

I. Dynasty 831

Chapter 831

“Your Majesty, please take a look.”

In the imperial study, Pang Yukun presented a set of printed currency to Xiao Ming.

After deciding to issue currency, Xiao Ming had the provincial office fully prepare and allocate resources. Coupled with his personal supervision, the Great Yu Empire’s first mint was successfully established, and within a month, it produced a set of currency for the Great Yu Empire.

This included the paper money he requested, as well as three types of metal currency. The materials for these three metal currencies were gold, silver, and copper.

Both the paper money and the gold, silver, and copper currencies were collectively called Great Yu Empire Dragon Coins. The gold coin in the Dragon Coin was called the Golden Dragon, weighing 1.5 grams, cast from pure gold. The silver coin was called the Silver Dragon, also weighing 1.5 grams, with a value one-tenth of the gold coin, and the copper coin was one-tenth of the silver coin.

Thus, the three metal currencies, gold, silver, and copper, were the main circulating currencies in the market, while paper money had relatively larger denominations, mainly used for large-scale commercial trade.

Xiao Ming was not being reckless in issuing currency this time. In this era, the common people’s acceptance of metal currency was far greater than that of paper money. Rashly using only paper money

would lead to a lack of trust among the common people, who would not willingly exchange their gold and silver for paper money in banks.

Therefore, Xiao Ming was currently producing large denomination paper money, primarily for trade circulation. At the same time, his doing so was also to prevent counterfeit money from impacting the civilian economy.

And if paper money was used for large-scale trade, merchants would naturally go to the bank to have the bank verify the authenticity of the paper money before using it, cutting off the circulation of counterfeit money.

After all, although he used many anti-counterfeiting technologies from later generations in the process of manufacturing paper money, it was hard to guarantee that Western countries would not print counterfeit money to harm the Great Yu Empire's finance.

Historically, Napoleon famously counterfeited large quantities of Tsarist Russian paper money, using vast amounts of counterfeit currency to purchase Russian goods during his invasion of Russia, causing economic chaos within Tsarist Russia, thus leading citizens to buy gold for refuge.

At the same time, Napoleon also printed British pounds, Austrian coins, and Prussian coins, filling Europe with counterfeit money for a time.

Thinking of this history, Xiao Ming felt it was still necessary to be cautious. Now, Western colonizers were full of malice towards the Great Yu Empire and always wanted to reverse the trade deficit. He could not give them this opportunity.

“So this is the One Hundred Golden Dragon Coin?” Xiao Ming looked at the paper money. This banknote was predominantly golden yellow, printed with ochre, a mineral pigment, ground with oil.

In the center of the banknote was an imperial portrait wearing a crown, bearing a three-part resemblance to Xiao Ming.

The reverse side of the banknote showed a steam locomotive moving on railway tracks, with the number “100” in the middle. These patterns were meticulously engraved by artisans. In the bottom left corner of Xiao Ming’s portrait, there was also a small square, printed with the production date and serial number of this banknote. Most importantly, this small square used micro-engraving technology, further increasing the difficulty of counterfeiting.

“Yes, Your Majesty. This is currently the Great Yu Empire’s largest denomination currency.” Pang Yukun said with a smile. In fact, one Golden Dragon was enough for a Great Yu Empire common person to live for a month.

After all, according to previous silver conversions, a female worker in a textile workshop now earned one Golden Dragon as a salary, which was twelve Golden Dragons a year, and a female worker’s salary was considered very high in Qingzhou Province.

“After issuing paper money, counterfeit currency verification personnel must be stationed in every bank. The issued currency also needs to be overprinted with the Qingzhou Bank’s seal to prevent the appearance of counterfeit currency.” Xiao Ming’s expression was serious.

Any policy progressed step by step; one could not get fat with one bite. This currency issuance was also an initial attempt at financial reform for him.

Putting down the paper money, Xiao Ming picked up the Golden Dragon, Silver Dragon, and copper coins. In contemporary Britain, a gold coin weighed about seven grams of gold. The reason he used one point five grams was that the current gold reserves were too low.

Issuing new currency this time, he only hoped to collect gold and silver from the common people. This way, they would not lack materials.

Like the paper money, the gold coins bore Xiao Ming's portrait. However, the silver coins and copper coins were different. The silver coins were engraved with a naval warship, while the copper coins were engraved with mature wheat spikes.

If according to modern rules, all currency should bear the portrait of the founding emperor. However, since Xiao Ming had effectively re-established a different nation after the Chang'an rebellion, he had no qualms about using his own portrait.

Most importantly, having his portrait on the money would also make users feel more comfortable with him. Who would object to money?

After verifying all the currencies, Xiao Ming said, "Have the Qingzhou Bank issue them. You then go to the newspaper office to find Fan Zeng and have him cooperate with you in publishing news about this new currency."

After a pause, he continued, "Additionally, the construction of the Qingzhou Bank must be expedited. At least, ensure that every province has a bank."

"I am already taking over the Cao Family Banks. It is estimated that within two months, all Cao Family Banks in all prefectures and counties can be rebranded and become branches of the Qingzhou Bank," Pang Yukun reported his current progress.

Xiao Ming had always trusted Pang Yukun. He said, "If that's the case, I am relieved."

As the emperor and his minister discussed the currency matter, Pang Yukun continued, "Your Majesty, I have learned that Ge Yiren and the other two, along with Kong Huai-ren, the head of the Qufu Kong family, have returned to Qingzhou Province. I believe Your Majesty should also hold the Fengshan Ceremony at Mount Tai. This way, Your Majesty can become the leader of Confucianism and guide its reform."

Xiao Ming nodded. He had also received this news. It was said that as soon as Ge Yiren arrived in Qufu, he persuaded Kong Huai-ren, the head of the Kong family. After staying in Qufu for a period, Kong Huai-ren, along with his three hundred disciples, arrived in Qingzhou Province and was now awaiting his audience.

Xiao Ming was naturally pleased about this matter. The Kong family recognizing the situation at this time saved him a lot of effort.

"I will see Kong Huai-ren when I am ready. I have many things to instruct him," Xiao Ming mused. To reform Confucianism, he had personally drafted a set of key points for reform, just waiting for Kong Huai-ren to promote them for him.

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Pang Yukun responded. After confirming that Xiao Ming had no other matters, he turned and left.

After Xiao Ming was left alone in the imperial study, he picked up the Great Yu Empire's new currency again. In a blink of an eye, the Great Yu Empire's reforms had been underway for two years. Under the provincial office's deliberate support, various workshops had been established throughout the Great Yu Empire, with both state-owned and private entities jointly supporting the Great Yu Empire's current industry.

And because of the prosperity of industry, merchants had more goods to trade, allowing a continuous flow of silver into the Great Yu Empire. The issuance of currency was precisely against this backdrop.

However, for him, the current industrial capacity was still insufficient. He needed more workshops, but this would require more market support for industry, and at the same time, the sale of more types of goods.

Thinking of this, he was somewhat eager to acquire more regions like Goryeo.

As he was thinking, Li San arrived outside the imperial study.

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"Your Majesty, Cao Zhengyang has confessed everything."

Entering the imperial study, Li San handed a confession to Xiao Ming.

Ever since Cao Zhengyang was arrested, they had been interrogating him for a month. In the beginning, Cao Zhengyang was stubborn, refusing to admit that he deliberately caused damage under the Cao family's instruction. Even after Li San used some interrogation methods, Cao Zhengyang still refused to speak.

Finally, Li San had no choice but to confine Cao Zhengyang to solitary confinement, and every time Cao Zhengyang was about to fall asleep, he would be woken up. After three days of this, Cao Zhengyang, unable to endure such mental torment, finally confessed everything.

“It was indeed Cao Kun’s order,” Xiao Ming said, glancing at the confession. Cao Zhengyang explicitly stated that Cao Kun had sent someone to deliver the message to him.

In addition, Cao Zhengyang also confessed some important information about the State of Chu.

“The merchants’ council was established a month ago. Now Cao Kun serves as its speaker, and Cao Zhengyang’s elder brother, Cao Zhengtong, is the Chief of Staff of the Prince of Wei’s residence. According to Cao Zhengyang, the merchants’ council is planning to seize military power. If they succeed, the Prince of Chu will become a mere puppet.” This news somewhat shocked Li San. In his opinion, a merchant seeking involvement in government affairs was already astonishing, and now they were even attempting to meddle with the army.

Xiao Ming was also somewhat surprised. “The Prince of Chu must be mad. Once they gain military power, the State of Chu will be dictated by the Cao family.”

