

Chapter 1190

It's the path we'll continue to walk in the future. (5)

Was it right? Or was it wrong?

Chung Myung didn't have the authority to make that judgment. He was directly involved. No matter how vehemently he opposed Chung Mun, the fact remained that he, as a disciple of Hwasan, hadn't prevented what Hwasan had done. Therefore, he couldn't judge.

He could express his frustration, he could even vent his anger at those who belittled their pride, but he couldn't bring himself to say that the predecessors were right in the face of the suffering brought about by their choices.

But now, those who had inherited their will were affirming that the predecessors hadn't been wrong. Chung Myung had never once forced such an idea.

If his Sahyeongs, including Chung Mun, were watching this scene from the afterlife... Baek Cheon's words would offer more comfort than the status of Hwasan, which was getting higher day by day, or Chung Myung's solitary efforts traversing the Central Plains. They would realize that what they had sought to convey with their sacrifice had finally come to fruition. They would be able to confirm that their deaths had not been in vain.

Baek Cheon smiled softly at Beop Jong.

«And that's why we will continue going our own way, Abbot.»

«...»

«Of course, in your eyes, Abbot, we may seem foolish and naive. But... isn't it necessary to have such fools in the world?»

Having finished speaking, he bowed deeply towards Beop Jong.

«Please understand our inability to accept the Abbot's proposal.»

«...Amitabha.»

Beop Jong closed his eyes and exhaled deeply. After a somewhat lengthy silence, he slowly opened his eyes. He glanced around at the other lords present.

«Do the other leaders of Cheonumaeng share the same sentiment?»

«Yes.»

The first to respond was Tang Gunak. He nodded solemnly and added with a serious expression,

«It may sound presumptuous, but I believe there is no error in Acting Leader's words.»

«...»

«And perhaps it's decisions like these that change the world, not the cautious ones. To those who adapted to society, such decisions may seem foolish and hasty.»

A gentle smile graced the corners of Tang Gunak's lips.

«I may not be wise enough to judge right from wrong immediately, but at least I won't regret following such a decision. Regardless of the outcome.»

Namgung Dowi also nodded in agreement and spoke up.

«Abbot.»

«...Speak, Young Lord.»

«I'm not here to claim that my father's decisions were always right. His decisions were undoubtedly hasty.»

Beop Jong's expression turned serious, while Namgung Dowi remained composed.

«But even so, I don't want to deny the determination that my father held in his heart. Losing that determination would mean losing everything for Namgung clan, wouldn't it?»

«...»

«That's why Namgung clan also stands with Hwasan and its will. Because for Namgung, the most invaluable thing to regain is our determination to be the best clan under the heavens.»

A faint smile graced Beop Jong's lips.

He wasn't acknowledging those words. It was simply because he was reminded, once again, of his own age.

It's still hard to empathize. It just seems impulsive. Isn't the world a place where sheer enthusiasm alone won't suffice? But...

'I must have been the same.'

Past Beop Jong probably wasn't much different from them now. Eventually, he accepted the world and compromised with himself. But these people are declaring that they will walk a different path.

Should I say they're wrong? Or...

«I don't think we need to listen to what others have to say.»

Their expressions already revealed their decision.

«I...»

Beop Jong paused for a moment and looked at Hye Yeon. The corners of Beop Jong's mouth curled up a little more as Hye Yeon met his eyes directly instead of looking away.

«As an individual and as a Buddhist monk, I respect your choice. How can I criticize such noble determination?»

Hye Yeon's eyes widened slightly. But Beop Jong soon shook his head.

«But as the Abbot of Shaolin, it's difficult for me to respect your choice. If your determination leads to unfavorable outcomes, your deaths alone won't suffice to bear the consequences.»

«Abbot...»

Beop Jong's expression turned slightly melancholic, without giving an answer.

“Therefore... Shaolin, along with Gupailbang and Five Great Families, will not provide any support to Cheonumaeng in the future, and will clearly oppose any independent actions taken by Cheonumaeng.»

Baek Cheon's face stiffened slightly.

This statement is tantamount to officially declaring that Gupailbang acknowledges the fact that Cheonumaeng and Gupailbang are separate entities.

Despite being prepared for it, hearing these words from Beop Jong sent a chill down their spines. They knew better than anyone the deep history and legitimacy behind the word Gupailbang.

«Furthermore, Gupailbang will not intervene in conflicts arising between Cheonumaeng and other sects.»

«Abbot!»

The one who reacted to this statement was Tang Gunak. While others might simply overlook it, Tang Gunak understood clearly what this meant. Even if the situation escalated to the point where Sapaeryeon attacked Cheonumaeng, Gupailbang's declaration meant they wouldn't aid them.

This declaration meant one thing: complete division.

