

Rise 183

Chapter 183: Strategy for Defeating the Japanese Pirates

On the way, the weather was gloomy, and the convoy arrived in Anqing in the evening. Although the weather had been hot and stuffy, fortunately, there was no rain, allowing the family to gain more time for the autumn harvest.

Since it was already evening when he arrived in Anqing, Zhu Ping'an decided to stay overnight and planned to go to the riverside the next morning to look for a passenger boat to Yingtian.

The next morning, Zhu Ping'an checked out of his room, shouldered his luggage, and left the inn. By then, a light rain had begun to fall outside. He covered his luggage with an oilcloth, held a bamboo umbrella, and walked toward the river.

At the riverside, he found a small shop and had a bowl of old duck soup while eating the oil cakes made by his mother, Chen. People living by the Yangtze River love to eat duck. According to the locals, duck is mildly cool in nature, making it best for cooking. After finishing breakfast, Zhu Ping'an headed straight for the Yangtze River, where the docks were bustling with people, and masts stood like a forest.

The shipbuilding technology of the Ming Dynasty was at its peak during the feudal period. Even though Admiral Zheng He's voyages to the Western Ocean were now history, the ships anchored along the Yangtze River were still awe-inspiring. It was hard to believe that such large vessels were products of the Ming Dynasty.

Zhu Ping'an inquired about prices from three different boatmen before settling on a passenger ship. He paid over three hundred wen for the fare and boarded the vessel. It was a streamlined large ship with a long hull, a spacious and orderly superstructure, swift speed, and comfortable accommodations.

The fare he paid was for a third-class cabin, which had four beds. However, the cabin was clean and tidy, well-ventilated, and furnished with neatly arranged tables, chairs, and beds. Meals were also available, though they required an additional cost. This was Zhu Ping'an's first time traveling a long distance by ship, and he found it quite novel. After boarding, he placed his luggage on the berth, opened the window, and either sat or lay down while leaning against the window frame. The river breeze was refreshing, making the experience quite enjoyable.

When the ship set sail, his cabin remained unoccupied, allowing him to enjoy first-class comfort for the price of a third-class ticket. Not bad. In the Ming Dynasty, the Yangtze River was home to many white dolphins. From time to time, they would leap alongside the ship, resembling a dolphin show in an aquarium—quite a spectacular sight.

"At dawn, I bid farewell to Baidi in a sea of clouds,

A thousand miles to Jiangling, returning in a single day."

With favorable winds and currents, the ship traveled quickly. Departing in the morning, by noon the following day, it had already arrived at the dock outside Yingtian City. Upon arrival, due to high water levels, the original dock was submerged, and a temporary dock had been constructed using bamboo rafts and floating barrels. The boatmen constantly shouted reminders, urging passengers to step on the same plank with both feet and to watch their footing for safety.

Carrying his luggage on his back, Zhu Ping'an stood outside Yingtian City and suddenly had a feeling of "Hu Hansan is back again!"

"Hey, hey, hey! You up front—move along if you're going, or step aside if you're not. Don't block the way!"

A rough male voice from behind shattered Zhu Ping'an's moment of excitement.

"Oh, oh! My apologies." Feeling slightly embarrassed, Zhu Ping'an clasped his hands together in a gesture of apology and stepped aside.

"Oh, it's a scholar, sir! My respects!" The man, who seemed experienced and well-traveled, quickly noticed Zhu Ping'an's scholar's robe and immediately changed his tone to one of respect. He stopped in his tracks and gestured for Zhu Ping'an to proceed first.

"Not at all, please go ahead," Zhu Ping'an responded, returning the gesture.

"You first, I'm in no hurry," the man insisted, shaking his head.

Well, fine then. Zhu Ping'an, carrying his luggage and holding his umbrella, took the lead and walked toward Yingtian City.

Once inside the city, he headed straight for the inn he had stayed at last time.

The familiar Qinhuai River, the familiar Jiangnan Examination Hall, the familiar Confucius Temple—all soon came into view as he approached his old lodging. Since the journey had taken less than two days this time, and there were still about seventeen days left until the imperial examination, the inn was not yet crowded.

As soon as Zhu Ping'an stepped inside, the innkeeper immediately recognized him as the top scorer of the academy exam who had previously stayed there. He greeted him enthusiastically, instructing the attendants to bring a dry towel and serve ginger tea, making Zhu Ping'an feel truly welcomed.

"Young Master Zhu, are you here to stay again? We've kept your old room just for you!"

Perhaps because Zhu Ping'an's previous success had brought the inn a lot of business, the innkeeper directly arranged for him to stay in the same upper-class room as before.

