

## I. Dynasty 821

### Chapter 821

As June arrived, the weather in Qingzhou Province suddenly grew hot.

Every year at this time, he deeply missed contemporary T-shirts and shorts. After all, compared to such cool attire, he could only wear a dragon robe everywhere now.

However, fortunately, he was the Emperor, and people attended to him at all times. To avoid distraction from the heat while handling state affairs, he had Qian Dafu bring in saltpeter and water, and at the same time, he had the machinery department manufacture a hand-cranked fan.

When saltpeter encountered water, it would absorb a large amount of heat from the water, causing the water to freeze. Using a fan could blow this cold air over.

This way, it was both cool and humid, and the effect was no different from having an air conditioner installed indoors.

The only drawback was the consumption of saltpeter, a strategic resource. However, since gaining control of Bashu, the Mining Department had fully taken over the saltpeter caves in Shu territory. Regarding saltpeter resources, he finally no longer had to worry about scarcity.

Previously, Qian Dafu always stood outside the door when Xiao Ming handled state affairs. Now, he stood inside the door.

This was Xiao Ming's consideration for his hard work, a small gesture, but it deeply moved Qian Dafu.

As he was enjoying the coolness inside, a small eunuch arrived outside the door. Qian Dafu inquired with the small eunuch and then returned inside.

"Your Majesty, the Goryeo delegation has arrived in Qingzhou Province and has been arranged by the Foreign Affairs Department to stay at the Splendid Restaurant," Qian Dafu said.

Xiao Ming was reviewing the memorials that had been sent. He looked up, pondered for a moment, and said, "I will meet them tomorrow. Not today. I'm not in the mood."

Qian Dafu responded with a "Yes," turned to have the little eunuch notify the Foreign Affairs Department, then turned back and asked, "Your Majesty was quite happy just now. Why are you suddenly out of sorts?"

Xiao Ming had always trusted Qian Dafu and liked to talk to him. He sighed and said, "It's nothing but the problem of official corruption. It's only been a few years since I ascended the throne, and these officials are all already unable to resist extending their hands to line their pockets."

"So it's that," Qian Dafu thought for a moment and said, "Ever since the founding of the Great Yu Empire, the problem of official corruption has been escalating. Back then, Great Ancestor, in a fit of rage, beheaded tens of thousands of officials, causing a shortage of officials throughout the Great Yu Empire, but this still could not eradicate the problem. Moreover, although some of the Great Yu Empire's officials are graduates of Bowen Academy, most are still former officials. These officials are accustomed to corruption; how could they possibly stop?"

Xiao Ming nodded. Qian Dafu was right. The problem of corruption was eighty percent due to former officials, and twenty percent due to officials who graduated from Bowen Academy.

This was only what was reported in the memorials sent by the Censorate. Undiscovered corrupt officials were probably even more numerous.

Regarding this problem, Xiao Ming sometimes felt helpless. Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang, the founding emperor of the Great Ming in contemporary times, almost exterminated officials yet could not curb this problem. How then should he solve it now?

After a moment of contemplation, he said, "The root cure for corruption lies not in killing, but in changing customs. For thousands of years, the Confucian 'li shang wang lai' (reciprocity in social interactions) is the root of corruption. This is a culture of corruption. As long as the soil of this culture is not eradicated, the Great Yu Empire will forever be corrupt."

At this moment, Xiao Ming felt that developing technology was important, but at the same time, eradicating some dross culture was also crucial. While Confucian rites certainly emphasized propriety.

However, after thousands of years of transmission, this propriety gradually extended to the notion that one needed to give gifts to get things done.

Besides this custom, the society based on personal connections and human sentiment was also something he disagreed with, because it was essentially a continuation of clan relationships and an impediment to the Great Yu Empire's rule of law.

In such relationships, officials accepted bribes through personal favors, thereby trampling on the law.

At the same time, when one became an official, their entire family would rise in status. Over time, in areas where the imperial court's ruling power was weak, clan forces would control certain government departments, or even the political affairs of a certain region.

"Changing customs, changing customs..." Xiao Ming repeated incessantly, because this was the fundamental solution, and also the way to avoid the cycle of dynastic rise and fall.

Qian Dafu was stunned. The solution Xiao Ming proposed was something he had never heard of.

"Your Majesty, the people of the Great Yu Empire have grown accustomed to such a life. How difficult would it be to change?" Qian Dafu shook his head.

"It is difficult, yet not difficult," Xiao Ming said. "The imperial court represents the law, and Confucianism represents the moral constraints of the common people. This changing of customs must naturally start from the very root of culture. If Confucianism changes its customs, the Great Yu Empire will change its customs."

Through these seven years of observation, Xiao Ming had discovered that Confucian concepts were deeply rooted in people's hearts. Their status in the hearts of the common people was no less than that of Christianity in the West.

Followers of Christianity obeyed doctrine, while officials and common people who trusted Confucianism obeyed Confucian thought.

If the common people applied the spirit of “immersion in a pig cage” (a brutal ancient punishment for adultery) to treating corruption, the Great Yu Empire’s corruption problem would surely be resolved.

Thinking of this, Xiao Ming felt that not completely eradicating Confucianism was the right choice. Perhaps he could hold both the titles of a great Confucian scholar and the Emperor of the Great Yu Empire, and from both material and spiritual aspects, eradicate the ills that had formed in the Great Yu Empire over thousands of years.

Qian Dafu stared blankly at Xiao Ming. He sensed that this Emperor, who never adhered to rules, was about to cause another major stir.

“Oh, by the way, where are Ge Yiren and the other two?”

Xiao Ming asked. This matter naturally required the cooperation of the three.

He decided to create a century-long deception, thereby making the three into great Confucian scholars representing the ideas of the new era, to influence the common people’s thoughts through their writings.

Of course, this thought would certainly have to pass through his hands.

“They are in Qufu. After the news of the northern expedition’s victory came back, the three only then went to Qufu. It must be said that these three are also extremely intelligent. Riding on the momentum of the northern expedition’s victory, they have gained even more confidence.”

Xiao Ming nodded gently. "Have them come to see me when they return."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Qian Dafu responded.

Having clarified this matter, Xiao Ming picked up his pen and began reviewing memorials. Although it was necessary to change customs, these corrupt officials also needed to be dealt with severely. Otherwise, light penalties and little fear would fail to deter the current officialdom.

After finishing the review of the memorials in his hand, Xiao Ming began to consider how to deal with Goryeo.

Clearly, Goryeo was now merely fish on a chopping board for him, ready to be carved at his will. Even if Goryeo fought desperately with him, the ultimate outcome would only be defeat.

However, subduing an enemy without fighting was always superior to using force. Since Goryeo had sensibly chosen to submit, he would seize this opportunity to completely assimilate Goryeo and turn it into a province of the Great Yu Empire.

This might take a long time, but leaving an unstable factor beside the Great Yu Empire was an unwise choice.

Therefore, what he had to do was to assimilate, erase Goryeo's history, and make the Goryeo people subservient.

Chapter 822

Hwang Ja-man and Kim Chang-myung almost drooled at the table full of stir-fried dishes.

They had stayed in the Splendid Restaurant yesterday, and this morning they received news from the Foreign Affairs Department that the Great Yu Empire's Emperor would receive them this afternoon.

"Your Highness, please start eating. We are about to go meet the Emperor of the Great Yu Empire," Hwang Ja-man could no longer resist.

Last night, they had tasted stir-fried dishes and immediately couldn't get enough. Faced with a dazzling array of varied stir-fried dishes, they just wanted to try every single one.

Kim Chang-myung showed a faint smile. If he weren't about to meet the Emperor of the Great Yu Empire, he would surely get drunk this noon.

The two ate their fill. Nearing the time to enter the palace, they tidied themselves. Because they were here to present tribute, they brought many tribute items this time. The most precious among them was the renowned Goryeo ginseng. Previously, whenever Goryeo offered tribute to the Great Yu Empire, they would bring this Goryeo ginseng.

Having prepared everything, at two o'clock in the afternoon, the translator arrived at the Splendid Restaurant, leading the Goryeo delegation towards the imperial palace.

At the same time, the accompanying Goryeo delegation sounded their instruments. This was a custom from previous tribute missions, meant to attract the common people's attention, so that the common people would know that these were foreign envoys.

This commotion quickly attracted the attention of the common people on both sides of the road. Upon learning that this group of envoys came from Goryeo, the common people's faces showed expressions of pride.

They had not heard of a vassal state paying tribute to the Great Yu Empire for a long time. This scene alone was enough to prove that the Great Yu Empire was powerful once again.

For the awakened people of the Great Yu Empire with their national consciousness, this was a landmark event.

As the Goryeo envoys proceeded, more and more common people gathered on both sides of the road. Reporters from the newspaper also appeared in the crowd. They recorded the grand scene before them, while the newspaper's artists depicted this scene on paper, preparing for publication back at the office.