“The State of Chu understands the West better than we do. The Cao family has also spoken to the Prince of Chu more than once about Western monarchs. Between life and death, perhaps he trusts the Cao family more,” Li San said cautiously.

Xiao Ming sighed. The problem lay precisely here: no matter how much goodwill he showed, the Prince of Chu refused to believe him. He now firmly believed that even if he surrendered, Xiao Ming would eventually kill him. One could only say that the Prince of Chu was too shrewd.

He said, "You are right. Now, the Prince of Chu will simply not believe me, so he will absolutely not surrender to me."

Li San smiled upon hearing this. He said, "Your Majesty, this may not be a bad thing. We still have some scruples about acting against the Prince of Chu. If the Cao family controls the merchants' council and then gains military power, Your Majesty will no longer have to worry about the Prince of Chu. Whether the Prince of Chu rebels or not, we will have ample reason to march south. If Your Majesty wishes to make the State of Chu show its true colors more quickly, perhaps Your Majesty can dispatch secret guards to assassinate the Prince of Chu."

Xiao Ming also thought of this. Currently, the Prince of Chu's heir, Li Chuyuan, was in Qingzhou Province. Once the Prince of Chu died, Li Chuyuan would have to return to succeed him. This was a rule of the Great Yu Empire.

The Prince of Chu might be willing to share power with others for the sake of survival, but Li Chuyuan would not agree, as he was the next Prince of Chu.

"I think so too. Since the Prince of Chu won't let me live in peace, why should I let the Prince of Chu live in peace? As long as the Prince of Chu dies, I can send Li Chuyuan back to fight the Cao family. Perhaps then, Li Chuyuan will even request me to send troops to rescue him. What do you say?"

Xiao Ming made up his mind. As the saying goes, "War is a great affair of the nation, a place of life and death, a path to survival or destruction, which must not be left unexamined." War can never be arbitrary. The failures of contemporary America in the Vietnam War and Korean War sufficiently illustrate this problem.

Advanced weapons do not necessarily guarantee victory in war, or even if victorious, the cost is often immense.

And these were not what Xiao Ming wanted to see. Therefore, even though the Great Yu Empire was equipped with advanced firearms, he still acted after careful deliberation in every war, trying every means to reduce losses, or simply subduing the enemy without fighting.

“Your Majesty is wise. This way, it gains time for deploying troops, reduces casualties, and at the same time, provides a just cause for war,” Li San said.

Xiao Ming continued to read the information revealed by Cao Zhengyang. Besides the council and the military, the Cao family and the French were also colluding, purchasing many Western firearms.

“It seems I need to have a serious talk with Li Chuyuan, and perhaps fan the flames a bit,” Xiao Ming said with a smile.

After a pause, he said, “Do you have the confidence to assassinate the Prince of Chu?”

Li San chuckled twice. He said, “Your Majesty, it is said that Song Changping is developing a firearm that loads ammunition from the breech. This firearm can be fired from any position, and its accuracy and firing rate are both superior to the Conqueror Musket. If Your Majesty can provide me with such a firearm, I believe it won’t be a big problem.”

Li San knowing this secret did not surprise him, because Song Changping and Lin Wentao were all under the surveillance of the secret guards. Getting some intelligence was very normal for Li San.

In fact, as soon as there was any movement from Song Changping's side, Li San would know, even earlier than Song Changping himself.

As his words fell, a small eunuch arrived at the door and whispered a few words to Qian Dafu. Qian Dafu smiled, "Your Majesty, speaking of the devil, Song Changping requests an audience outside the palace."

Xiao Ming squinted at Li San. He said, "It seems you already know."

Li San smiled and scratched his head.

After a while, Song Changping arrived outside the imperial study. Seeing Song Changping holding a firearm, he asked in surprise, "Song Changping, this wouldn't be the breech-loading gun, would it?"

Song Changping nodded. He said, "Precisely. I have already tested it on the training ground. This firearm can directly fire paper cartridges. However, due to the complexity of the breech-locking mechanism, it will be very difficult to mass-convert Conqueror Muskets. After all, there are sixty-three individual parts just in the breech-locking mechanism, and many parts have different shapes. To produce such parts, more precise machine tools are required."

Xiao Ming understood. Song Changping was not here to claim credit this time but to express his difficulties. In fact, a breech-locking mechanism required very high processing precision. This precision could only be achieved with high-precision lathes. Otherwise, mass production would be impossible.

Due to variations in part dimensions, assembly would be impossible.

As if to explain the breech-loading gun in his hand, he said, "This gun's parts were personally ground by me. It took a month to assemble, and even then, some parts don't fit perfectly. But overall, it's barely usable."

Xiao Ming took the breech-loading gun. The breech-locking mechanism of this gun was provided by him to Song Changping. Overall, this gun was somewhat similar to a Sharps breech-loading gun, with a falling block breech mechanism. A thickened trigger guard acted as a lever to move a rising and falling breechblock to open and close the breech.

The most difficult part was a hinge structure, which had many components and was the processing bottleneck Song Changping mentioned.

"I was actually planning to look for you after I finished with this currency matter," Xiao Ming said. "This gun will temporarily only be used as a sniper rifle in the army. Since it's difficult, manually produce a small number to equip the army. I will have Lin Wentao think about the matter of precision machine tools."

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Song Changping sighed as he watched Xiao Ming continuously tinker with the breech-loading firearm.

Previously, he had been somewhat smug about firearm shooting, but this difficult manufacturing process of the breech-loading gun made him realize that without an industrial foundation, he would have only theories and be unable to accomplish anything.

Especially lathes. In his opinion, these different types of lathes were simply the foundation of the Great Yu Empire's industry, because without these lathes to produce high-precision components, many machines simply could not be manufactured.

“Lathes are actually so important. I, your humble servant, had indeed overlooked that before,” Song Changping said with some shame. “Previously, the slightly rough parts of flintlock guns were still usable, but the more complex the mechanism, the higher the precision required from the lathe.”

Xiao Ming smiled. “You’re right this time. But you needn’t worry. Bowen Academy has always conducted related lathe experiments.”

Lathes had always been Lin Wentao’s responsibility. After all, Lin Wentao had been dealing with machinery—steam engines, harvesters, and so on. Compared to Song Changping, he needed precision lathes even more to produce components.

After briefly explaining the progress and difficulties of the breech-loading gun, Song Changping had achieved his purpose. He extended his hand and said, “Your Majesty, I, your humble servant, will return and further improve this breech-loading gun. Also, what about the name of this breech-loading gun?”

“This firearm is, after all, based on the Conqueror Musket. Let’s still call it the Conqueror Musket. After all, Conqueror is not a specific type of firearm, but a series,” Xiao Ming mused.

“Yes, Your Majesty.” Song Changping still held out his hand.

Li San, seeing this, said, “Changping, leave this breech-loading gun to our secret guards. We have something very important to do.”

Hearing this, Song Changping said without hesitation, “No! You secret guards must be doing something extremely dangerous with this gun. What if this firearm falls into enemy hands?”

“How could we secret guards lose anything? If it’s discovered, we’ll destroy this firearm,” Li San said seriously.

Unlike his glibness with officials, Li San was always very honest when facing people like Song Changping. After all, officials would be wary of him, but people like Song Changping would not.

Song Changping listened, then looked at Xiao Ming, waiting for Xiao Ming’s say.

By this time, Xiao Ming had thoroughly understood this firearm. Just as Song Changping said, this gun had a complex structure and was extremely difficult to manufacture. Even if it fell into enemy hands, its production would be very slow.

However, even so, Xiao Ming dared not take this risk. The advent of the breech-loading gun era would mean that trench warfare would become mainstream, and then the duration of wars would be greatly extended.

After a moment of thought, he said to Li San, “Remember, once exposed, you must destroy this gun immediately, especially the breech mechanism.”

Xiao Ming’s expression was solemn. Song Changping could tell that the secret guards must be executing a major mission. He said, “The key is the breech-locking mechanism. Whether it’s blown up or dismantled, the complete hinge structure must not be left behind.”

Li San’s expression became serious. He understood the gravity of losing this firearm.

“Yes, Your Majesty. This time, the secret guards will dispatch their most elite assassins to Lin’an. We will plan carefully before acting. I will not make a move without absolute certainty,” Li San said solemnly.

“The Prince of Chu always enjoys hunting. Every autumn, he goes to Qianming Mountain to hunt. You might choose this timing, and you can also use landmines,” Xiao Ming said calmly.

As long as the Prince of Chu remained alive, he would continue to be a shield for the Cao family, leading the State of Chu down a road of no return. War at that point would inevitably result in more casualties.