When it was time to pay, the innkeeper repeatedly refused to accept the money, but after Zhu Ping'an insisted, he finally accepted it. However, he still charged one hundred wen less than the previous stay in the attic.

Outside, the autumn rain refused to cease, weaving a delicate silver-gray web like damp spider silk, enveloping the entire city of Yingtian.

A single autumn rain truly brings a single bout of cold. It has only been two days, yet while it was still sweltering when I left home, I can now feel the chill in the air.

Zhu Ping'an packed his belongings, took a hot bath, changed into clean clothes, and then sat at his desk, spreading out his brush, ink, paper, and inkstone. He wrote a letter of safety, addressed it properly, and enclosed a small piece of silver, entrusting a shop assistant downstairs to deliver it to the nearby private postal bureau when he had time. Zhu Ping'an only knew that such private postal bureaus existed in this era, but he was unaware of the exact cost. He handed the assistant a small piece of silver, instructing him to return any extra or keep the remainder for his own meal.

The private postal bureau was a professional civilian postal service that emerged during the Yongle period of the Ming Dynasty. Its establishment was a natural result of the increasing development of private trade and communication. Of course, Zhu Ping'an did not concern himself with the reasons behind its existence; he only cared that his letter of safety reached his parents.

By evening, the shop assistant delivered his dinner and handed him a receipt stamped with a private seal. He also informed Zhu Ping'an that the letter had been sent to the private postal bureau, leaving twenty wen in change.

After thanking the assistant, Zhu Ping'an had his meal and then sat by the window, lighting an oil lamp and practicing writing policy essays.

After passing the Tongzi Examination, policy essays played a significant role in the subsequent provincial, metropolitan, and palace examinations. In ancient times, a person's talent was generally evaluated in three areas: poetry, classical argumentation, and policy essays. The weight of policy essays was by no means lesser than that of poetry. Take Su Xun, one of the Eight Masters of the Tang and Song dynasties and father of Su Shi—have you ever heard of any poetry from him? Likely not. Instead, he became famous for his policy essay

"On the Six Kingdoms," which gained widespread recognition in both scholarly circles and the imperial court due to his insightful commentary on the Northern Song military and strategic planning.

Although the eight-legged essay dominated the imperial examinations during the Ming Dynasty, the court had always focused on policy essays when selecting officials, and the Ming was no exception. The eight-legged essay was merely a literary form, and while eloquence was valued, unique insights were even more important. Especially in the palace examination, policy essays were at the core. The emperor would pose questions regarding current affairs, agriculture, and social customs, and examinees were expected to provide their opinions—this was known as countermeasures. For example, if the emperor asked how to handle the coastal pirate crisis, the examinee had to present their own views and solutions.

At this moment, Zhu Ping'an chose coastal piracy as his topic and attempted to draft a countermeasure policy essay.

"The necessities of the pirate barbarians all originate from our vast and prosperous China. For instance, their homes require mats woven in Hangzhou and Chang'an; their women need cosmetics, their lacquerware artisans require gold and silver foil, all of which are produced in Wulin. Furthermore, ceramics from Raozhou, silk from Huzhou, gauze from Zhangzhou, and cotton from Songjiang are especially valued by their country.

The pirates, living in a land where rites and music have collapsed, are embroiled in conflicts among their chieftains and remain unenlightened. Yet, they covet our flourishing China, driven by survival needs. They have raided coastal areas numerous times, attacking Shandong, Zhili, Zhejiang, and Fujian, growing increasingly rampant.

The problem of coastal raiders does not stem from their audacity alone but from internal mismanagement. It is not that the pirates dare to invade China but that China itself has fostered them. The government fails to provide proper governance and relief, leading to desperation among the people, who are then forced into

banditry. Instead of dispersing them, officials inadvertently attract them, nurturing their strength. Consequently, they unite in fleets, build strongholds, capture officials, and burn Chinese ships."

After finishing, Zhu Ping'an read through the essay, then suddenly crumpled it and tossed it into the trash. After some thought, he retrieved it and burned it over the oil lamp.

This was the Jiajing Emperor's era of alchemy, with Yan Song in power. Criticizing government corruption, military unpreparedness, and other major issues... This was an imperial examination granted out of benevolence due to the frequent omens of a prosperous era. To bring up all these problems now would be akin to slapping the emperor in the face and indirectly accusing Yan Song. Given how many henchmen Yan Song had, a single flick of their fingers could land someone like him in the dungeons of the Embroidered Uniform Guard or the Eastern Depot.

Yan Song was a treacherous minister, but now was not the time to confront him directly.

Thus, Zhu Ping'an took out another sheet of xuan paper, adjusted his thinking, and began writing a new version of the essay under the oil lamp.