After walking for half an hour along the main road of Qingzhou City, Hwang Ja-man and Kim Chang-myung arrived at the palace gate. Upon being informed that only the two of them could enter, they were led by eunuchs to the Zhengda Guangming Hall.

At this time, Xiao Ming and a group of ministers involved in Goryeo affairs were waiting for them.

Ever since the political reforms, Xiao Ming had refined the Great Yu Empire's governmental affairs, summoning specific officials for specific matters, rather than calling all officials every time something happened.



So, in the Zhengda Guangming Hall, only Li Kaiyuan, Liang Dahai, and important officials dispatched to Haigucheng and Bisa Castle were present.

All along the way, admiring the magnificent imperial palace of the Great Yu Empire, Hwang Ja-man and Kim Chang-myung cautiously followed behind the eunuchs.

Upon entering the Zhengda Guangming Hall, Hwang Ja-man and Kim Chang-myung simultaneously knelt before Xiao Ming, who was seated on the dragon throne, and shouted, "Goryeo envoys Hwang Ja-man and Prince Kim Chang-myung wish His Majesty the Emperor of the Great Yu Empire ten thousand years, ten thousand years, ten thousand times ten thousand years!"

Seeing this, the officials remained expressionless. If it had been before, they would surely have thought the Goryeo envoys were very respectful of the Great Yu Empire.

But after living in Goryeo for a period, they understood that in Goryeo, from the king down to the common people, everyone was accustomed to kneeling. Therefore, this act of kneeling, which appeared quite solemn in the Great Yu Empire, did not make those familiar with Goryeo feel any special honor.

"Dispense with the formalities!" Xiao Ming said calmly.

This era was somewhat similar to contemporary times. Goryeo's culture was greatly influenced by the Great Yu Empire. Even Goryeo's writing used the Great Yu Empire's characters. The only difference was that Goryeo people spoke the Goryeo language.

“Thank you, Your Majesty.” Hwang Ja-man and Kim Chang-myung rose. At this point, Hwang Ja-man took out Goryeo’s state letter, held it flat with both hands, and said, “Your Majesty, this is my Goryeo’s state letter.”

Qian Dafu walked to Hwang Ja-man’s side, took the state letter, and gave it to Xiao Ming.

Xiao Ming had already learned of Goryeo’s intention to pledge allegiance to the Great Yu Empire through Li Kaiyuan’s words, because Hwang Ja-man had sought out Li Kaiyuan before his departure.

As for the content of the state letter, he already knew it. So, after a brief glance at the state letter, he put it down.

“Goryeo broke its faith, recognized a thief as its father, repeatedly invaded the Great Yu Empire with the Golden Tent Khanate, and colluded with Japanese pirates to plunder the coast. Do you think I will let bygones be bygones because of a single state letter from the King of Goryeo?”

Xiao Ming slammed the table in front of him and angrily rebuked.

Hwang Ja-man immediately knelt again, while Kim Chang-myung’s face turned pale. Seeing Hwang Ja-man kneel, he also knelt.

At this moment, they understood that this envoy mission would likely not be smooth.

Secretly glancing at Kim Chang-myung, Hwang Ja-man's lips curled into a barely perceptible smile. Kim Chang-myung was truly terrified, but he knew this was merely a show being put on by the Great Yu Empire.

He had to cooperate with the Great Yu Empire's prince to carry out this act.

"Your Majesty, the barbarians are powerful. Your King also had many unavoidable circumstances. I hope Your Majesty can forgive him," Hwang Ja-man said, prostrating himself.

Kim Chang-myung also explained, "Your Majesty, my imperial father was also forced into it, but in reality, though in the Golden Tent Khanate, his heart is with the Great Yu Empire."

Xiao Ming sneered. Hwang Ja-man had already told Li Kaiyuan about the little scheme the Goryeo court was hatching. Even now, Goryeo was still trying to fool him with the empty title of suzerain.

Unfortunately, he would not fall for it. How could a hunter be used by his prey?

"I never like to hear grand words or empty talk. If Goryeo truly intends to repent, then it must prove it to me with actions," Xiao Ming snorted.

"Please enlighten me, Your Majesty," Hwang Ja-man said.

Xiao Ming then took out the policy he had drafted yesterday and said, "Given Goryeo's failure to distinguish between good and evil, loyalty and treachery, and its repeated action in harassing my Great Yu Empire, causing numerous casualties among my Great Yu Empire citizens, to prevent such incidents from happening again, from today onwards, and to prevent you from going back on your word while also protecting Goryeo from Japanese invasion, the Great Yu Empire will garrison troops in Goryeo. All expenses incurred during the garrison period shall be paid by Goryeo. Once a state of war is entered, the Great Yu Empire shall have the right to command Goryeo's army. Secondly, to deepen the benevolent relationship between the Great Yu Empire and Goryeo as suzerain, Goryeo shall completely adopt the Great Yu Empire's language and study the Goryeo history compiled by the Great Yu Empire."

After a pause, he continued, "To help Goryeo develop, Goryeo needs to abolish its currency and uniformly use the Great Yu Empire's currency and all standards of weights and measures. The Qingzhou Bank will serve as the official institution for Goryeo to issue currency. At the same time, to prevent treacherous ministers from misleading the king, the Great Yu Empire shall have direct appointment power over Goryeo officials. In terms of commerce, Goryeo shall permanently exempt Great Yu Empire goods from all taxes."

Kim Chang-myung, kneeling in the great hall, watched as his face turned paler with each condition stated by the Great Yu Empire's prince.

These words, seemingly grand and for the harmony and improved relations between the two countries, effectively completely hollowed out Goryeo. If agreed to, Goryeo would thoroughly become a puppet of the Great Yu Empire, with no hope of ever regaining its independence.

Xiao Ming stated the policies targeting Goryeo one by one, his expression firm. This time, he completely castrated Goryeo from military, political, economic, and cultural aspects, solving this perennial problem once and for all.

Chapter 823

Sweat, brought on by the scorching heat, soaked Kim Chang-myung's body, yet he felt a chill permeate him.

He deeply felt the immense malice the Great Yu Empire harbored towards Goryeo this time. But even so, they now seemed to have no ability to resist.

Goryeo's south was already occupied by Japan, and the remaining army in the north was less than one hundred thousand men. This was not even enough to fill the teeth of the Great Yu Empire, which had easily defeated the Golden Tent Khanate.

However, this matter was too important for him to decide. At this moment, he looked at Hwang Ja-man, hoping this old minister could handle it.

Hwang Ja-man noticed Kim Chang-myung's expression. In fact, this whole performance was for Kim Chang-myung's benefit. His role in it was merely to follow the Great Yu Empire's policies.

After a moment of contemplation, Hwang Ja-man said, "Your Majesty, these four conditions are simply too harsh. If we agree, wouldn't Goryeo lose all its autonomy?"

"If you fall into Japan's hands, you will likewise have no autonomy. And I believe Japan will not keep the King of Goryeo once it occupies Ryukyo City. What do you say, Prince of Goryeo?"

Xiao Ming's smile was very strange, which made Kim Chang-myung even more nervous.

"Your Majesty, Goryeo is the Great Yu Empire's northern barrier. If it were occupied by Japan, the Great Yu Empire would directly go to war with Japan. I believe this is not what the Great Yu Empire desires

either.” When Kim Chang-myung came, he held the intention of acknowledging a suzerain, and then getting food, drink, and even having the suzerain fight for him.

But now, after such turmoil, he found that he gained no benefits at all. Instead, he was handing over the nation’s lifelines to the Great Yu Empire. How could he accept this disparity?

“Japan is merely a tiny island nation. My Great Yu Empire fleet has already assembled in Haigucheng. With just my command, I can blockade Japan’s waters at any time. Then the Japanese pirates remaining in Goryeo will be like dogs without a home. Of course, I can also save myself this trouble and let Japan continue northward. But then, it won’t be your family ruling Goryeo.” Xiao Ming emphasized.

He then said, “My words end here. How you decide to proceed is up to you. You still have ten days’ time.”

Kim Chang-myung was about to argue for Goryeo when Hwang Ja-man tugged his arm. He held back his words.

“Your Majesty, we will return and deliberate on this matter, and give Your Majesty a reply as soon as possible,” Hwang Ja-man said respectfully. Then he left with Kim Chang-myung.

After the two disappeared from the Zhengda Guangming Hall, Li Kaiyuan said, “Your Majesty, will the King of Goryeo agree? If so, Goryeo’s status in the Great Yu Empire would be even lower than that of Guandong.”

“I intend to make Goryeo subservient. Otherwise, should they be equal to the common people of the Great Yu Empire? There is no need for mercy when dealing with them. The stricter you are with them, the more respectful they will be towards you.”