If the death of the Prince of Chu alone could easily resolve the State of Chu, then he was willing to do so. Therefore, regardless of whether they had the breech-loading gun or not, he would dispatch the secret guards to assassinate the Prince of Chu.

Of course, he also knew that the Prince of Chu and the Cao family were also constantly preparing to assassinate him. After all, politics was inherently a matter of the strong preying on the weak.

Having settled this matter, Xiao Ming dismissed Li San, and at the same time instructed Song Changping to modify some more Conqueror Muskets for wartime use.

Currently, the Great Yu Empire was surrounded by enemies. If they did not wage war with a generational advantage in firearms, continuously increasing casualties would hinder the Great Yu Empire’s overseas expansion.

Moreover, any so-called small country surrounding the Great Yu Empire was in fact a large country globally. The Great Yu Empire's surrounding environment could not be said to be anything but hostile.

The two departed. Xiao Ming had Qian Dafu summon Lin Wentao.

If the Great Yu Empire's industry wanted to advance further, it had to collectively improve the precision of machine tools. Especially now that electricity had made progress, the future of the Second Industrial Revolution was already visible.

After a while, Lin Wentao arrived at the imperial study, led by Qian Dafu.

After bowing, Lin Wentao awaited Xiao Ming's instructions.

"I called you here this time to give you special tutoring. Today, you will learn what precision machine tools are, and how to produce them. At the same time, I will also teach you more about mechanical structures."

Xiao Ming went straight to the point. A country needed many talents, but the most brilliant were often a few top talents, who could be called geniuses.

These individuals were extremely proficient in certain areas and very intelligent. Whatever they learned, they could quickly grasp and apply. Clearly, Lin Wentao was such a talent.

Precisely because of this, Xiao Ming intended to cultivate Lin Wentao into the Great Yu Empire's mechanical genius to counterbalance the continuously emerging scientific prodigies of Europe.

Like in contemporary times, Europe during this period also produced many talents, and various scientific theories were in their perfecting stage.

"Thank you, Your Majesty," Lin Wentao said, immediately excited.

His admiration for Xiao Ming came not only from imperial power but also from the vast knowledge Xiao Ming possessed.

Xiao Ming, personally involved in advancing the Great Yu Empire's technological progress, did not slack off. He meticulously explained the types and structures of precision machine tools to Lin Wentao.

Overall, with the advent of the steam engine, the precision of machine tools had to become increasingly precise to adapt to production. And to meet this requirement, he had to produce gantry planers.

This type of planer was mainly used for planing large workpieces. It was the "mother machine" of industry. The gantry planer worked by moving the workpiece back and forth in a straight line through a gate-like frame. The crossbeam of the frame typically had two vertical tool holders that could slide. During cutting, it would move horizontally like cutting meat, shaping the workpiece to the desired size.

Besides the gantry planer, Xiao Ming also explained the universal cylindrical grinder, gear hobber, and gear shaper to Lin Wentao. Among them, the cylindrical grinder was a grinding machine for processing cylindrical, conical, or other shaped external surfaces and shaft shoulders. The gear hobber was a lathe

for producing gears and sprockets; bicycle chains had to use this machine. And the gear shaper was for fine grinding the teeth of gears.

In addition to these, the most important items to be produced this time were the length measuring machine and profile measuring machine, which ensured precision.

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In the imperial study, palace maids fanned gently, blowing cool breezes towards Xiao Ming and Lin Wentao.

Under Xiao Ming's explanation, the structure and images of one lathe after another appeared in Lin Wentao's mind.

"The length measuring machine Your Majesty spoke of is already in testing at Bowen Academy. It uses the measurement units designated by Your Majesty. However, currently, the most precise length measuring machine that can be realized can only reach one thousandth of a millimeter, and before manufacturing the length measuring machine, we must first divide millimeters into equal parts. Only then can we set the one-thousandth scale for the length measuring machine."

Lin Wentao's words made Xiao Ming nod. This was precisely what he wanted to say.

Currently, the Great Yu Empire's measurement precision basically stopped at one hundredth, which was the millimeter level.

However, to manufacture breech-locking mechanisms and other more precise machinery, he had to increase the measurement precision to one thousandth, and even to one ten-thousandth in the future.

“You are right, but this division of millimeters can only rely on manual engraving. I will provide you with microscopes, and you can try to divide millimeters into equal distances,” Xiao Ming said.

Lin Wentao nodded. The issue of precision had always been a headache for him.

In fact, in his view, whoever mastered industrial precision would master machinery manufacturing. After all, lathes were also called “mother machines of industry” in Bowen Academy’s books. As the name suggested, these lathes were the mothers of machines.

“It’s just that if we do this, our measurements will inevitably have some errors,” Lin Wentao said with a hint of regret.

Xiao Ming frowned. In fact, precision was only a relative problem, not an absolute one. Even in contemporary times, rulers produced in the same batch would have errors in their markings.

Therefore, whether it was the precision of the lathe itself, its components, or the precision of the manufactured parts, there would always be errors. Industry only needed to control the errors within a certain range.

Precisely because he understood this, Xiao Ming was not as confused as Lin Wentao.

This confusion was about how the initial scales came about, such as meters, centimeters, millimeters, etc. In contemporary times, people might not think about the issue of ruler markings because everything was readily available.

But here, he had to explain that the most primitive scales were actually drawn by hand, just as he personally drew the Great Yu Empire's weights and measures, and then promoted them as standards.

Then artisans would use this standard to create measuring units, which in turn allowed lathes to produce components with a certain precision.

Precisely because of this, in fact, the Great Yu Empire's ability to manufacture parts with precision could only rely on manual grinding. There was no other way. After all, theoretically, only human hands could achieve infinite precision. The evolution of lathe precision in history unfolded in this manner.

In contemporary times, the West set the standards for weights and measures, and other countries could only emulate their unit sizes. Such imitation made it very difficult to achieve one hundred percent accuracy; only close approximations were possible.

Now, what Xiao Ming and Lin Wentao were doing was essentially establishing the Great Yu Empire's industrial precision, building the Great Yu Empire's manufacturing tradition. And the foundation of manufacturing tradition lay in the artisans' meticulousness.

"Errors are inevitable; absolute equidistance is impossible. We can only reduce errors to the minimum. Once we establish a one-thousandth precision standard, we can manufacture vernier calipers with one-thousandth precision. Then, we can manufacture length measuring machines with one ten-thousandth precision," Xiao Ming said loudly.

The mass production of breech-loading firearm components was a breakthrough point in the Great Yu Empire's industry. Once this point was surpassed, the Great Yu Empire would embark on the path of precision manufacturing.

And in this process, he also needed to manufacture precision spirit levels, dial gauges, right-angle gauges, straightedges, high-precision spindle mandrels, and dial gauge rods. But before that, he had to have an original scale with one-thousandth precision.

This was also one of the reasons he had Lin Wentao come here this time: he wanted Lin Wentao to manually grind a vernier caliper with one-thousandth precision.

“Yes, Your Majesty.” Lin Wentao nodded heavily. He was under immense pressure.

Upon returning, he decided to mobilize all artisans to engrave this one-thousandth precision vernier caliper, and from them, select a caliper whose errors were indiscernible to the naked eye to serve as the original caliper.

Then, they would mass-produce machines for manufacturing vernier calipers, and after that, use vernier calipers to manually produce other precision tools.

The teaching between the two continued until about three in the afternoon. Through the explanation, Lin Wentao basically understood the issue of precision.

After leaving the imperial palace, Lin Wentao went directly to Bowen Academy. Next, he would lead the students in establishing the Great Yu Empire’s industrial precision standards and formulating a set of parts dimension specifications. However, first, he needed to manufacture an original vernier caliper with one-thousandth precision.

While Lin Wentao was busy, Xiao Ming was not idle. He summoned Prince Li Chuyuan of Chu.

This unfortunate Prince of Chu had been thrown into Qingzhou Province for over two years due to the Prince of Chu's ambitions, and the road back was still distant.

"Prince Li Chuyuan of Chu greets Your Majesty."

In the imperial study, Li Chuyuan bowed ninety degrees, his head deeply lowered.

For the past two years, he had lived in Qingzhou Province, feeling increasingly uneasy as Qingzhou Province grew richer and stronger. Especially after the Golden Tent Khanate's defeat, he hadn't slept a wink, pondering a question every midnight: 'What would be the fate of the State of Chu if it opposed Xiao Ming?'

At this time, Xiao Ming sat in a chair in the imperial study, drinking tea. He said to Qian Dafu, "Grant him a seat."

Qian Dafu responded and had a eunuch bring a chair for Li Chuyuan. Li Chuyuan hesitated for a moment, then sat down.

