

I. Dynasty 74

Chapter 74: Assembly Line

North of Qingzhou City.

Upon arriving at the steel workshop, Xiao Ming gathered the craftsmen to teach them the effective use of the hydraulic forging press.

The steel workshop was entirely constructed from blue bricks. On one hand, this structure effectively prevented fires, and on the other, it was sturdy enough.

These blue bricks came from the brick kiln in the industrial district. Initially, Xiao Ming had aimed for red bricks, but he gradually realized that using red bricks in this era was somewhat wasteful, as blue bricks were sufficient.

This also helped reduce costs.

The material used for constructing various workshops was, of course, cement. Since the limestone quarry provided an ample supply of limestone, Xiao Ming began producing cement for the construction of the industrial district.

Moreover, within the industrial district, several main roads were paved with cement, making the area clean and facilitating transportation.

The emergence of these two building materials had long caught the attention of Qingzhou's merchants. However, Xiao Ming had no intention of making these technologies publicly available.

He believed that blue bricks were relatively easy to replicate. Merchants could likely figure out how to produce them just by seeing them, as the pottery and porcelain industries in the Great Yu Empire were quite advanced, making it impossible to keep such knowledge hidden.

Cement, however, was different. First, there was the need for limestone, and second, the specific firing process. Without either of these, cement could not be produced.

Although merchants discussed these materials, they showed little interest.

In their eyes, these materials held little value compared to products like perfume and soap, which could bring them tangible profits.

The concept of real estate development was nonexistent here.

"The assembly line means that each person is responsible for producing only their assigned component. These components are then assembled at the end. Therefore, each production team will have access to the hydraulic forging press," Xiao Ming explained to the craftsmen in the steel workshop.

Traditionally, craftsmen were responsible for crafting an entire set of armor themselves. However, this method would be phased out in favor of industrialized production.

Chen Qi and Chen Wenlong nodded in understanding. They had never considered such a production method before, but as soon as Xiao Ming proposed it, they immediately recognized its advantages.

By having each group of craftsmen focus on their specific component, they could quickly become proficient in their tasks. Through repetition, their speed and efficiency would greatly improve.

After explaining the concept of the assembly line in the workshop, Xiao Ming called Chen Qi over and said, "You're familiar with the craftsmen. Now that the forging press is ready, organize the craftsmen into groups today."

Chen Qi didn't understand what had spurred Xiao Ming's sudden enthusiasm. After neglecting the workshop for some time, Xiao Ming now seemed reinvigorated, personally overseeing every detail.

However, upon reflection, Chen Qi realized that he himself knew very little. He often admired the Prince of Qi, as it seemed like Xiao Ming had an endless stream of ideas.

With Xiao Ming supervising on-site, Chen Qi didn't dare to be careless. He divided the craftsmen in the steel workshop into ten groups based on their expertise, with each group responsible for a specific part of the production process.

Most of the craftsmen in the steel workshop were slaves, and each group was led by a skilled craftsman.

Skilled workers were now a problem for Xiao Ming, as this wasn't something that could be solved simply by imparting knowledge.

Although the Machinery Department had been training these craftsmen, most were still at the apprentice level.

“Ah, troublesome. Where can we find more skilled craftsmen?” Xiao Ming muttered to himself.

Chen Wenlong then said, “Your Highness, the fastest way to acquire craftsmen is through war. In the past, the barbarians plundered countless skilled craftsmen from our Great Yu. Now, not only do their armor and weapons rival ours, but they’ve even started using fire tubes in sieges.”

“The barbarians learn quickly. Fire tubes have only been around in the Great Yu for a few decades, yet the barbarians have already adopted them,” Xiao Ming said with concern.

In this era, which corresponded to the 17th century, the Great Yu’s firearms were still in their infancy. The fire tubes were the most primitive, firing stone projectiles with a range of only about a hundred meters. Even so, these fire tubes had a significant psychological impact during sieges.

Chen Wenlong also frowned. “The northern barbarians are growing stronger by the day, and their national power is gradually matching that of the Great Yu. Even Goryeo, which once submitted to the Great Yu, now pays tribute to the barbarians.”

“Goryeo,” Xiao Ming sneered. This “stick country” had always been opportunistic. Even in modern times, they couldn’t change their nature.

Xiao Ming recalled that according to the Great Yu’s historical records, when the empire was first established, Goryeo had sent envoys to offer congratulations.

Now, they had switched allegiances.

“Leaving Goryeo aside, let’s talk about Japan. When the Great Yu was strong, Japan paid tribute to us every year, exchanging trivial gifts for vast amounts of gold and silver. But now, seeing the Great Yu repeatedly humiliated by the barbarians, Japan not only disregards our past relations but also shows disrespect, frequently raiding our coastal areas. Sigh.”

In every era, there are patriots who lament the fate of their nation. Although Chen Wenlong was a man of few words, he was deeply concerned about his country.

Having witnessed the suffering of the Great Yu’s people at the hands of foreign invaders, he felt indignant.

Yet, the Great Yu remained intoxicated in the dream of being the celestial empire, while the prosperity of the south lured officials into a life of luxury, making them oblivious to the looming crises.

Memories flooded Xiao Ming’s mind. In his recollection, his knowledge of Goryeo and Japan was limited, but he was certain that these two nations had also undergone changes due to the butterfly effect of history.

Historically, Goryeo should have already been called Joseon by this time, as the name was bestowed by Zhu Yuanzhang upon the Joseon dynasty, which overthrew the Goryeo dynasty with Ming support.

However, in this world, without the Yuan dynasty or Zhu Yuanzhang, the Goryeo dynasty, supported by the barbarians, had persisted to this day, retaining its original name.

As for Japan's invasion of Goryeo, that had indeed occurred. The Great Yu's history seemed to have had little impact on Japan, an isolated island nation. The era of Toyotomi Hideyoshi still saw expansionist policies.

However, this time, Japan was defeated by the barbarians, which only deepened their disdain for the Great Yu.

Now, Japan was in the Tokugawa shogunate era. Historically, barbarians feared strength rather than respected virtue. This was why Japanese pirates and ronin, seeing the Great Yu's wealth and military weakness, frequently raided its coasts.

"Minister Chen, there's no need to sigh. Empty talk is no substitute for action. Self-pity won't change the current situation. When my army is strong and well-equipped, why should I fear the barbarians and savages?" Xiao Ming said.

"Your Highness is right. If I were like that, I'd be no different from those scholars who only talk about saving the nation," Chen Wenlong replied.

Xiao Ming nodded. This was precisely his point. Truth lies within the range of cannons—that was his philosophy.