Coming from contemporary times, Xiao Ming deeply understood Goryeo's inherent weakness. This country only submitted to nations that strict with them, like America.

However, here, the roles were reversed. He would make Goryeo understand who the real father was.

Thinking of contemporary America, Xiao Ming suddenly frowned. Apparently, America in this timeline had not yet become independent, but according to Dutch intelligence, the conflict between the colonies and Britain was already very sharp, seemingly on the verge of war at any moment.

Xiao Ming was happy yet somewhat worried about this news. He was happy that America had not yet gained independence, but worried that he might not be able to participate as a troublemaker in the War of Independence.

He would turn North America upside down.

"How lowly!" As Xiao Ming's words fell, Liang Dahai suddenly said with a chuckle. His task of recruiting laborers in Goryeo had not yet ended, so Xiao Ming had also summoned him.

Accompanying him was the general responsible for the Goryeo garrison this time. This person, in truth, had some kinship with Xiao Ming; he was an imperial relative.

Because the Empress Dowager was precisely this general's aunt.

“Your Majesty, if that is the case, I am willing to lead troops to Goryeo. When we arrive at the city walls, we shall see if the King of Goryeo agrees,” Yun Changfeng said loudly, presenting a tough-guy image.

As for this cousin, Xiao Ming had truly not promoted him out of favoritism. On the contrary, Yun Changfeng had been promoted by Luo Hong after earning considerable merit as a centurion in the northern war.

Later, Luo Hong learned that Yun Changfeng was the Empress Dowager’s nephew. Perhaps with the intention of flattering, Luo Hong specifically mentioned him in his memorial.

Xiao Ming then mentioned this to the Empress Dowager, who said nothing but that it was entirely up to Xiao Ming to decide.

Xiao Ming knew that the Empress Dowager never participated in these matters. After a moment of thought, he decided to cultivate Yun Changfeng.

Truth be told, besides people like Lu Fei, Ye Qingyun, and Lei Ming in the army, no other outstanding generals had emerged so far.

However, with the increasing foreign military expeditions, he needed more and more generals. These few major generals were responsible for the overall war, not for handling localized minor affairs, such as garrisoning Goryeo.

So, during this period, Xiao Ming intended to cultivate some promising new generals for use when occupying colonies.



His heavy reliance on Yun Changfeng was also based on this purpose, because once troops were stationed in Goryeo, this army would be stationed abroad for many years, requiring reliable individuals to command it.

After all, for the Great Yu Empire, where information was very poor, it was difficult for him to know the movements of this army.

Besides Yun Changfeng, other promising new generals Xiao Ming was currently focusing on cultivating included Du Boyuan and some other young generals.

Glancing at Yun Changfeng, Xiao Ming said, "I have just this intention. So, you will go to Goryeo tomorrow. The division I have prepared for you to garrison in Goryeo is ready. Regardless of how the King of Goryeo replies, you must garrison in Goryeo."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Yun Changfeng said.

After the Chang'an rebellion, he joined the army despite his father's objections and fought through life and death battles to reach where he was today, without relying on any connections.

Now, suddenly being heavily used by Xiao Ming, he felt a great deal of emotion. If he had sought out the Empress Dowager using their familial relationship as nephew and aunt when he first came to Qingzhou Province, he might have had a different fate.

However, he believed that it wouldn't have been better than it was now, because the generals in the army all understood the Emperor's character. Having the identity of an imperial relative would actually be disadvantageous for development in the military.

After giving Yun Changfeng a few more instructions, Xiao Ming discussed with the officials. For him, whether Goryeo was willing or not, this was a foregone conclusion. So, every official going to Goryeo had to start thinking about how to implement measures to completely hollow out Goryeo.

While the Zhengda Guangming Hall was in lively discussion, Kim Chang-myung, with a dark face, and Hwang Ja-man arrived outside the palace gate.

Glancing at the Zhengda Guangming Hall, Kim Chang-myung said, "State Councilor Hwang, this is simply too much! How can my imperial father agree to this?"

#### Chapter 824

A gust of hot wind stirred his robe. The heat made Hwang Ja-man loosen his collar.

Hwang Ja-man naturally understood Kim Chang-myung's anger, but he saw some matters more clearly than the prince.

"Your Highness, I ask you, when the barbarians were here, how much freedom did Goryeo truly have?" Hwang Ja-man said calmly. "I'm afraid that humiliation was no less than what the Great Yu Empire would inflict."

Kim Chang-myung choked for a moment. He had heard about the recent palace bloodshed. Beishan's insults to the King of Goryeo over the years were known to all.

Moreover, if they did not obey the barbarians' orders, Goryeo's throne would also be difficult to maintain.

"The State Councilor is absolutely right, but we have just been freed from the barbarians' clutches. How can we now be treated equally by the Great Yu Empire?"

Hwang Ja-man knew that this Goryeo prince still had some ambition, but this ambition came at the wrong time. He said bluntly, "Because Goryeo is a weak country. If we do not rely on a powerful country, how can we survive? Compared to the lives of Goryeo's common people, what does this even count for?"

Kim Chang-myung was speechless for a moment. In Hwang Ja-man's words, he seemed to have become someone who disregarded the lives of Goryeo's common people. He thought for a moment and finally sighed.

"That's right, Goryeo is a small country. This is the tragedy of small countries," he said. "When I return, I will write to my imperial father and tell him the conditions proposed by the Great Yu Empire."

Hwang Ja-man breathed a sigh of relief. Although the King of Goryeo sent him, he couldn't completely trust him. Now, with Kim Chang-myung's support, he believed the King of Goryeo would take this matter seriously.

With that, the two, protected by guards, returned to the Splendid Restaurant. Borrowing paper and brush, Kim Chang-myung wrote a letter and had someone send it back to Goryeo.

At the same time, after Yun Changfeng left the imperial palace, he simply packed up and headed to Dengzhou. A ten-thousand-man division was waiting for him in Dengzhou.

This time, going to Goryeo, he would supervise the execution of these terms in Goryeo. If the King of Goryeo still tried to resist, they would have to exert some effort to replace the King of Goryeo.

Three days later, he arrived in Dengzhou. On the same day, he boarded a warship and headed towards Haigucheng, arriving at Haigucheng on the fourth day.

Then, without stopping, he led a division of troops directly towards Ryukyo City.

At this point, Kim Chang-myung's letter had also reached Ryukyo City.

"Bastard! Bastard! Bastard..." The King of Goryeo held the letter, his body trembling with rage. He shouted, "Gather the army! I will fight the Great Yu Empire to the death!"

"Your Majesty, think twice! Once war begins, Goryeo will be doomed forever! A Great Yu Empire army from Haigucheng is about to reach the city walls! Heavy forces are also pressing from the Liaozhou direction! Goryeo lacks horses; it cannot even muster a thousand cavalymen! How can we go to war with the Great Yu Empire?"

The ministers panicked. Some ministers even knelt directly on the ground, weeping bitterly.

The King of Goryeo dejectedly sat down. After angrily gasping for a while, he gradually calmed down. Now, all the ministers understood very well that a ten-thousand-man Great Yu Empire musket

contingent was enough to sweep across Goryeo, because Goryeo's forces were all infantry and simply could not muster cavalry.

Such an army was vulnerable to the Great Yu Empire's firearms. Why, they didn't even have firearms themselves!

"Your Majesty, there's a saying in the Great Yu Empire called 'sleeping on faggots and tasting gall' (enduring hardship for a future goal). As long as Your Majesty can endure temporary humiliation, under the influence of the Great Yu Empire, Goryeo will surely grow strong. Even if we cannot defeat the Great Yu Empire then, at least we will no longer suffer bullying from Japan." a minister advised.

The King of Goryeo narrowed his eyes slightly and let out a long sigh. "If that is the case, I can only agree to this matter, lest the common people of Goryeo suffer the fires of war again."

"Your Majesty is benevolent. The common people will surely be grateful to Your Majesty," the ministers flattered.

Turning around, the King of Goryeo's expression eased somewhat. This letter indeed made him very angry, but in his opinion, compared to Beishan's cruel rule over Goryeo, the Great Yu Empire's methods seemed much gentler.

However, he could not agree immediately. He had to put on a show in front of his ministers, and the arrival of the Great Yu Empire army also made these officials too afraid to say much. This way, the common people of Goryeo would not blame everything on him in the future.

Now that he was old, he only wanted to peacefully enjoy wealth and glory. As long as the Great Yu Empire allowed him to remain on the throne, that would be enough. Most importantly, he was very afraid of losing his supply of black incense; now he couldn't go a day without it.

The King of Goryeo might have hidden it from other officials, but he didn't hide it from Kim Hyun-sung's gaze. Kim Hyun-sung could tell that the King of Goryeo was merely feigning righteousness.

Sighing slightly, he was somewhat perplexed. Since when had his King lost his grand ambition and become addicted to pleasure?