The two sat facing each other. Xiao Ming was not in a hurry to speak. Instead, he handed Li Chuyuan the confession from Cao Zhengyang, letting him read it first.

Li Chuyuan was initially a bit bewildered, but after reading it, his face grew increasingly grim.

“Delusional! Delusional!” Li Chuyuan’s hands trembled slightly in anger. “Where did the Cao family put my imperial father? Where did they put me? Your Majesty, the State of Chu is my feudal state; it cannot fall into the hands of a bunch of scoundrels like the Cao family.”

Li Chuyuan’s reaction pleased Xiao Ming. As far as he knew, when the Prince of Chu sent Li Chuyuan to Qingzhou Province, Li Chuyuan was already somewhat displeased. Now, seeing his own feudal state about to change hands, how could he not be worried?

“You and the Prince of Chu were probably both kept in the dark by the Cao family. Since the Cao family wants to seize power, how could there be any place for you and your father in the future?” Xiao Ming said.

Li Chuyuan nodded. He knew what was happening in the State of Chu, but he hadn’t expected the Cao family to harbor such malicious intentions. They were waiting to seize all power and then kick them aside.

“Your Majesty, my imperial father has been blinded by greed. Please allow me to send a letter to admonish my imperial father,” Li Chuyuan said anxiously.

Xiao Ming narrowed his eyes. He believed the Prince of Chu would not heed Li Chuyuan’s letter. After all, the Prince of Chu was now somewhat insane to the point of losing his mind, and he also did not want the Prince of Chu to rein himself in.

So he said, "Your imperial father will not listen to you now. I only ask you, do you want to be a homeless dog, or do you want wealth and glory for the rest of your life?"

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In the imperial study, cool breezes wafted from the hand-cranked fan. Li Chuyuan, however, was drenched in sweat.

Beads of sweat, as large as beans, continuously rolled down his face.

He now understood. Xiao Ming's true purpose this time was indeed the State of Chu. And for him, this was a crucial conversation. One wrong step, and he would fall into an abyss of eternal damnation.

So, he first decided to play dumb, because he always liked his opponent to reveal their cards first. He said, "I don't quite understand Your Majesty's meaning."

Xiao Ming smiled upon hearing this. Li Chuyuan might be a philanderer, but having grown up in the environment of the State of Chu, he certainly wouldn't be a political idiot.

"The Prince need not pretend to be foolish. You understand the situation in the State of Chu better than I do. Your imperial father is seeking his own demise. Once the Cao family interferes in the State of Chu's government affairs, the State of Chu will become the Cao family's State of Chu, not the imperial family's State of Chu. After all, the reason Great Ancestor enfeoffed the State of Chu to the Li family was precisely because of the friendship back then. Am I right?" Xiao Ming said with a smile.

Li Chuyuan's face paled slightly. Xiao Ming's words carried a clear threat. After a moment of hesitation, he nodded and echoed, "Your Majesty is right. How can the State of Chu fall into the hands of others? Not to mention that Your Majesty will not agree, even I will not agree."

“That’s right. In fact, I have always thought highly of you during your years in Qingzhou Province. This crisis is a shared crisis for the Great Yu Empire and the State of Chu. After weighing the situation, I have decided to let you return to Lin’an,” Xiao Ming said, gazing at Li Chuyuan.

“Let... let me go back?” Li Chuyuan pointed to himself, speaking with disbelief.

Xiao Ming nodded affirmatively, “The State of Chu has been misled by treacherous officials. Now, only you, the Prince, can turn the tide.”

For him, taking the State of Chu was only a matter of time. However, to reduce casualties, he hoped that the State of Chu would become vulnerable due to internal strife when he marched south.

And the person to cause this internal strife in the State of Chu was Li Chuyuan.

He was certain that this prince would not collude with the Cao family. Even if forced to cooperate with the Cao family due to the Prince of Chu’s pressure, he would absolutely believe the Cao family completely.

“Thank you, Your Majesty, for your immense grace! Thank you, Your Majesty, for your immense grace!” Li Chuyuan was so excited he could barely contain himself. Two years had passed in the blink of an eye in Qingzhou Province, and in these two years, he had ceaselessly longed for his State of Chu.

Now he could finally go back.

“Pack up and go back. Remember what I told you. Whether it’s life or death, whether it’s wealth or destitution, it’s all your own choice,” Xiao Ming reminded him again.

Li Chuyuan nodded. After repeated thanks, he left the imperial study.

Qian Dafu looked at Li Chuyuan’s retreating figure with a puzzled expression. He said, “Your Majesty, letting Li Chuyuan return just like that? Is Your Majesty not afraid that the Prince of Chu, having lost his only restraint, will launch an attack on the north?”

Xiao Ming smiled, “If that were the case, I would have a legitimate reason to act. What I fear is the Prince of Chu not making a move. For me, Li Chuyuan being in Qingzhou Province or not makes no difference. But for the State of Chu, it’s different. How could Li Chuyuan willingly hand over the wealth and power he’s about to inherit to the Cao family? After all, Li Chuyuan’s relationship with the Cao family is only ordinary.”

After a pause, he continued, “Moreover, if the Prince of Chu dies, Li Chuyuan, who inherits the Prince of Chu’s position, will surely have intensified conflicts with the Cao family. At that time, attacking the State of Chu would be twice as effective with half the effort.”

Qian Dafu nodded slightly. He now understood. The Emperor had made an open move against the Prince of Chu. If all went well, once Li Chuyuan returned, he would play the role of a troublemaker.

As the two were speaking, Li Chuyuan exited the imperial palace and headed towards his residence. He was now somewhat impatient to return to Lin’an. He missed the feeling of being above everyone but one.

Upon returning to his residence, he immediately had his servants pack their belongings for Lin'an. In truth, he had seen through Xiao Ming's intentions. However, it had to be said that Xiao Ming was truly formidable; this time, he had hit him where it hurt.

This return to the State of Chu would surely involve entanglement with the Cao family. He certainly did not want to lose his power and status.

Learning that Li Chuyuan was returning, the old butler serving Li Chuyuan's expression changed dramatically. He said, "Your Highness, now that you are returning to Lin'an, should you not consult with His Highness the Prince of Chu?"

Li Chuyuan sneered twice, then raised his foot and fiercely kicked the old butler. He angrily said, "You old dog! Do you really think I don't know about your collusion with those merchants? That bastard Cao Kun must have given you many benefits, right? What, you want me to wait two days so you can go give them a heads-up?"

The old butler clearly hadn't expected Li Chuyuan to strike him. He lay on the ground, groaning. Li Chuyuan's kick was powerful; it almost broke his bones.

However, Li Chuyuan had guessed correctly this time. He had indeed often exchanged information about Li Chuyuan's whereabouts for silver, and he understood that someone was monitoring Li Chuyuan.

Seeing the terrified expression on the old butler's face, Li Chuyuan grew even more enraged. He continued to punch and kick the old butler.

After venting his anger, the old butler was on the verge of death. At this point, Li Chuyuan left the residence without looking back. He secretly vowed in his heart to make the Cao family suffer humiliation.

...

Lin'an, Cao Kun sneezed. Rubbing his nose, he turned his head to look north.

Beside Cao Kun were the French instructor Basile and the missionary Richard. They were now very friendly.

Behind him followed his eldest son, Cao Zhengtong.

Today, they were to officially announce the establishment of the merchants' council. From then on, they would insert a foot into the game of power.

"Chairman Cao, what your council needs now is an army. Without an army, your merchants' council is merely a puppet. In my opinion, it's time to establish a new army for the council," Richard's eyes flickered with a complex expression.

Cao Kun felt a surge of excitement upon hearing this. Richard's words hit him right in the heart. A merchants' council without command over an army was nothing but an empty shell.

“Mr. Richard, what is your brilliant idea?” Cao Kun asked.

Richard hesitated. For the past two years, Cao Kun had shown them around the mountains and rivers of the south, and at the same time, made them very wealthy.

Precisely because of this, their relationship with Cao Kun grew better and better. Now, they often offered advice to Cao Kun.

Having experienced the French Revolution, they inherently liked the council system Cao Kun was promoting, because it would mean they would be more difficult to deal with than an autocracy.

“It’s actually very simple. Soldiers fight and kill, partly for the country, partly for money. The Prince of Chu’s army, though numerous, lacks elite soldiers and capable generals. Now, as long as you are willing to spend silver, we can train excellent private armies for you. After all, here, your families are still qualified to recruit private armies. These private armies will be your strength.”

