

I. Dynasty 267

Chapter 267: Export Cannons

Laughter echoed kindly through the streets of Qingzhou.

Seeing the old man's surprised face, Xiao Ming smiled and said, "Uncle, this is real. If you don't believe me, you can go to the Qingzhou Prefecture office to ask. As long as you follow the law and work hard, in two years you can get official household registration here."

"Thank you, young lord! Thank you!" the old man said excitedly. He had thought he was going to die, but now he had a chance to start over. He felt lucky he had chosen to come here.

The newspaper boy nearby said, "The person in front of you is Prince Qi himself! His words are always true!"

"Prince Qi?" The old man looked shocked. But when he turned to look again, the young nobleman was already riding away.

Slowly standing up, his heart full of emotion, the old man handed three copper coins to the newspaper boy. "I'll buy this paper."

"Hey, no need to pay!" the boy said. But the old man had already walked off without looking back.

He went straight to the Qingzhou Prefecture office. When he asked about refugee resettlement, the officials explained the local refugee policy in detail. There, he also met others who had come from outside the province for the same reason—to ask how to settle down.

Inside the office, some refugees were discussing.

“The Prefect Zhan said earlier—if you join the construction team, transport crew, or go to the mines, you can earn a living. These places really need workers. If you have special skills, you can even get household registration within one year.”

Outside the office, a group of refugees chatted.

“Construction and mining are hard labor,” one of them said. “But there are also workshops run by merchants. The only thing is, Prince Qi’s own workshops usually don’t accept refugees.”

“Why not?” the old man asked.

“They worry spies might be hiding among us,” the man explained. “Prince Qi’s factories are filled with secrets. I’ve heard they mainly use slaves. Only less important places like the textile workshop hire outsiders. I’m planning to send my wife there—one silver tael per month is enough to live in Qingzhou.”

“Yeah, me too,” others agreed.

“But there’s no need to worry. There’s plenty of work in Qingzhou. As long as you’re willing to work hard, you won’t go hungry. I’ve been carrying cargo at the docks—earned 500 copper coins this month.”

The refugees kept talking, full of hope. What mattered most was that Qingzhou didn't have random, harsh taxes or powerful families bullying the people.

Life here felt free.

The more the old man listened, the happier he became. Qingzhou sounded like paradise. He hunched over slightly, still holding the newspaper, and hummed a tune as he walked out of the city.

Even though his stomach was growling from hunger, he had just gotten a refugee pass. That meant he could now claim two liang of rice each day. With three people in his family, that was six liang of rice daily. He had to bring his son and daughter to get their passes too.

Outside the city, in a small forest, they had built a simple shelter. It was just four wooden poles holding up some grass for a roof.

Inside was a torn cotton blanket, black from age. Outside, a young girl was trying to start a fire.

When she saw her father return, she asked, "Dad, did you buy the rice?"

The old man's face turned a little red. He hesitated and didn't answer her question. Instead, he asked, "Where's your brother?"

“He went to the river to catch fish,” she replied. Then she noticed something in his hand. “Dad, what’s that?”

“A newspaper,” the old man answered, a little ashamed. He regretted spending their last three copper coins on it.

Just then, a young man’s voice came from nearby. “Dad, you’re back! Look, I caught a big fish! We can make porridge tonight. We won’t go hungry!”

He held up a grass carp—at least three jin (about 1.5 kg).

The old man smiled when he saw it. “I didn’t get rice, but I did bring this Qingzhou newspaper, and I got a refugee pass.”

“A newspaper? What’s that?” the son and daughter asked.

So the old man told them what happened in the city. The young man looked shocked. “Really? You saw Prince Qi? And he said we wouldn’t be punished? We can settle in Qingzhou?”

The old man nodded. “Yes, but the prefecture still needs to investigate your murder case first. Only after that will there be a final decision.”

The girl turned to her brother and said, "Brother, they say Prince Qi is kind and fair. It looks like coming to Qingzhou was the right choice. Now we can walk into the city without fear."

The young man nodded firmly, eyes full of emotion. Then he took the newspaper and looked at it. "Sister, the job for women in the textile workshop is real! The ad even shows where the workshop is. But it says you have to pass a skills test to get in."

The old man said confidently, "Your sister is well known for her weaving and sewing skills back in the village. We're not afraid of competing. Let's not waste time. You two go get your refugee passes and then visit the textile workshop. If she gets in, we'll have a new home here."

The young man agreed. Together, they hurried toward Qingzhou City.

Military Factory

At the military factory, Xiao Ming was inspecting a batch of cannons prepared for shipment to Chang'an.

While he was away in Cangzhou, the factory had stayed busy. They weren't just making cannons for Great Yu's provinces, but also building export cannons for sale.

To keep the factory hidden, Xiao Ming had built it in the mountains outside Qingzhou City, deep within Mount Tuo.

There was only one mountain road leading into the area, and few people ever came here. That made it easy to keep secret. Any outsider entering the mountain would be quickly spotted and removed by the guards.

“Your Highness, here are the 100 cannons,” one of the supervisors said. “Just as you instructed, we shortened the barrels to reduce their range. At most, these will only reach half the distance of our own cannons.”

The factory was built inside a secluded mountain valley, with a large open courtyard where the cannons could be tested.

Xiao Ming nodded. Not only had they shortened the barrels, but the gunpowder they used was traditional black powder, not his improved granulated powder.

This ensured that even if other nobles had cannons, his own army would still have the advantage.

Seeing the 100 cannons lined up in rows was an impressive sight. He said, “Good work. Now, pull one out and fire a test shot. I want to see how it performs.”