Until now, Shaolin had recognized Cheonumaeng as an orthodox alliance and had regarded them as a group they should embrace, even if there were disagreements. Therefore, they had not openly antagonized each other.

But now, Beop Jong, in this very moment, declared that they would no longer consider Cheonumaeng even as a potential ally.

In the history of Gangho, has there ever been a time when any sect of Gupailbang, including Shaolin, declared hostility toward fellow orthodox sect?

Perhaps this may be an attempt to deny the fact that Cheonumaeng is an 'orthodox faction'. After all, Shaolin and Gupailbang are places that protect all people and sects in the world. In other words, isn't it nonsensical to say that those who don't receive their protection aren't orthodox sects? Just the declaration of walking a different path was too heavy a price to bear. Beop Jong's gaze shifted from Tang Gunak to Baek Cheon. Despite making such a significant declaration, Baek Cheon remained unchanged from before, calmly accepting Beop Jong's gaze.

'Excellent,'

Beop Jong's declaration wasn't driven by any ill feelings towards them. He understood now why Hwasan and Cheonumaeng were choosing their path. But Beop Jong himself was someone who had to walk his own path. He had come too far to stake everything on mere righteousness.

So, he had to do his best from his own standpoint. In order to unite more forces and fight against those who will attack Gangho, he had to stop those who sought to join Cheonumaeng. Even if it meant defining Cheonumaeng as evil in the process.

«Please understand,»

Beop Jong uttered the cold words, his voice serene as if it wasn't him speaking. When Baek Cheon, who received the statement, let out a faint sigh.

«To be honest, it's difficult to understand. But if that's how you uphold your righteousness, then we have no right to criticize you.»

Beop Jong smiled lightly.

Cheonumaeng firmly established its principles, while Gupailbang gained justification to break Cheonumaeng's momentum.

Although it wasn't the outcome he desired, he couldn't deny that he gained something. If he hadn't firmly established his stance regarding Cheonumaeng, he might still have been swayed by them.

«Then it's settled,»

said Beop Jong, rising from his seat as if signaling the end of the lengthy conversation.

Everyone followed suit, watching him as he stood.

«Amitabha,»

Beop Jong uttered solemnly.

«It became difficult to part ways on good terms, but confirming each other's positions wasn't meaningless,»

«We share the same sentiment.»

Beop Jong's gaze shifted from Baek Cheon to Chung Myung. Observing Chung Myung's subtle expression, Beop Jong then directed his attention to Hye Yeon, who sat with closed eyes.

«The lofty ideals often crumble because the path to achieving them is unbearably painful,»

Beop Jong's words resonated with everyone present.

«As a martial artist before being a leader of Shaolin, I applaud your difficult decisions. May your path not be too treacherous,»

Beop Jong bowed his head slowly, and everyone followed suit.

«Then.»

Beop Jong turned around without hesitation.

Jongli Hyeong, seeming somewhat regretful, watched as the others followed Beop Jong out of the room. The elders stepped forward to see Beop Jong off.

«It's okay, you don't need to see me off.»

«But it's a matter of courtesy...»

«I'm more comfortable this way.»

«In that case...»

Beop Jong smiled warmly at Hyun Jong.

«Alliance Leader.»

«Yes, Abbot?»

«You have exceptional disciples.»

«They are more than I deserve.»

Beop Jong smiled gently.

«I hope we can meet again with smiles on our faces.»

«I hope so too.»

«Take care.»

As Beop Jong walked towards the main gate of the manor, everyone watched him go. Then, in a sudden impulse, Hye Yeon ran after him.

Sensing someone approaching, Beop Jong glanced back.

Though Hye Yeon had rushed forward, he hesitated when faced with Beop Jong. Sensing his hesitation, Beop Jong spoke first.

«Experience it firsthand.»

“...”

«You’ve only seen their determination, witnessed their achievements. But now that you understand the price of that determination, you must also share that responsibility.»

«... Yes, Abbot.»

«You’ll come to your own conclusions. It’s a path probably not possible in Shaolin.»

With that, Beop Jong’s words ended.

Without leaving any words of well-wishing, congratulations, or even resentment, Beop Jong left Jangwon with a firm stride.

Watching his confident steps, Tang Gunak let out a sigh.

«Abbot is truly an Abbot.»

«... Yes.»

Baek Cheon nodded solemnly.

«It’s no wonder he became the leader of Shaolin.»

Tang Gunak smiled faintly.

«Don’t worry too much.»

«Yes?»

«The position of the Sect Leader of Hwasan isn’t something just anyone can take.»

A smile similar to Tang Gunak’s bloomed on Baek Cheon’s lips.

«That’s how it should be.»

Baek Cheon’s gaze, which now left Beop Jong’s back, rose to the vast sky above. Not a single cloud was in sight.

«Absolutely.»

The boundless blue sky seemed to gaze down at them.