If he agreed to this matter, Goryeo would end up in the hands of the Great Yu Empire.

He made one last effort, "Your Majesty, even if we agree to the Great Yu Empire's demand, at least have the Great Yu Empire drive away the Japanese pirates. Are we to agree to so much and receive no return at all?"

"Hmm, that can be brought up to the Emperor of the Great Yu Empire," the King of Goryeo said. In fact, he felt somewhat disheartened, because he knew that no matter what he did, Goryeo could not escape its fate as a vassal state.

Since that was the case, becoming a vassal state of whom no longer mattered.

After discussing this matter with the ministers, the King of Goryeo seemed somewhat fatigued. He instructed Kim Hyun-sung to relay Goryeo's reply to the Great Yu Empire army outside the city, then returned to his bedchamber.

After the King of Goryeo left, the Goryeo officials, who had just been as despondent as if they had lost their parents, immediately became excited. They all discussed how to establish deep relationships with Great Yu Empire officials.

The officials led by Kim Hyun-sung, meanwhile, remained silent. They scornfully looked at the opportunistic officials and left.

Thirty li outside the city, Yun Changfeng led his army towards Ryukyo City. If the treaty was finalized, his army would be stationed within Ryukyo City.

From then on, Ryukyo City would be completely under the Great Yu Empire's supervision.

If the treaty could not be reached, he would have no choice but to take final military action and eliminate the King of Goryeo. However, that would be more troublesome, as it would force the Great Yu Empire to pay a higher cost to rule Goryeo. Furthermore, they might have to face Goryeo's resistance from top to bottom, which was something no one wanted to see.

The main army marched along the official road leading to Ryukyo City. Goryeo common people who saw the Great Yu Empire army along the way all scattered and fled.

Just as he could see the city walls of Ryukyo City, a team of Goryeo officials emerged from the city and walked towards them.

Upon approaching, Kim Hyun-sung, holding a state letter with both hands, walked towards Yun Changfeng.

Taking the state letter sent by the Goryeo official and scanning it, Yun Changfeng's anxious heart settled. In this state letter, the King of Goryeo had agreed to all of the Great Yu Empire's conditions.

Nodding in satisfaction, looking at Ryukyo City not far away, Yun Changfeng ordered, "The army will advance into Ryukyo City. From now on, we may be living here for a period."

Chapter 825

"Your Majesty, Yun Changfeng has led a division to garrison Ryukyo City, and the King of Goryeo's state letter has also arrived."

In the imperial study, Qian Dafu held the Goryeo state letter with both hands. It had just been sent back from Goryeo by a courier.

Over ten days had passed since he last met the Goryeo prince and Hwang Ja-man in the Zhengda Guangming Hall. Now, he finally received the King of Goryeo's reply.

"This King of Goryeo isn't completely foolish." Xiao Ming rose and looked out the window. From June to July, more than half of the year had already passed.

Overall, he was still very satisfied with the achievements made this year. Firstly, he had captured the six cities of Guandong from the barbarians. This strategy completely turned the Golden Tent Khanate into a nomadic people, making them unable to directly confront the Great Yu Empire anymore.



His next achievement was Goryeo. Losing the protection of the Golden Tent Khanate, Goryeo finally returned to its normal historical trajectory, once again becoming a vassal of the Great Yu Empire.

“Indeed. If he had been unreasonable, Your Majesty would probably have killed him,” Qian Dafu said with a smile. At the court assembly that day, he felt that Xiao Ming had harbored murderous intent towards the King of Goryeo.

“Precisely. I will not allow an unreasonable King of Goryeo to exist, because this would affect the Great Yu Empire’s control over Goryeo.”

Qian Dafu nodded. “But even though Goryeo has been recovered, Japan has become a serious concern for the Great Yu Empire. And compared to Goryeo, Japan is even more difficult to deal with, isn’t it?”

Hearing this, Xiao Ming smiled. “Japan’s firearms are indeed superior to Goryeo’s and the Golden Tent Khanate’s, but compared to my Great Yu Empire, there is still a considerable gap. The only trouble is that this Yamada Nobunaga is quite cunning. He has made the Japanese daimyo and common people very fanatical, somewhat like fanaticism.”

“Fanaticism? What is that?” Qian Dafu found it a bit difficult to understand.

Xiao Ming pondered for a moment. This statement was not without purpose; it was derived from an analysis of secret guard intelligence.

Because of the existence of the technology crystal, he had also been studying the characteristics of Japan as a nation. Overall, Japan had some good traits, such as diligence, obedience, and loyalty, but its flaws were also very obvious: they were inherently strong-willed, had a narrow island mentality, were prone to extremism, were very cruel to other peoples, and lacked compassion.

Coupled with the presence of the Bushido spirit, deeply ingrained in the souls of the Japanese islanders, this nation could easily be turned into a fanatical, brigand nation by the incitement of politicians.

Whether it was Toyotomi Hideyoshi during the Wanli era or the invasion during World War II, it was all like this.

And in this era, the one leading Japan towards extremism was Yamada Nobunaga. According to the Great Yu Empire's records on Japan, the Bushido spirit in this timeline showed many characteristics. Japanese samurai were arrogant yet also self-abasing. This self-abasement made them outwardly focus on etiquette, but inwardly they were barbaric and cruel. They enjoyed bullying the weak, while showing astonishing submission to the strong.

This was the Japan he understood: a peculiar country that, if you rubbed its face in the dirt, would call you "father."

Therefore, in Xiao Ming's view, the Great Yu Empire would always be underestimated by Japan until it beat Japan until it cried, even if Japan knew the Great Yu Empire might be growing stronger.

After all, Japan's inherent flaw was self-deception; it wouldn't cry until it saw the coffin.

In contemporary World War II, Japan dared to directly confront America, which also showed how thick-skinned this country was.

"It means 'excessive militarism'," Xiao Ming said calmly.

Qian Dafu looked enlightened. "Excessive militarism also requires some capability. If one has no capability, isn't that just asking for trouble?"

"That's right. This Yamada Nobunaga is indeed asking for trouble," Xiao Ming chuckled.

As the two were chatting and laughing, a small eunuch arrived outside the imperial study and loudly announced, "Your Majesty, Secret Guard Commander Li San requests an audience outside the palace."

"Let him in." Xiao Ming raised his eyebrows. Li San was primarily responsible for intelligence gathering within the Great Yu Empire.

Both Wang Xuan and Li San would personally come to report to him if they had important intelligence.

Soon, Li San arrived outside the imperial study.

The current Li San was a bit plump. Since marrying Liuli, Li San's life had been quite comfortable.

Upon entering the imperial study, Li San bowed and said solemnly, "Your Majesty, your humble servant discovered some abnormalities with the Cao Family Bank, so I immediately came to the palace to report to Your Majesty."

“The Cao family?” Xiao Ming frowned.

Li San continued, “Yes, Your Majesty. Your Majesty has been ‘letting the tiger run to catch it,’ just waiting for the Cao family to make a mistake. I didn’t expect it to confirm Your Majesty’s suspicions so soon.”

Xiao Ming was not surprised. In this era, many officials and merchants would judge him with the mindset of this era, unaware that Xiao Ming’s foresight was many levels higher than theirs.

Often, with just a small move from them, Xiao Ming understood what they intended to do.

Especially merchants. They couldn’t see Xiao Ming’s supervisory hand and mistakenly believed that the imperial court was indifferent to their commercial activities, which was a grave error.

“What exactly is going on?” Xiao Ming asked.

“According to intelligence obtained by the secret guards, a considerable amount of silver was openly transported out of the Cao Family Bank today. According to the bank, it was for transferring funds to other banks,” Li San said.

After a pause, he continued, “And at the same time, Cao Zhengyang is selling off assets within Youzhou and Qingzhou Province, under the pretext of family business losses.”

“So that’s it.” Xiao Ming narrowed his eyes. To an outsider, these actions of the Cao family would seem perfectly normal, as the circulation of silver was a very common matter.

But in the eyes of Xiao Ming and the secret guards, it was different. Their actions were highly suspicious. However, Xiao Ming dared not make a snap decision. If this was just a normal matter, his rashly removing Cao Zhengyang might cause merchants to criticize him, leading more merchants to support the Prince of Chu, who was now desperately trying to Westernize.

“In that case, do not alert them for now. You are to send men to monitor the merchant ships transporting silver. Once the merchant ships attempt to reach the State of Chu, you immediately have the Jinling Province garrison seize them. At the same time, you are to immediately have the secret guards investigate all of the Cao Family Banks in the north. If similar activities are found, then immediately seal the Cao Family Banks with the security bureau,” Xiao Ming said.

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Li San nodded heavily.

After reporting this, Li San turned and left. At this point, Xiao Ming rubbed his temples. In truth, he had already anticipated this day, but he was still displeased when it actually happened.

