

I. Dynasty 226

Chapter 226: Lüluo is from Dengzhou?

Only Xiao Ming and Zhan Xingchang remained in the Governor's meeting hall.

As Xiao Ming sketched the blueprint, he explained how to construct the new outer wall.

First, the wall wouldn't be solid. Since they were building it, they might as well design it as a fortress. So, rather than just a wall, it would function as a military stronghold.

Overall, the wall would retain a traditional appearance, but the outer layer would be replaced with concrete. The interior would be hollow, except for the section up to five meters from the ground, which would be filled and compacted with earth. This would save costs while ensuring that even if the exterior were damaged, the interior would remain intact.

Above the five-meter mark, hollow chambers would be built. Small openings—just wide enough for spears—would be embedded in the outer wall. During battles, soldiers could use these openings to attack climbing barbarians.

This section would be about 2.8 meters high. The third and fourth levels would follow the same design.

On the fifth level, the openings would be enlarged to allow cannons to fire through while still preventing enemy entry. From this level onward, cannon mounts would be installed inside the chambers. The next four levels would maintain this structure, with occasional spear openings interspersed.

In total, the wall would match the height of the old one—around 20 meters, an imposing defense.

After hearing the design, Zhan Xingchang looked excited. “With such a sturdy wall, even the barbarians would despair at the sight of it!”

“If we complete it, the Battle of Cangzhou will never repeat itself,” Xiao Ming said.

The memories of the last war were still fresh. Zhan Xingchang nodded. “But Your Highness, such a complex project will require your personal supervision at the site. Without hands-on guidance, I fear I won’t be able to execute it properly.”

“I was already planning to go. I don’t want shoddy construction. For now, prepare the slaves, cement, gravel, and wooden planks in advance,” Xiao Ming instructed.

Concrete structures weren’t overly complicated—the main challenges were reinforcing steel bars and wooden formwork. For skilled carpenters, this wouldn’t be difficult.

The real issue was the steel reinforcement.

At this stage, Xiao Ming couldn’t produce modern-grade steel bars. He’d have to rely on the ironworks to improvise. After all, human ingenuity was boundless.

After assigning tasks to Zhan Xingchang, Xiao Ming returned to his residence.

The meeting had highlighted several problems in the fiefdom, but at least the people now had surplus grain and no longer feared starvation.

However, beyond staple foods, they lacked vegetables or other cash crops.

This was his next challenge. Future industries would require raw materials like cotton, silk, and hemp.

Thinking of this, Xiao Ming remembered tung oil—a waterproofing agent for ships that was also scarce in his fiefdom. He'd have to purchase it from elsewhere.

"Industrial development is truly difficult," he sighed, gaining a deeper appreciation for the complexity of a complete industrial system.

Unlike his current situation, where he constantly lacked materials or parts.

Back in his chambers, Xiao Ming began drafting detailed blueprints—general layouts, concrete structures, steel reinforcement diagrams, and joint designs.

His meticulous approach aimed to establish a foundation for Qingzhou's construction industry. In modern times, his homeland was renowned as a construction powerhouse. He intended to build that reputation now.

After working all day, he finally completed the drawings by evening, though his hands ached from exhaustion.

“Your Highness, you haven’t even eaten lunch?”

Lüluo entered with dinner, frowning when she saw his untouched midday meal.

Xiao Ming smiled. “Ah, I forgot.”

“Your Highness is so dedicated, but your health matters too,” Lüluo chided gently.

Over the past year, Xiao Ming had grown comfortable around the two maids. “Alright, alright. Now you sound just as nagging as Ziwan.”

Lüluo, once timid around him, had grown bolder—a change Xiao Ming appreciated. A silent companion would’ve been dull.

As she picked up the untouched lunch tray, Lüluo suddenly remembered something. “Your Highness, is the loom ready? Ziwan and I visited the textile workshop. If the looms arrive, we’ll recruit skilled girls from nearby counties to work there.”

“That... might take a few more days. After I return from Dengzhou. The Machinery Department hit some snags while building the looms. I’ll need to inspect them myself,” Xiao Ming said, frustrated.

He'd assigned this task before leaving for Chang'an, but without his supervision, the craftsmen—new to loom production—had run into issues.

"Your Highness is going to Dengzhou again?" Lüluo's expression shifted slightly.

Xiao Ming noticed. "Yes. Why?"

"Your Highness, before entering the palace, I was from Dengzhou. I was sold to Chang'an and later chosen by Her Majesty to serve in the palace. It's been over ten years now."

"You're from Dengzhou?" Xiao Ming blinked. "Why didn't you mention this earlier?"

"Your Highness never asked," Lüluo murmured.

Xiao Ming chuckled. "My oversight. Since you're from Dengzhou, what can you tell me about it? Where are your parents? I could take you to visit them during this trip."

At this, Lüluo's eyes reddened. "Your Highness, my parents were fishermen. They were killed by Japanese pirates at sea. I sold myself to buy them coffins. If any family remains, it would be my elder brother. But he swore vengeance and went to sea. I don't know if he's alive anymore."

By the end, she was quietly crying.

Every servant girl had a tragic past—otherwise, they wouldn't have been sold so young.

Xiao Ming softened. "Then come with me to Dengzhou. You know the area, so you might assist me. And you can revisit your hometown."

"Thank you, Your Highness! I'll prepare right away." Lüluo bowed gratefully.

She'd never dared mention this before—servants weren't supposed to reconnect with family. Only Xiao Ming's kindness had given her the courage.

Watching Lüluo skip out like an excited deer, Xiao Ming shook his head. This trip to Dengzhou wouldn't be simple.