Chapter 836

The water of the Qiantang River appeared as a white line across the horizon, rushing towards the shore. Soon, huge waves surged, creating a spectacle of crashing waves and splashing water.

Cao Kun gazed at the Qiantang River tide, which appeared annually, and then looked with interest at the tide-riders appearing and disappearing in the river. A faint smile gradually formed on his lips.

“Only brave people can become the eye-catching tide-riders in the river. To gain wealth and power, taking risks is also necessary. For the Great Yu Empire to truly develop, it must allow merchants to rule this country. Only then will this country become rich and strong.”

"I must say, there are few people as open-minded as you in the Great Yu Empire. We French will stand with you." A strange glint flashed in Richard's eyes.

Currently, what France needed was a divided Great Yu Empire. He and Basile had witnessed during their time in the Great Yu Empire how the northern Emperor conquered the peoples on this land.

At the same time, they also learned what kind of weapons this Emperor's army used. If this Emperor were allowed to gain control of the wealthy south, then the army from the north would continue southward and clash with them in Indochina.

And this was something their country could not tolerate.

Of course, they were also making two-pronged preparations. While secretly supporting the State of Chu, they were also ready to negotiate with this Emperor at any time.

If this Emperor could avoid interfering with their colonies in Indochina, they might establish relations with him.

Conversely, they would firmly fight this Emperor to the end, even if they could only fight across the distant seas.

"With your words, I am at ease," Cao Kun laughed heartily. He did not take Richard's words seriously.

He understood these Western countries. He believed their promises were less trustworthy than a sow climbing a tree. Relying on others was worse than relying on oneself. Now, the French had exported many valuable technologies to the State of Chu, and this was what he needed.

Richard also laughed along, like a golden-furred fox.

...

Qingzhou Province.

As news about the currency spread in the newspapers two days prior, many common people and merchants flocked to the area.

These merchants and common people were all people who had previously deposited their silver in Cao Family Banks. Ever since the Cao Family Banks were sealed, they lived in constant fear, almost daily going to the provincial office to inquire about their silver.

Due to the impact of this incident, even the Qingzhou Bank experienced a run, with common people taking their banknotes and deposit slips to the Qingzhou Bank, demanding to exchange them for silver and gold. For a time, the entire Qingzhou Province was filled with alarm.

However, the impact of this incident was eventually brought to an end. The imperial court officially promised to fully assume the debts of the Cao Family Banks, and at the same time, all Cao Family Banks were renamed Qingzhou Bank.

Moreover, to prevent private banks from causing further damage to the Great Yu Empire's industry and commerce, from now on, private individuals were prohibited from opening banks. Only the imperial court could establish banks.

This news disheartened some merchants who had intended to open banks, but it received the approval of most merchants and common people.

Because of the Cao family incident, they now only trusted the imperial court. Because in the past few days, everyone who went to the Qingzhou Bank to exchange money received their silver, without a single copper coin missing.

"What is this? Didn't they say they would return our silver?"

Inside the branch of Qingzhou Bank, which had been converted from a Cao Family Bank, emotions ran high. Upon arriving at the Qingzhou Bank, they discovered that the imperial court was giving them a completely unfamiliar currency.

Although they had learned about this in advance from the newspaper, it was still difficult for them to accept when they actually received these currencies.

The bank staff behind the glass counter maintained a smile. They had all undergone strict training before entering the bank.

He said neither humbly nor arrogantly, "These are currencies issued by Qingzhou Bank, personally approved by His Majesty and the Grand Secretariat. From now on, all trade in the Great Yu Empire must use the new currency. The silver you deposited in the previous bank is equivalent to three thousand Golden Dragons. This is three thousand Golden Dragon coins. There is no mistake. And the gold content of the Golden Dragon is ninety percent, with only ten percent other metals to increase hardness."

The merchant grabbed a handful of Golden Dragon coins from the bag. These Golden Dragon coins were each the size of a thumb-cap. It had to be said that their design was exquisite.

"Gold coins!" The merchants gradually calmed down when they learned that these Golden Dragon coins were gold. It was just that the size of the Golden Dragon coins made them somewhat dissatisfied.

The bank employee smiled and nodded.

At this, the boisterous merchants and common people settled down. One by one, they craned their necks to look at the currency on the counter. Besides gold coins, the bank employee then introduced silver coins and copper coins.

Finally, the bank employee took out a piece of paper money and said, "This is paper money worth one hundred Golden Dragons. Those who need to exchange for large trades can do so. It is much more beautiful than a banknote, and also more practical than a bank."

"Made of paper? Only a fool would exchange for that," someone in the crowd shouted.

As his words fell, a dissenting voice rose, "I am willing to exchange! Cao Zhengyang fled with the silver, and it was the imperial court who recovered it for us. To be honest, would the imperial court of old have

returned this silver to you? You deserve it for depositing your silver in the wrong place and can only accept your bad luck. Now that your silver is recovered, some people are being picky. If that's the case, don't come to Qingzhou Bank. Go south and find your Cao Family Bank."

The people in the bank fell silent. They looked at each other, and many faces showed expressions of shame.

At this point, the voice spoke again, "You covet the benefits that the Great Yu Empire's strength brings you, yet now you are unwilling to lose a little personal gain or bear a little risk for the imperial court. While the decline of the Great Yu Empire is certainly the responsibility of powerful families and the imperial family, are you yourselves without responsibility?"

The voice drew closer and closer to the counter. A young scholar walked towards the center of the crowd, and those around him automatically made way.

The merchant who had just spoken looked somewhat mortified. "Every man for himself! It's only been a few years since His Majesty ascended the throne, and now many officials are already extorting us merchants! Such a court will surely fall sooner or later. It's better to think more about ourselves!"

The young scholar, instead of getting angry, chuckled. "Official corruption is a fault of the imperial court, but if it weren't for you people frequently offering gifts for convenience, how would officials who don't do business without gifts have developed?"

"Hehe, you're quite good at making excuses for the imperial court. In the end, everything is the common people's fault, isn't it?" the merchant sneered.

The young man lightly fanned himself with a paper fan and said calmly, "No, no. What I mean is that only when the imperial court and the common people are united, with one heart and mind, can the Great Yu Empire eradicate the ills of a thousand years. The imperial court must punish corrupt officials, but we also cannot engage in bribery for convenience."

The merchant frowned. "Hmph, you speak with great arrogance. Who do you think you are?"

The young man gently fanned himself with a paper fan and said calmly, "I am not talented, but I am from the Qufu Kong family."

As his words fell, the entire hall was stunned.

The young man looked triumphant. This matter at the bank today was the best gift he could give the Emperor.

Chapter 837

"Hahaha..."

A burst of laughter suddenly filled the imperial study. Xiao Ming had just learned about what happened at the Qingzhou Bank, and for him, it was indeed interesting.

"As Your Majesty said, the Qufu Kong family is very sensible. Today's currency issuance was unexpectedly smooth," Pang Yukun said, gently stroking his beard, a smile on his face.

Promoting the new currency was his greatest worry, because money involved the common people's most fundamental interests. Improper handling could lead to public dissatisfaction, creating friction between the imperial court and the common people.

But Confucianism suddenly intervened, and by presenting profound arguments one after another, resolved this issue in a very short time, greatly relieving him.

"Qingzhou Province was once the land of Qi and Lu. The common people here respect Confucianism more than in other places, so this is not surprising. However, Confucianism has given me such a great gift; I'm afraid their demands are not small either," Xiao Ming said thoughtfully.

Pang Yukun, a cunning and experienced strategist, had long seen through this matter. He said, "The current head of the Confucian family, Kong Huai-ren, has only one son, named Kong Sheng-ze. The Confucian scholar in Qingzhou Bank this time was him. Today, Kong Huai-ren had his son personally step forward, probably to ensure he has a good future."

Xiao Ming nodded. Ever since he became Emperor, he had seen through many things. Sometimes, using people he disliked was necessary for national interests, because these people could bring about change for the nation, such as those like Kong Huai-ren.

Technologically, he had the technology crystal. No one could hinder him in this aspect. However, in terms of the spiritual governance of the nation, he needed Confucianism to assist. After all, compared to technology, a nation's spiritual outlook was equally important.

Coming from later generations, he deeply understood that a nation rises from savagery and is destroyed by bleeding-heart policies. From ancient times until now, both humans and nations have always adhered to the law of the jungle. This has never changed.

“If that’s the case, it seems I need to meet them. It’s also time for New Confucianism to be promoted throughout the Great Yu Empire, otherwise, ignorance will always drag down the nation’s development.”

“Then I will return and inform the two to seek an audience,” Pang Yukun bowed, bade farewell, and left.