Because the Cao family’s actions proved one thing to him: once merchants gained enough money, they would certainly seek every opportunity to demand power.

Rising and looking out the window, Xiao Ming’s mind formulated a plan. He said, “Qian Dafu, what do you think about holding regular court assemblies for merchants?”

Qian Dafu looked bewildered. He said in shock, "Is Your Majesty preparing to compromise with merchants?"

## Chapter 826

Golden sunlight shone on Qian Dafu's astonished face.

Xiao Ming's proposal shocked him. He said cautiously, "I, your old servant, can only chat casually with Your Majesty. I dare not comment on such an important matter."

With a light chuckle, he looked at Qian Dafu and said, "You needn't be nervous. You'll understand once I explain."

Merchants' status in the Great Yu Empire had been suppressed for over a thousand years. Now, with their sudden liberation, there was bound to be a great explosion. This explosion was not only in the development of industry and commerce but also in the merchants' mindset.

Because they had amassed a great deal of wealth, they felt they should have some say in state affairs. Of course, a very small number of ambitious merchants hoped to be like those in the West.

"Now, influenced by the Prince of Chu, merchants have many ideas in their hearts. Precisely because of this, Cao Zhengyang is thriving in Qingzhou Province, as merchants consider him a business leader and complain about the imperial court strictly limiting their commercial activities."

Xiao Ming had been observing the development of Qingzhou Province, so he was very aware of the current situation in Qingzhou Province.

After a moment of thought, he continued, “Therefore, I have decided to give them such an opportunity: to hold an annual court assembly composed of merchant representatives, artisan representatives, student representatives, etc., allowing them to offer suggestions on the Great Yu Empire’s governance. At the same time, a new institution will be added to the provincial office, named the Political Consultation Council. Merchants, students, and artisans who join the Political Consultation Council will be responsible for selecting candidates to attend the court assembly. How about it?”

In fact, the system Xiao Ming envisioned was basically somewhat similar to the Great Yu Empire’s previous “yuanwailang” (supernumerary officials), except that yuanwailang had no right to participate in government affairs. Now, Xiao Ming was giving them a formal institution and officially recognized status.

Most importantly, they could express their dissatisfaction with government affairs or offer suggestions beneficial to the Great Yu Empire’s development directly in front of the Emperor.

The reason Xiao Ming thought of this was also due to inspiration from modern times. Since merchants needed the right to participate in government, he would give them an institution that seemed very important, but whose actual importance depended on his attitude.

At the annual merchants’ court assembly, he could adopt merchants’ more favorable suggestions. This way, merchants would feel valued and would have no other excuse to demand deeper involvement in government affairs.

After all, this court assembly was basically no different from the officials’ court assembly.

After hearing all this, Qian Dafu revealed a wry smile. So this was what the merchants’ court assembly meant. He said, “Your Majesty is wise. Since merchants like this, then let them try it.”

Xiao Ming nodded, “To avoid unnecessary turmoil, I think it’s necessary to reveal a little information about the Political Consultation Council in the newspaper.”

With that, he sat down and drafted a manuscript, which he sent to the newspaper office.

The next day, the Qingzhou Daily roared with the headline: “A Great Transformation in Merchants’ Status After a Thousand Years: A Few Things About the Political Consultation Council.”

As soon as this newspaper was published, the originally calm Qingzhou City became lively again.

“Anyone willing to join the Political Consultation Council can annually elect merchant representatives to attend the court assembly held on November 6th of each year. At that time, His Majesty the Emperor of the Great Yu Empire will discuss state affairs with the Grand Secretaries and adopt beneficial advice.”

In the Wei Family Restaurant, Ding Wu read the content of the newspaper, his expression excited. After finishing the newspaper, he slammed the table hard. “Did you see that? Did you see that? This was personally written by His Majesty!”

Those who could afford breakfast at the Wei Family Restaurant were basically the influential merchants of Qingzhou Province. They had once greatly envied merchants in the State of Chu who could participate in government affairs, but now, this happiness came too suddenly.

“This Cao Zhengyang boasts all day about how well the Cao family is doing in the State of Chu. Now, with this, they have nothing to say!”



“Ding Wu, if this Political Consultation Council is established, we will elect you as its head! Then we’ll see how long Cao Zhengyang can remain arrogant!” Others chimed in.

Ding Wu heard this and stood up to express his thanks. “Thank you all for your kind regard. If I can have the honor of seeing His Majesty at the court assembly, I will surely report all your suggestions to His Majesty.”

“Good!” The merchants laughed loudly.

Cao Zhengyang sat not far from Ding Wu. The merchants’ blatant provocation made his face flush crimson. Now, the merchants completely disregarded him.

However, despite his anger, he felt more regret. This time, he seemed to have gone too far.

Ever since he settled in Qingzhou Province, things had been too smooth for him here. With the increasing freedom of Qingzhou Province merchants, he had not felt the ubiquitous majesty of the imperial court for a long time.

Moreover, due to the Cao family’s extensive investments in Qingzhou Province, officials and common people alike held him in great respect, which subtly made him a bit arrogant.

Most importantly, he believed that the Prince of Chu and the imperial court were one and would remain peaceful, just as they had for centuries.

But five days ago, an order from the Cao family completely made him see reality. The Prince of Chu and the Emperor did not seem to be so harmonious.

So, seeing the content of the newspaper, he felt a mix of emotions. He wondered what his father would think when he saw this newspaper.

But a drawn bow has no turning back. Since the Cao family had taken this step, there was no turning back. The silver had already been transported out of Qingzhou Province. Once the imperial court learned of it, the Cao Family Bank would be doomed forever.

At the same time, he had already made preparations. After breakfast, he would, under the guise of engaging in commerce, travel from Qingzhou Province to Dengzhou, and then he would board a British merchant ship to Lin'an.

After hastily finishing his meal, Cao Zhengyang left the Wei Family Restaurant without refuting those around him. At this, the restaurant manager glanced at Cao Zhengyang, then exchanged a look with the waiter.

The waiter understood and turned to walk towards the East Market. He was going to report Cao Zhengyang's whereabouts to them.

While Qingzhou Province was in a state of fervor, news about the Political Consultation Council quickly spread to the workshops outside Qingzhou City. Merchants like Zhu Wuliu, who had started from scratch, all cheered excitedly, eagerly anticipating the imperial court's formal promulgation of the law regarding the Political Consultation Council.

While the merchants were excited, Xiao Ming was already discussing this issue with the Grand Secretariat. The Political Consultation Council had no rights stipulated by the Great Yu Empire's laws. In other words, this Political Consultation Council existed as an institution for the imperial court to broadly solicit opinions.

Besides merchants, people from other industries of the Great Yu Empire would also participate. They would represent various strata of the Great Yu Empire and voice their opinions.

So, for Xiao Ming, this institution still had some benefits. It could give him a more direct understanding of the Great Yu Empire's development.

At the same time, it could also make officials restrain their grasping hands. After all, the Political Consultation Council could also serve as an eye to monitor officials' behavior.

"To pool wisdom and broaden channels for expression, this is what a wise ruler does. We, your humble servants, are willing to assist His Majesty in establishing this Political Consultation Council."

Having understood the essence of the Political Consultation Council, Pang Yukun and Fei Ji both agreed.

Chapter 827

Li San continuously organized the intelligence sent by the secret guards, his brows furrowing deeper and deeper.

According to the intelligence, Cao Zhengyang's recent movements were increasingly suspicious. Now, he could basically confirm that the Cao family's real purpose was to transfer silver.

“Fortunately, the secret guards have always had a dedicated person watching Cao Zhengyang. Otherwise, something big would happen this time.” Li San’s forehead beaded with sweat.

Although the secret guards were established by the imperial court to collect intelligence and supervise officials, with the increasing territory and number of officials, the secret guards’ manpower was now quite stretched.

Due to this reason, the secret guards abandoned some of their civilian oversight and instead focused on supervising important imperial officials and generals. He even reluctantly assigned a dedicated person to watch someone like Cao Zhengyang.

After all, compared to high-ranking and powerful officials, Cao Zhengyang was merely a minor figure.

However, this minor figure was now clearly about to undertake a major endeavor.

“Cao Zhengyang has already boarded the merchant ship heading for Dengzhou. Immediately notify the guard station to arrest Cao Zhengyang. Additionally, have them seize all of the Cao family’s businesses in the north.” Li San ordered. If action wasn’t taken soon, Cao Zhengyang might escape.

“Yes.”

The secret guard commander beside Li San responded and immediately left the secret guard office with three other men.

“You are to immediately go to Jinling Province and have the Jinling Province garrison intercept the silver.” Li San said seriously. Judging by the news from the other six prefectures, Cao Zhengyang had secretly transferred the silver from all the banks in the nearby counties.

If this batch of silver reached the State of Chu’s territory, it would severely impact the industrial and commercial development of the north. Although the Qingzhou Bank could now contend with the Cao Family Bank, many merchants, swayed by Cao Zhengyang’s persuasion, had deposited their family assets into the Cao Family Bank.

After issuing one order after another, Li San rose and headed towards the palace. He intended to report this matter to Xiao Ming.

He arrived at the imperial palace and waited outside the city for a while before being permitted to enter.

Upon reaching the imperial study, he saw Pang Yukun and Fei Ji also present.

“Your Majesty, Elder Fei, Senior Grand Secretary Pang.” Li San bowed.

Fei Ji and Pang Yukun, seeing Li San, both smiled warmly. This former royal household servant had now, in the blink of an eye, become the commander of the Great Yu Empire’s most mysterious organization, the secret guards.

It could be said that no official dared to offend him, fearing being caught by the secret guards.

“You’ve come so quickly. It seems something has truly happened with Cao Zhengyang this time,” Xiao Ming said.

Li San said frankly, “Yes, Your Majesty. I have already investigated. The Cao Family Banks in the prefectures and counties around Qingzhou Province have all transferred silver. Moreover, Cao Zhengyang is preparing to go to Dengzhou, which is very unusual. To prevent any unforeseen circumstances, I have already ordered the seizure of the Cao Family Banks and the interception of the silver being transferred by the Cao family.”

“This Cao family is truly muddled. How dare they undermine His Majesty at this moment?” Pang Yukun snorted angrily.

Fei Ji always maintained a composed demeanor. He said, “Actually, it’s not hard to understand. It’s simply the nature of merchants. As Your Majesty said, merchants are similar to nomadic people. Nomadic people move in search of water and grass, while merchants move in search of money. The Cao family initially sought refuge with Your Majesty to preserve the Cao family’s foundation. Now, seeking refuge with the Prince of Chu is also for the Cao family’s foundation. After all, the Prince of Chu’s actions now are quite significant, showing a strong tendency to govern with merchants.”

“Elder Fei is absolutely right, but this Prince of Chu is also desperately seeking any cure. Merchants are always shortsighted, only pursuing current exorbitant profits. Perhaps allowing merchants to hold power could bring about commercial prosperity in the short term, but in the long run, it will inevitably lead to inaction on national affairs due to conflicts of interest among merchants,” Pang Yukun eloquently explained.

Ever since Xiao Ming established the Son of Heaven’s Academy, these officials often attended lectures. Now, they had a deeper understanding of political systems from books, no longer confined by their previous backward feudal ideas.

Xiao Ming let the pen twirl in his hand. His gaze lingered on Fei Ji and Pang Yukun for a moment. He was very satisfied with their current progress.

He said, "I have to admit, the Prince of Chu is also a formidable figure. To defeat me, he can put aside anything. According to Wang Xuan's intelligence, Lin'an now also presents a different kind of prosperity than Qingzhou Province. It is said that a Western-style parliament is being formed, and its speaker is Cao Kun."

"No wonder the Cao family is willing to risk their lives for the Prince of Chu! The Prince of Chu truly dares to do such a thing! If this parliament is equivalent to a Western parliament, wouldn't the Prince of Chu's power also be limited by the parliament? Will the Prince of Chu agree?" Fei Ji was utterly astonished.

"The Golden Tent Khanate has been defeated. The Prince of Chu knows that His Majesty's next target is him. Between life and power, which do you think he will choose? Moreover, even if that's the case, the Prince of Chu can still inherit his title and enjoy wealth and glory indefinitely," Pang Yukun frowned.

After a pause, he continued, "Your Majesty, the south is wealthy, and for a long time, the Prince of Chu's influence has always been greater than that of the imperial family. If war truly breaks out, the common people may not side with the imperial family. Last year, Your Majesty's request to migrate from densely populated areas to sparsely populated areas has been ineffective, and many common people are unwilling to come north. This has even led to several incidents of common people violently resisting."

Li San nodded upon hearing this, indicating his agreement.

Xiao Ming rose and walked to the map, looking at the region south of the Yangtze River. "I indeed underestimated the Prince of Chu's capacity to accept Western culture. In these past two or three years, the Prince of Chu has truly surprised me."

Fei Ji smiled, "Your Majesty, the Han people of the south have another name: Hakka people. The Hakka's origin began when Qin conquered Lingnan and assimilated the Baiyue, and after a thousand years, they have formed stable large clans. These Hakka people often trade with overseas peoples, and even thrive in places like Luzon, Malacca, and Annam. These nations established by Han people once paid tribute to the Great Yu Empire, but they have disappeared in recent centuries. This Li family of the Prince of Chu was originally from Fuzhou, and later followed the Great Ancestor to settle in Lin'an, but the Prince of Chu and places like Fuzhou have always maintained close ties."

"I used to be confused, but now I think about it, those nations established by Han people must have been occupied by Westerners," Pang Yukun said.

Xiao Ming naturally understood the Hakka people. They were indeed a group skilled at pioneering. But even so, it could not deter his will to unify the Great Yu Empire.

Now, the Prince of Chu and the Cao family were conspiring to launch a coordinated attack on the development of Qingzhou Province's industry and commerce, aiming to delay Qingzhou Province's development. He now had to crush the Cao family's plan.

What saddened him a little was that the Prince of Chu was very clever and had left no incriminating evidence for him to seize. The Cao family's further actions would be the Cao family's problem, and on the surface, he was still a loyal feudal lord. He had no reason to send troops.



And sending troops under the pretext of reducing feudal lords' power would trigger a chain reaction from the Prince of Huainan, the Prince of Yong, the Prince of Ruyang, and others, which was also something he did not wish to see.

## Chapter 828

The cicadas chirped outside the imperial study, their incessant noise irritating.

Xiao Ming paced back and forth before the three, lost in thought. While the industrial revolution was in full swing, the Great Yu Empire still faced security challenges.

The Prince of Chu, the barbarians, Japan, Tibet, and so on—these hostile forces needed to be dealt with one by one. His task was still immense.

“Feudal lords are ultimately a major concern for the Great Yu Empire. As long as they remain, the Great Yu Empire will remain in a state of division. What’s most regrettable is that I cannot intervene in the internal affairs of the feudal states,” Xiao Ming said. This was a rule established by Great Ancestor. In Xiao Ming’s view, these feudal states were like independent federations, pledging loyalty to the imperial family while maintaining their own internal systems.

And this was precisely why he hated it so much: because the feudal lords were like ticking time bombs. If the imperial family was strong, all would be peaceful. If the imperial family weakened, these feudal lords would seize the opportunity to replace them.

After all, this had happened just a few years ago; it was by no means his conjecture.

Fei Ji’s face showed contemplation. Xiao Ming’s words were enough to make him understand what Xiao Ming intended to do. He said, “Your Majesty, this matter cannot be rushed. The north is not yet

completely stable, and Japan is eyeing Goryeo covetously. The Northern Expeditionary Army will need to recuperate after returning to the capital. Rashly reducing feudal lords' power might push them to the Prince of Chu's side, causing trouble in the rear."

"Elder Fei is absolutely right. Currently, most of the Great Yu Empire's forces are tied down in the north. Even with the triumphant returning soldiers, we can only muster sixty thousand men. Moreover, it takes time to gather grain and fodder, and prepare ammunition. This Northern Expedition has already consumed greatly, and the plundered slaves consume a lot of rations. Your Majesty, I believe now is absolutely not the time to dispatch troops. We should currently focus on stabilizing Guandong and Goryeo, at least until Guandong can provide grain for the stationed troops," Pang Yukun advised. Due to the delay in spring plowing, Guandong currently had no grain production at all.

Currently, not only could it not provide grain to the Great Yu Empire, but the imperial court also had to subsidize grain. After reclaiming the six cities, the provincial office's statistics quickly emerged.

Now, the six cities of Guandong had a total population of 2.2 million, which was very significant.

Xiao Ming glanced at Pang Yukun. In his memory, this fellow was always like this: whenever there was a war, he would complain about lacking grain and money, never being happy.

However, he understood that Pang Yukun was a cautious person, who never liked to fight battles without full confidence.

"If that's the case, then let's reconsider next autumn. But before that, I need to find a way to make the Prince of Huainan and the Prince of Yong surrender their military power," Xiao Ming mused.

In fact, he also didn't want to fight his own people. Internal strife was meaningless. If the Prince of Chu could surrender his military power and be a wealthy prince, he wouldn't do anything to him.

But now everything was too late. The Prince of Chu was now digging his own grave. Once the parliament led by Cao Kun was established, the State of Chu would change its nature. At that time, he might not be facing the Prince of Chu, but a capitalist parliament.

However, even so, he was not very worried. The State of Chu was developing, but the north was also developing, and his development speed was much faster than that of the State of Chu.