Watching Pang Yukun’s departing figure, Xiao Ming looked thoughtful. Technology and ideology were the two cornerstones of building a nation. For him, technology merely enriched the nation’s material wealth and armed its army, but ideology was the fundamental guarantee of a nation’s stability. Otherwise, even more weapons would only be used by others.

Now, there was no problem with technology, but ideological construction was still very backward. This was the fundamental reason why he placed such great importance on cooperating with Confucianism, because thousands of years of inheritance had deeply rooted Confucianism in the hearts of every person in the Great Yu Empire. To put it more vividly, Confucianism in the Great Yu Empire was equivalent to another crystal, but this crystal did not transmit technology but rather different ideologies.

Now that the barbarians had been driven to the grasslands, the north of the Great Yu Empire gradually stabilized. The next step was to unify the entire country and enter the colonial era.

He did not want the literati of this country to suffer from bleeding-heart syndrome at this time, and then disgust him with talk of how foreign conquests were immoral and that foreign tribes should be civilized with benevolence.

Nor did he want to see incidents like earthquakes and floods being attributed to his loss of heavenly virtue as Emperor.

Thinking thus, Pang Yukun soon returned, and two well-dressed individuals followed behind him.

“Qufu Kong Huai-ren and Kong Sheng-ze greet Your Majesty.”

Entering the imperial study, Kong Huai-ren and Kong Sheng-ze simultaneously bowed.

When Xiao Ming appeared outside the imperial study, he had been observing the two. Kong Huai-ren was around forty years old, with a slightly dark complexion, a round and somewhat plump face, and a pair of slender eyes. Kong Sheng-ze, meanwhile, was around twenty, with a handsome appearance, much more attractive than his father.

At first glance, he even suspected that this Kong Sheng-ze was the neighbor’s child.

“You two Confucian scholars, rise,” Xiao Ming said with a gentle smile, appearing harmless. He needed to test them out; now was not the time to intimidate them.

“Thank you, Your Majesty.” Kong Huai-ren and his son then dared to look at Xiao Ming.

After the victory of the Northern Expedition, they had been on edge until Ge Yiren appeared. The entire Kong family then settled down, and they immediately went to Qingzhou Province to avoid offending the Emperor.

Moreover, now that the victor was decided, he determined that Xiao Ming was firmly seated on the throne. As for the Prince of Chu, he held no hope for him, because in the eyes of the Kong family, the barbarians were much more dangerous than the Prince of Chu.

The Kong family had been passed down for a thousand years and possessed the ability to discern worldly trends.

After exchanging glances for a moment, after a brief silence, Kong Huai-ren was the first to speak, "Long live His Majesty! I, your humble servant Kong, am late in presenting myself before Your Majesty. I hope Your Majesty will forgive my transgression."

"Duke Yansheng worries unnecessarily. The Qufu Kong family is a millennium-old clan of the Great Yu Empire. How dare I blame you? Rather, it is I who was disrespectful for not visiting the Kong family after ascending the throne," Xiao Ming said blandly. Every generation's great Confucian master was called Duke Yansheng. This generation's Duke Yansheng was Kong Huai-ren.

Kong Huai-ren, hearing this, suddenly felt a cold sweat break out on his back. Ge Yiren had told him about this Emperor when he went to the Kong family.

Unlike previous emperors, this Emperor had unique and unpredictable ideas and should not be treated as an ordinary person.

And during his time at the Kong family, Ge Yiren had also conveyed this Emperor's ideas, as well as the matter of New Confucianism.

He was initially very angry about this, because for thousands of years, Confucian thought had been a self-contained system, not controlled by monarchs. It only needed to uphold the imperial family of each dynasty. But this Emperor was changing Confucianism too drastically.

However, his anger vanished due to Ge Yiren's advice, because Ge Yiren had stated with certainty that if the Kong family did not cooperate, this Emperor was fully capable of performing the "burning of books and burying of scholars" and completely eradicating Confucianism.

"Your Majesty's words humble me, Kong. This matter is due to the Kong family's negligence towards Your Majesty, not Your Majesty's negligence towards the Kong family. It is also my own foolishness, committing such a great mistake. Henceforth, I, Kong, shall never dare again. Everything shall be by Your Majesty's command."

Kong Sheng-ze's face also turned pale. The two of them, having been in Qingzhou Province for several days, felt the prosperity and power of Qingzhou Province. If this Emperor wished to do something, there was probably no one who could stop him.

It was the duty of every Duke Yansheng to perpetuate the Kong family. Compared to changing some Confucian ideas, survival was paramount. So, after weighing their options, they finally accepted Ge Yiren's suggestion.

"Your Majesty, the Great Yu Empire is undergoing rapid changes. The Kong family overlooked this and became like frogs in a well. To understand Your Majesty's thoughts, I am willing to go to Bowen Academy and become an ordinary student, to help Your Majesty in the future," Kong Sheng-ze said nervously.

Pang Yukun was overjoyed upon hearing this. He looked at Xiao Ming, his eyes gleaming with excitement. If the future Duke Yansheng could study at Bowen Academy, this would be a landmark event for the secularization of Confucianism.

From then on, Confucian scholars would have no reason to be aloof.

Chapter 838

The sky outside the imperial study was clear and blue like a gemstone.

The gloom in Xiao Ming's heart gradually dissipated. It had to be said that the attitude of the two Kong family members was very much to his liking. However, speaking beautifully was one thing; the most important thing was how they would fulfill their promises.

Rising and walking in front of the two, he said, "Since Ge Yiren invited you, you must know what I want. Just do as I say, and I will keep a close eye on how well it's done."

As he spoke, Xiao Ming looked directly at Kong Huai-ren and his son.

"Yes, Your Majesty. I, Kong, will definitely go back and earnestly comprehend Your Majesty's New Confucianism to share Your Majesty's worries," Kong Huai-ren said, bowing.

Xiao Ming nodded. He looked at Kong Sheng-ze. "I am very pleased that you can go to Bowen Academy. When you return, I will reserve a good position for you. Of course, I will also readmit Confucian scholars, but these Confucian scholars are not those Confucian scholars. You should understand what I mean."

Kong Sheng-ze gently nodded. Undoubtedly, these Confucian scholars had to be New Confucian scholars.

With the animosity resolved, the Kong family father and son were greatly relieved. Kong Huai-ren also grew bolder. He said, "Your Majesty's achievements are unparalleled through the ages. You campaigned north against the barbarians, conquered Goryeo in the east, and pacified internal strife in the Great Yu Empire. These merits are sufficient for a Fengshan Ceremony at Mount Tai. I, Kong, believe we should choose an auspicious day for Your Majesty to hold the Fengshan Ceremony."

Xiao Ming chuckled. He said, "The Fengshan Ceremony is still too early. It will not be too late after I have pacified the entire realm. Moreover, New Confucianism has not yet been widely promoted. If I were to ascend Mount Tai at this time, it would surely invite ridicule."

Kong Huai-ren felt a renewed pressure in his heart. Having accepted this matter, he had to act quickly. After some thought, he said, "Your Majesty, I, Kong, have always been very interested in this newspaper. I hope Your Majesty will allow me to propagate the ideas of New Confucianism through the newspaper. This will surely achieve twice the result with half the effort."

Xiao Ming was naturally pleased. "That's certainly no problem. I was even thinking of publishing the matter of my meeting with Duke Yansheng today in the newspaper to show that there is no ill will between me and the Kong family."

Kong Huai-ren's dark face broke into a smile. Now, he was completely at ease. In his opinion, as long as they followed the Emperor's will, the Kong family would continue to hold a high status in the future.

"This is excellent," Kong Huai-ren said with joy.

After an open and frank discussion about New Confucianism, Xiao Ming talked about some more details with the two before dismissing them.

“Congratulations, Your Majesty! You have gained another assistant,” Pang Yukun said with emotion.

Xiao Ming smiled, “Don’t you blame me for being somewhat biased towards Legalism?”

Pang Yukun had always been known for his adherence to law. He said, “Whether it is Confucianism or Legalism, both have the duty to uphold the imperial family. Previously, I worried that Your Majesty was powerless to cope, but now it seems I worried too much, so I have no feelings of grievance.”

“Then I am at ease. From now on, you are to prepare for the conquest of the State of Chu. The Great Yu Empire has been divided for too long; it is time for it to be reunited.”

The Grand Secretaries all understood Xiao Ming’s upcoming plan, and the victory of the Northern Expedition had also fueled the imperial court’s martial spirit. Therefore, they always maintained a positive attitude towards war.

Responding with a “Yes,” Pang Yukun bowed and departed.