This was like the tortoise and the hare race. An extra year would only widen the gap between north and south. Perhaps then, he would eliminate the Prince of Chu with an overwhelming advantage. After all, Song Changping was already developing a Sharps breech-loading rifle that used paper cartridges as ammunition.

This Sharps rifle was very similar in construction to the Conqueror Musket currently used by the Great Yu Empire. It also used an external percussion cap and hammer ignition, with paper cartridge cases. The difference was the addition of a breech-locking mechanism.

Thus, the Great Yu Empire's Conqueror Musket could become a breech-loading rifled musket with just a slight modification and upgrade.

The reason for this was, of course, no coincidence. Xiao Ming had guided Song Changping in this direction from the very beginning of the design, precisely to facilitate the upgrading of firearms.

Currently, the Great Yu Empire had over one hundred thousand modern firearm troops. If they frequently changed weapons, he couldn't afford it. Moreover, according to news from the battlefield, many Conqueror Muskets were lost during the northern expedition.

These firearms might have fallen into barbarian hands. If so, he believed that Japanese and Western spies had very likely already obtained this new type of firearm.

For him, he could not tolerate his own weapons losing their advantage on the battlefield. Otherwise, he, a man with the technology crystal, would truly be disgraced.

Besides this reason, another reason he chose the Sharps rifle was the issue of bullet production. This rifle could fully use the Minié bullets currently used by the Conqueror rifle, without requiring a specialized matching bullet production line.

The only problem now was whether Song Changping could manufacture a qualified breech-locking mechanism, as this would affect the firearm's airtightness.

In the coming period, he would need to specially manufacture a set of production machinery for the breech-locking mechanism.

After discussing the issue of the Prince of Chu, Xiao Ming said to Li San, "I am temporarily not attacking the Prince of Chu, which does not mean I fear him. You are doing very well. Now, you must immediately cooperate with the security bureau to seal all of the Cao family's businesses."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Li San responded.

Having settled this matter, Xiao Ming dismissed the three. If it had been before, he would surely have worried himself sick over the Prince of Chu, but now it was completely unnecessary, for he had full confidence in his ability to control the situation.

Now, his plan could not be disrupted. The current priority was still to deal with the barbarians and Japan, and at the same time stabilize Guandong and Goryeo, turning these two places into the Great Yu Empire's granaries and dumping grounds for goods.

Thinking of this, he had Qian Dafu summon Hwang Ja-man. The Goryeo delegation was waiting for his reply to report back.

Soon, Hwang Ja-man, who had been waiting in the restaurant for several days, arrived. Seeing Xiao Ming, he immediately knelt down with a fawning expression.

Xiao Ming did not let Hwang Ja-man rise. At this moment, he wanted to demonstrate danger in front of him. After a moment of contemplation, he said, "Hwang Ja-man, since you are willing to work for me, I will not treat you unfairly. You need to faithfully fulfill the conditions I proposed to Goryeo."

"Your Majesty, I, your humble servant, would fulfill Your Majesty's grace even if it meant being shattered to pieces," Hwang Ja-man said sincerely.

Nodding, Xiao Ming continued, "The Great Yu Empire's army is stationed in Ryukyo City, which is enough to protect your life. But you will need to find your own way to resolve any conflicts that arise during the implementation of the treaty. My principle is that, under the premise of fulfilling the treaty, I will not interfere in your internal affairs."

"I understand Your Majesty's meaning. I, your humble servant, will never cause trouble for Your Majesty."

Xiao Ming had said what needed to be said. Among the terms of this treaty, the most controversial would probably be the cultural issues. In this regard, he had been quite heavy-handed, but only heavy-handedness could assimilate Goryeo.

Otherwise, bland and ineffective education would not assimilate this place even in a thousand years. Once Goryeo's culture revived, this place would separate again. The historical grievances between England and Ireland were enough to prove the dangers of leaving loose ends.

And what he wanted to do was solve it once and for all.

Chapter 829

Cao Zhengyang was somewhat flustered. Just as the merchant ship he was on was about to depart, a group of soldiers clad in silver armor boarded the ship, surrounding him completely.

"Merchant Cao, I'm afraid you'll have to come with us." The leading security commander held his helmet under one arm and placed his other hand on his hip, looking at Cao Zhengyang.

"Di Ying!" Cao Zhengyang's eyes narrowed.

The person who arrived was indeed Di Ying, the general who had once been stationed in Bashu. In the Bashu war, there were many civilian casualties, and the entire court was indignant. Di Ying had no choice but to bear this responsibility.

After the court assembly's decision, he was relieved of his military command and transferred to the security bureau, becoming a fifth-rank commander.

In the security bureau's official system, each province's security bureau had one governor-general (Zhengsanpin, third-rank), two prefects (Sipin, fourth-rank), two commanders (Wupin, fifth-rank), and below the commanders were chiliarchs, centurions, and so on.

Di Ying had no complaints about this rank, because he knew very well that his ability to remain in the imperial court was due to the Emperor's and his old friends' leniency. Moreover, in that situation, even if he had been stationed in Songzhou, he could not have resisted the barbarians.

However, someone had to be held responsible for the Battle of Bashu, otherwise, public anger would be hard to appease. He could only swallow this bitter cup himself.

"I didn't expect Merchant Cao to still remember me. It's truly an honor. However, even so, I, your commander, still have to take you back," Di Ying said, chewing on a piece of straw, looking unrestrained.

Cao Zhengyang's heart felt as if it was being squeezed, and fine beads of sweat appeared on his forehead. He argued loudly, "I have not violated any law! By what right do you arrest me? Are you not afraid I will personally lodge a complaint with the Emperor?"

Di Ying curled his lips, "When I was fighting on the battlefield, you were still sucking milk in a woman's arms! Trying to scare me? You're not worthy! Men, take him away! Impound this merchant ship!"

"Yes!"

Receiving Di Ying's order, one hundred security guards immediately rushed onto the ship.

Cao Zhengyang fell into despair. He understood that the imperial court had been watching them all along. The current Emperor had never truly trusted him.

"Act!"

Just as the security guards were boarding, Cao Zhengyang suddenly shouted. He was going to make a final gamble, otherwise, he would never be able to leave Qingzhou Province.

As his words fell, the crew members who had been busy on the ship suddenly picked up swords and rushed at the security guards. Cao Zhengyang also put his hand into his sleeve.

Di Ying was tempered by war. Such an unexpected incident was a minor matter to him. As Cao Zhengyang moved, he drew a three-edged bayonet from his waist and held it against Cao Zhengyang's chin.

"This is called a three-edged bayonet. It was recently manufactured by the military machinery department. With just a slight thrust, your blood will flow like a stream until death," Di Ying said grimly.

Cao Zhengyang was merely a merchant. At the moment of life and death, he was no match for someone like Di Ying, who had seen countless deaths. His movements immediately stopped.



Di Ying chuckled twice, then reached into Cao Zhengyang's sleeve and pulled out a short-barreled firearm.

"A firearm! The imperial court strictly prohibits the private possession of firearms. Cao Zhengyang, it seems your intentions this time are not small."

Di Ying said, seeing unfamiliar script on the firearm. In his opinion, this firearm was not produced in the Great Yu Empire.

As he spoke, the security guards, clad in full armor, easily dealt with the crew members who attempted to resist.

Although these security guards did not belong to the army, they had to undergo strict training before being commissioned. Dealing with ordinary thugs was easy for them.

Cao Zhengyang closed his eyes upon hearing this. This time, all of the Cao family's operations in the north were ruined.

While Cao Zhengyang was being arrested, couriers galloped day and night to relay the order to intercept the merchant ship to Jinling Province. Immediately, the Jinling Provincial Office dispatched security guards to the river, who intercepted the Cao family's merchant ship as it was about to enter Jinling Province's waterway.

News quickly reached Qingzhou Province. Within six days, all of the Cao family's conspiracies were completely shattered.

“Your Majesty, the silver confiscated in Jinling Province totals eight million taels. This silver is now on its way back to Qingzhou Province.”

In the imperial study, Li San reported the current progress to Xiao Ming.

“Eight million taels! This Cao family really did it. This is equivalent to emptying almost half of the ready cash on the market,” Xiao Ming snorted.

“Indeed. Fortunately, Your Majesty had the secret guards constantly watching, otherwise, the Cao family would truly have succeeded this time,” Li San said with lingering fear.

Xiao Ming frowned. This was indeed a troubling issue. The backwardness of this era made the imperial court’s oversight of the common people very weak.

After all, even in modern times, it was impossible to completely prevent capitalists from absconding with funds, let alone here.

“I only noticed something abnormal about Cao Zhengyang. His statements are just like his father’s statements in Lin’an,” Xiao Ming said calmly, “Oh, by the way, how is the seizure of the Cao family’s assets progressing?”