The imperial study quieted down. Xiao Ming turned and looked at the map hanging on the wall. Now, a large part of the Great Yu Empire’s northern territory belonged to him, but his rule south of the Yangtze River was still very weak, and this was something he could not tolerate.

However, before instigating war, he needed to continue strengthening the Great Yu Empire’s industrial level and produce a wider variety of industrial products, some of which were crucial for war: military food.

In this Northern Expedition, the biggest consumption was still logistical supplies. Some food even rotted before reaching the battlefield, causing enormous waste. In his opinion, the outdated grain and fodder transportation of feudal armies severely hampered the progress of war.

Therefore, he had long conceived the idea of producing military food, such as military canned food, because currently, only this type of canned food was relatively easy to implement.

In contemporary Europe, the invention of canning was in 1804. At that time, a Frenchman who ran a candied fruit business discovered that if food sealed in glass containers was properly heated, it would not spoil easily. He was greatly inspired by this.

This method allowed food to be preserved for a longer period without rotting or spoiling.

It was with canned food that the long-distance, long-term operations of European armies became a reality. It could be said that the ability to mass-produce and popularize canned food was an important indicator of whether a country's military power had entered modernization.

Now, Xiao Ming's army was transforming into a modern army in all aspects, and food naturally also needed to transform.

Thinking of this, he sat down and drafted an imperial edict, ordering the Imperial Household Department to establish a Great Yu Empire canned food production workshop, and he also made strict requirements on the types of canned goods.

Given the current situation of the Great Yu Empire, producing canned beef was naturally impossible; it would be too wasteful. However, relying on Dengzhou's fisheries to produce canned trout, and relying on Qingzhou Province's agriculture to produce canned potatoes, canned dried rice, canned dried vegetables, and so on, was feasible.

In addition to canned goods, he also ordered the Imperial Household Department to produce biscuits and bread for use as military rations. After all, both items could be stored for a year or even longer.

Besides canned goods, he also ordered the Imperial Household Department to produce individual backpacks, so that soldiers could carry more food, greatly reducing the pressure on logistics and making the army more suitable for long expeditions.

The imperial edict arrived at the Imperial Household Department. Qin Rui, as the chief official of the Imperial Household Department, immediately ordered the organization of artisans to establish a canned food workshop.

After three years of advanced study at Bowen Academy, he successfully took over his father Qin Chengming's position, becoming the official in charge of industry in the Great Yu Empire.

"You are to immediately go to the glass workshop and instruct them to build a branch factory in Dengzhou to produce glass bottles. You are responsible for organizing the production of backpacks. And you, go to the Agricultural Department and have them cooperate in providing ingredients. Three months from now, His Majesty wants to see the first batch of canned food. Hurry, hurry!" Qin Rui said, looking anxious.

The officials of the Imperial Household Department had long been accustomed to Qin Rui's style, but there was nothing they could do about it. Currently, the Imperial Household Department was under the

greatest pressure in the Great Yu Empire. Every now and then, an imperial edict would arrive, demanding that they mobilize resources to establish workshops.

If there was any delay, Qin Rui would be summoned to the palace for a reprimand, resulting in a severe scolding from Xiao Ming.

Having arranged everything, Qin Rui sighed. He was both pained and happy. Although he was a bit busy, the Imperial Household Department had transformed from an idle and overlooked department into a highly sought-after government office. After all, to accelerate industrial construction, the Imperial Household Department had been granted many special powers.

This power allowed him to mobilize all resources to build missing industries.

According to his statistics, the Great Yu Empire's industrial system now included over fifty types of industrial products, and this number was continuously increasing. However, this was still not enough, because the complete list of industrial systems the Emperor had given him was very complex.

Chapter 839

Li Chuyuan stood before the familiar Prince of Chu's residence, almost shedding tears.

More than two years had passed, and he had finally returned to the home he longed for day and night. However, the moment he saw Cao Zhengtong emerge from the Prince of Chu's residence, his joy of returning home turned into resentment.

Emerging with Cao Zhengtong was the Prince of Chu, who now looked at Li Chuyuan with considerable disbelief.

“How dare you escape from Qingzhou Province and return to Lin’an? Do you not know the consequences of doing so?”

Seeing Li Chuyuan, the Prince of Chu, instead of offering warm greetings, harshly reprimanded him, which made Li Chuyuan’s face even uglier.

To avoid alerting the Cao family and “beating the grass to startle the snake,” his return to Lin’an this time was extremely secretive. Even the Prince of Chu had not known.

“Father King, this time I, your son, did not return on my own initiative. Rather, His Majesty ordered me to return.” Li Chuyuan’s tone was very indifferent. His father’s attitude just now left him deeply disheartened.

He even suspected that his father’s promises to him back then were nothing but a trick. Anyway, his father had many sons, and if he died in Qingzhou Province, someone else would naturally take over the position of Prince of Chu.

“His Majesty!” The Prince of Chu was somewhat surprised. “Why would he let you return to Lin’an?”

Li Chuyuan’s heart grew colder. Now, his father was acting entirely like he was interrogating a prisoner. He felt none of the warmth of a father-son reunion.

After a moment of contemplation, he said, “I, your son, am not very clear. That day, His Majesty summoned me for an audience and merely said that I did not need to remain in Qingzhou Province, because he greatly trusted my imperial father.”

“Nonsense! This Xiao Ming must have malicious intentions.” The Prince of Chu paced back and forth restlessly. After the Northern Expedition ended, his mood became unstable.

Because Xiao Ming in the north was like a murderous sharp sword hanging over his head, ready to strike at any moment.

“Your Highness need not worry. I, your humble servant, believe that Xiao Ming letting the Prince back carries ill intent, to lure Your Highness into raising an army.” Cao Zhengtong’s expression was strange, but he only spoke half of his thoughts. The other half was not suitable to say now, which was that it was also to deal with their Cao family.

It could be said that this was Xiao Ming’s open scheme.

The Prince of Chu’s emotions gradually calmed down. He nodded slightly. “You are right. If it were before, I might have fallen for his trick. But now, the State of Chu needs time. However, since Xiao Ming let Chuyuan return, he must already be wary of the State of Chu.”

“The Cao Family Banks in Qingzhou Province were almost entirely eradicated overnight. This shows that Xiao Ming is already targeting the Cao family and the State of Chu. Your Highness, our time is running out,” Cao Zhengtong said seriously.

The Prince of Chu was somewhat worried. “If war breaks out between north and south now, I estimate the State of Chu has no chance of winning. What should we do?”

A strange glint flashed in Cao Zhengtong's eyes. He instigated, "Your Highness, the only solution now is to open up private militias and allow merchants to train troops. This way, with the power of the merchants' council, we can jointly resist the northern invasion."

In an instant, Li Chuyuan's face turned ashen. He angrily said, "Father King, you absolutely cannot allow the merchants' council to possess military power! Otherwise, the State of Chu will no longer be the State of Chu, and then Xiao Ming will not spare the State of Chu even more!"

"Prince, why do you say that? Now the merchants' council and His Highness the Prince of Chu are one entity. Our common enemy is Xiao Ming. How could the merchants' council be detrimental to Your Highness?" Cao Zhengtong appeared harmless.

The Prince of Chu frowned. He also had some doubts. However, just as Cao Zhengtong said, Xiao Ming's army was about to march south, and he now seemed to have no choice.

Because cooperating with the merchants' council offered a glimmer of hope, while facing it alone meant certain defeat.

Sighing deeply, he said to Cao Zhengtong, "As long as the State of Chu can be preserved, I will agree to your terms."

Cao Zhengtong was overjoyed upon hearing this. He was now truly grateful to Xiao Ming, because it was Xiao Ming's threat that allowed them to obtain what they had long yearned for.

Li Chuyuan opened his mouth, then said anxiously, "Father King must be mad! The Cao family will destroy our Li family's foundation!"

“Shut up! You have no say here! I know what you’re thinking! Did Xiao Ming confuse you with a few words? Wasn’t Prince Wei his own uncle? What was his fate? Do you think he will spare us?” The Prince of Chu suddenly flew into a rage, loudly rebuking Li Chuyuan.

Cao Zhengtong could see through it. How could he not see through Xiao Ming’s intentions?

After a pause, he said, “Since you’re back, be a good Prince. If you dare to disrupt the State of Chu, I will absolutely not spare you.”

Li Chuyuan’s face was pale. At this moment, he finally despaired of his father.

The Prince of Chu paid no attention to Li Chuyuan’s expression. He said to the guards behind him, “You are responsible for protecting His Highness the Prince. You must not let anything happen to him.”

The guards, hearing this, immediately walked behind Li Chuyuan.

Cao Zhengtong revealed a victorious smile. The Prince of Chu had indirectly placed Li Chuyuan under house arrest. Now, his fear of Xiao Ming had blinded him, and this was precisely the opportunity for their merchants’ council.

They had received news that Xiao Ming would not immediately attack the State of Chu, because attacking the south was no simpler than campaigning against the barbarians in the north. He would need some time to prepare for a southern expedition.

After all, the war with the barbarians had consumed a lot of resources in the north.

Thinking of this, Cao Zhengtong continued to say to the Prince of Chu, “Your Highness, our envoys sent to the grasslands and Japan have all brought good news. Lord Yamada of Japan has agreed to jointly deal with Xiao Ming, and the Golden Tent Khanate is even more so. Once Xiao Ming dares to march south, it will be a chain reaction.”

The Prince of Chu nodded in satisfaction. This was why he trusted the Cao family. Now, the situation in the State of Chu was developing in a more favorable direction.

As the group was speaking, a carriage passed by on the street outside the residence. Through the gaps in the carriage curtains, a pair of eyes observed the Prince of Chu and the others.

This person was none other than Li San.

To ensure the assassination of the Prince of Chu would succeed in one fell swoop, he personally came to Lin'an to plan. Now, he had thoroughly understood the environment around the Prince of Chu's residence and had also formulated different plans.

For him, the best opportunity would be when the Prince of Chu went hunting. At this time, he could not only kill the Prince of Chu but also make a perfect escape.

However, if the Prince of Chu canceled the hunt, then they would have to act in Lin'an City, but escaping completely would be very difficult.

Glancing at Li Chuyuan, Li San lowered the curtain. He pondered in his mind when to act.

From the situation just now, the conflict between the Prince of Chu and Li Chuyuan had already become public. And according to the intelligence he had received, many powerful families in the State of Chu were also very much against the Prince of Chu relying on the Cao family.

It could be said that the undercurrents of conflict were already surging in the State of Chu. If the Prince of Chu were killed now, the dissatisfied conservative forces would surely side with Li Chuyuan.

By then, the internal contradictions of the State of Chu would surely intensify, and this was precisely what they needed.

Chapter 840

"Your Majesty, I must say that this military canned food is a great invention for the army. It will greatly reduce logistical pressure and enable soldiers to fight in distant places. The only drawback is that glass bottles are very inconvenient to transport and are easily broken."

In the General Staff Department, Luo Quan raised his concern.

Xiao Ming was looking at the Great Yu Empire's sand table terrain. Hearing this, he felt quite helpless. In truth, he was aware of the drawbacks of glass canned goods, but for now, the fastest way to obtain canned food was to produce glass canned goods. Because attacking the State of Chu was imminent, having something was better than nothing.

And while producing glass canned goods, he had not given up the idea of manufacturing metal canned goods. However, establishing a metal canning production line was much more complex than a glass canning production line.

That was why he chose to first establish a glass canning workshop. Even if the army no longer purchased glass canned goods later, this workshop could still produce canned fruits to sell to the common people as commodities.

As for the metal canning process, it involved the manufacturing of tin-plated sheet metal cans, which included two processes: tin plating and metal canning.

To achieve this combination of processes, a combination of chemistry and machinery was required. Precisely because of this, the production of metal cans would probably lag behind glass cans by more than half a year, and he could not wait that long.

Fortunately, this process was not too complex. There were many methods for tin plating, the simplest of which was immersion tin plating.

This method involved immersing iron sheets into a solution containing tin salts, causing tin plating to deposit on the iron surface according to the principle of chemical displacement. Tin was non-toxic, so it could safely store food. After all, direct contact between food and iron would cause rust. This tin plating process was invented in the early 19th century in contemporary times.

Besides the tin plating process, there was the canning process, which was much more complex than tin plating. The reason he entrusted it to Lin Wentao was for him to produce a machine called a seaming machine.

When producing canned goods, iron sheets would be cut according to the size of the can. The body of the can would be rolled in the seaming machine, emerging curled into a can. Then, by crimping, the bottom and lid of the can would be assembled and sealed.

"I understand what you mean. However, this is currently the fastest method. You two should try using it for now. Once metal canned goods appear, you will be comfortable," Xiao Ming said.

His purpose in coming to the General Staff Department this time was not specifically for canned goods, but to formulate a military plan against the State of Chu.

Luo Quan's eyes were filled with anticipation. He greatly valued this easily portable canned food. Having campaigned for so many years, he deeply understood what this canned food would bring to the army.

"Since that is the case, I am relieved," Luo Quan said, stroking his beard and laughing heartily.

Then he walked over to Xiao Ming and said, "Your Majesty, I believe one thing needs to be done before attacking the State of Chu."

"What is it?"

Luo Quan walked towards the map in the General Staff Department. He pointed at the barbarians in the north and Japan on the Korean Peninsula. He said, "As far as I know, the Prince of Chu has always had secret dealings with the barbarians, and the Cao family also has business dealings with Japan. If the main army marches south, the barbarians and Japan might seize the opportunity to cause trouble. Therefore, I believe we must stabilize the border threats before attacking the State of Chu. Qi Guangyi is watching the barbarians, so they won't cause much trouble, but what if Japan takes the opportunity to attack?"

Xiao Ming nodded, "If I attack the Prince of Chu, these two hungry wolves might come up and take a bite. However, if I deal with the wolves first, the State of Chu will surely not dare to send troops, because that would make them rebels."

"Precisely. That is what I was thinking," Luo Quan said.

In fact, Xiao Ming had long intended to deal with Japan. However, wars had to be fought one by one. Now that the barbarians had fallen, Japan became the northern concern.

After a moment of contemplation, he said, "I will issue an order to Yue Yun, instructing him to blockade the waters between Japan and Goryeo, cutting off communication between the Japanese pirate army in Goryeo and their homeland. Then, I will have Ye Qingyun annihilate them in one fell swoop. After all, without grain and fodder supplies, their morale will surely dissipate."

"Using the navy at this time would be most appropriate." Luo Quan felt at ease.

Xiao Ming looked at the southern part of Goryeo. He would no longer give Japan an opportunity to provoke war. In his era, the initiative in war was held firmly in his hands.

Having settled this matter, Xiao Ming, Luo Quan, and the staff discussed the specific operational plan. Then, this plan was issued from the General Staff Department in Xiao Ming's name, heading respectively to Dengzhou and Haigucheng. After the northern war ended, they each returned to their own garrisons.

Three days later, the news arrived at the Dengzhou naval base. Upon receiving Xiao Ming's order, Yue Yun immediately assembled his fleet, preparing to head to Japanese waters.

"Excellent! Now we can finally let the Japanese navy taste the power of our new shells!" Yue Yun was full of vigor.

Ever since the naval fleet was fully re-equipped with the new shells, he had been eager for battle, ready to fight at any moment. The power of the shells made him very confident, as they had used them during the pursuit of pirates.

Just a few shots were enough to sink a pirate warship, proving their formidable power.

In his opinion, the Japanese navy was no different from pirates. They were no longer afraid of pirates' wolf pack tactics, so they were not afraid of Japan's wolf pack tactics either.

At the same time, Xiao Ming's order also reached the Haigucheng Grand Camp.

After reading the order, Ye Qingyun stretched. He said, "Assemble eight thousand men. We have work to do."

"Work?" The division commanders looked at each other.

Ye Qingyun said, "His Majesty wants us to proactively provoke war with Japan, drive the Japanese pirates on Goryeo territory back to their homeland, and completely control Goryeo."

Everyone immediately cheered. A division commander said, "Army Commander, are eight thousand men enough?"

"With the shoddy firearms Japan uses, if eight thousand men can't even cause trouble, then you and I might as well go home and plant sweet potatoes," Ye Qingyun cursed.

Another person asked, "Then how should we provoke them?"

"What reason do we need for provocation? Just hit the Japanese pirates hard and then occupy Kuomubridge. This is the only passage from here to southern Goryeo."

Everyone nodded. Currently, this stone bridge spanning the river was occupied by Japanese pirates, who often used it to invade Goryeo territory.

In Haigucheng, they often heard about Japanese pirates secretly crossing the river to plunder.

So, Ye Qingyun had long harbored suppressed anger. Now, this imperial edict finally gave him an outlet.

Thinking of this, he roared, “What are you still standing there for? Immediately bring your best soldiers and best weapons! This time, we will make the Japanese pirates understand what kind of powerful nation they have provoked!”

The group of warmongers immediately burst into laughter. They quickly drew out the elite from the army, preparing to capture the bridge.