“Reporting to Your Majesty, all of the Cao family’s mines, banks, and workshops have been seized. However, this matter was too sudden, causing panic among many merchants and common people. Now, many people are going to the Cao Family Bank, demanding to exchange silver,” Li San said.

Xiao Ming had anticipated this problem long ago. “I have my own way to deal with this matter. After you return, continue to follow the lead from Cao Zhengyang. The Prince of Chu and the Cao family are so meticulously plotting; they have probably planted many hidden agents in Qingzhou Province. Dig out as many as you can.”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Li San bowed in response.

Dismissing Li San, Xiao Ming immediately summoned Pang Yukun. The Cao family had many assets in the north. These assets had to be dealt with promptly, especially the Cao Family Bank, otherwise, it could easily cause chaos.

Pang Yukun quickly arrived at the imperial study. He breathed a sigh of relief upon learning that the silver had been intercepted.

“What a blessing! This time, Your Majesty had me come for the Cao family’s assets, I presume,” Pang Yukun said.

Xiao Ming nodded. Pang Yukun always understood his thoughts. He said, “I do not wish for the Cao family matter to affect the development of industry and commerce. So, regarding the Cao family’s mines and workshops, immediately dispatch officials to take them over and manage them on behalf of the Cao family. Once stable, then auction them off to other merchants to operate. As for the Cao Family Bank, it will be directly renamed the Qingzhou Bank and will exist as a branch of the Qingzhou Bank.”

Pang Yukun's thoughts were similar to Xiao Ming's. He said, "As for the common people and merchants demanding to exchange silver, I believe we should publicly announce in the newspaper that their banknotes will not be affected, to prevent chaos."

"Hmm, that can be handled this way," Xiao Ming mused.

In fact, he had called Pang Yukun for a more important matter: the currency system. Now that the Qingzhou Bank had entered Goryeo, his goal was to make the Great Yu Empire's currency a world-class currency in the future.

So, after completely eradicating the Cao Family Bank, he felt the time was right.

After a pause, he said, "Actually, I have an idea. It is to issue the Great Yu Empire's unified paper currency during this incident."

Chapter 830

"Paper money!"

Pang Yukun was somewhat surprised upon hearing this. Historically, the Great Yu Empire had always used certificates similar to banknotes; the concept of paper money had never existed.

Xiao Ming had anticipated Pang Yukun's reaction. He immediately activated the technology crystal to explain what paper money was to Pang Yukun.

“Undoubtedly, industry will make goods abundant, and the currency representing the flow of goods will also increase accordingly. Thus, the imperial court will need to issue currency according to the quantity of civilian goods to facilitate transactions between goods.”

“If that’s the case, then how much should be issued?” Pang Yukun asked, somewhat confused.

“The amount issued naturally cannot be arbitrary. Simply put, paper money is equivalent to the old copper coins. Issuing too much will lead to the devaluation of copper coins. What used to buy one bun with one copper coin will now require ten copper coins for one bun. In the long run, this will cause national instability. Therefore, the issuance of paper money must be equal to the current total industrial and agricultural output of the Great Yu Empire. At the same time, to ensure the value of the currency itself, the currency needs to be linked to gold and silver,” Xiao Ming said thoughtfully.

Although the Great Yu Empire showed a trend of surpassing the West in firearms, its current social system still had many imperfections.

Especially in finance, he was too far behind. So, after expelling the barbarians and the Great Yu Empire was basically stable domestically, he decided to make up for this deficiency.

Moreover, he had a grand ambition: to establish an international currency system dominated by the Great Yu Empire, building financial hegemony.

Although this ideal was still some distance away, preparations had to begin now, and issuing paper money was the immediate task.

Pang Yukun gradually understood under Xiao Ming’s explanation. He said, “If that’s the case, I, your old servant, suggest that the Great Yu Empire currently adopt a silver standard currency. After all, gold is too scarce, and silver is the currency that has always circulated in the Great Yu Empire.”

Xiao Ming nodded. He had once wanted to establish a gold standard currency system, but the conditions were not yet met.

“That’s what I meant. However, gold and silver can also be used together, and a system for exchanging gold and silver at a set ratio can be established,” Xiao Ming said. He was laying the groundwork for a gold standard, to use it directly in the future.

Pang Yukun thought for a moment and raised his last concern. He said, “Your Majesty, there are many people in the common people who counterfeit banknotes. If paper money is issued, how can counterfeiting be prevented?”

One cannot handle porcelain work without a diamond drill. Xiao Ming dared to issue paper money naturally because the Great Yu Empire could achieve banknote printing technology. So he said, “You needn’t worry about that. I have my own way to solve it.”

Pang Yukun nodded. “Since that’s the case, I, your old servant, will go back and first deal with the Cao Family Bank.”

With that, Pang Yukun bowed and turned to leave.

Watching Pang Yukun depart, Xiao Ming brought up the information from the technology crystal. Issuing paper money was not a simple matter; he naturally dared not act recklessly.

The reason he put it on the agenda now was partly because the Cao Family Bank had been uprooted, and partly because he was confident that the quality of the paper money he issued was good enough.

Generally, paper money had very high paper requirements, and ordinary paper certainly could not be used. After all, this type of paper was easily damaged by water.

Therefore, the paper truly used for paper money was banknote paper, which was manufactured from cotton linters.

This cotton linter, also known as cottonseed linter, referred to the short fibers remaining on cottonseeds after ginning. These short fibers were stripped off with a delinting machine, resulting in cotton linters.

Because the collection process was complex, short cotton linters were much more valuable than ordinary papermaking raw materials.

Having the materials was only the first step. The next was to master the raw material formula for this type of paper and produce it according to strict proportions.

This way, the paper produced would have a smooth and delicate texture, tough and resistant to folding. When holding such banknote paper in the air and shaking it, or holding both ends of a banknote with two hands and pulling it taut, or flicking the surface of the paper with a finger, it would produce a crisp and clear sound.

Comparatively, the raw materials for ordinary printing paper were mostly straw, wheat stalks, etc. This type of paper had a soft and rough texture, lacking toughness and tensile strength, and was easily torn. If shaken in the air, the sound would be dull.

So, just the manufacturing standard of this banknote paper made it impossible for Great Yu Empire merchants to counterfeit it. After all, the cost of counterfeiting would be very high.

Additionally, he had another anti-counterfeiting method: watermarks.

Watermarks were an ancient anti-counterfeiting method. In contemporary times, his country was the earliest country in ancient times to master watermark pressing technology.

At that time, threads were woven into patterns or designs on the paper screen, protruding from the screen surface. When paper was manufactured, the pulp density varied at these spots, and when viewed against the light, patterns with alternating brightness would appear, thus forming a watermark.

In the Tang Dynasty, there was “Yanbo Jian” watermarked paper, and in the late Qing Dynasty, there was “Wang Liuji” watermarked paper. In Europe, Prussia issued Saxony banknotes with watermarks in 1772, and since then, the use of watermarks became increasingly common.

Besides these two, the third banknote printing technology the Great Yu Empire could achieve was letterpress printing, which used raised designs.

This would create a raised and indented pattern on the surface of the paper money. And the last element would be the printing pigments: mineral pigments.



Compared to plant-based pigments, the colors of various paintings done with mineral pigments remained unchanged for a long time, capable of lasting for thousands of years without fading.

Thinking of this, Xiao Ming said to Qian Dafu, “Now, follow me to the printing workshop.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” Qian Dafu responded and went out to prepare.

Xiao Ming then picked up his fountain pen and recorded the key technologies. Next, he would transfer technical backbone personnel to establish a paper money workshop.

This workshop would be a top secret of the Great Yu Empire. The method of printing banknotes would be a secret among secrets.

After finishing writing, Xiao Ming rose and went to the printing workshop. This workshop had always been managed by the newspaper office. He directly had Fan Zeng select a portion of people with clean backgrounds from it.

At the same time, he instructed him to establish a complete workshop system, from papermaking to printing, following the newspaper’s printing procedures.

He, meanwhile, gathered the selected individuals at Bowen Academy.

Because this issuance of paper money was very important, Xiao Ming had the provincial office prepare a confidentiality agreement for each of them. Once the agreement was signed, they would strictly guard the secrets of the banknote printing workshop. Any violation would constitute a breach of the Great Yu Empire's Secrecy Act.

The artisans selected by Fan Zeng were all common people who had lived in Qingzhou City for generations. Information about their families for several generations was very clear, and their entire families also lived in Qingzhou City.

Such artisans were very secure for Xiao Ming, as they had many concerns and the probability of them being bribed was very low.

Over the next few days, Xiao Ming imparted the core technologies of banknote printing to them. Of course, the processes were separated; each artisan only mastered a portion of it.

At the same time, he also ordered the machinery department to manufacture ginning machines. With the current industrial capability, this type of machine was not a problem.