

I. Dynasty 268

Chapter 268: Special Reward for Special Service

The ends of the military factory's courtyard were both bordered by mountain walls, and they usually used these slopes as targets for cannon testing.

At that moment, Chen Qi ordered the workers to pull off the canvas covering the cannons. Xiao Ming stepped forward to inspect them, and just as Chen Qi had said, these export cannons were shorter and had smaller calibers than usual.

This wasn't surprising—Xiao Ming had previously explained the theory of cannon design to Chen Qi, and it was clear Chen Qi had understood and applied that knowledge.

What pleased Xiao Ming most wasn't just the cannons themselves, but the fact that the military factory had developed the ability to design and produce other cannon types independently.

That marked real progress. He walked around the cannons and nodded again. When not considering the type of cannonballs or gunpowder, the two most important factors that determined a cannon's range and power were barrel length and caliber. A larger caliber meant a wider barrel, which created a more powerful blast.

Meanwhile, the longer the barrel, the more time the high-pressure gases could act on the cannonball, increasing its speed and firing distance. With this principle, different types of cannons could be developed for different purposes.

Now that Qingzhou could manufacture cannons, Xiao Ming's next step was to build a full system: naval cannons for ships, field cannons for the army, and siege cannons for city defense.

Once the cannon was loaded and fired, the cannonball shot out with a boom, flying in a straight line. After about 700 meters, it began to fall, eventually hitting the ground and rolling until it was stopped by the mountain wall.

Xiao Ming was satisfied. "A direct shot of 700 meters is fine. Good. Then let the Imperial Guards take these to the capital."

Not only was Prince Wei pressing him for delivery, but so was Xiao Wenxuan, the emperor himself. In fact, to speed things up, the Imperial Guard's transport ships had already arrived in Qingzhou.

After Prince Wei's envoy left the day before, the commander in charge of transporting the cannons had arrived as well. He introduced himself as an officer of the newly created Firearms Battalion, responsible specifically for managing the kingdom's new artillery.

When Xiao Ming heard that name, he couldn't help but feel speechless. His recent battle in Cangzhou had clearly begun ushering the Great Yu Empire into a new age of gunpowder weapons. And if the emperor had gone as far as forming a new military unit for firearms, then his intentions were obvious.

After inspecting the cannons, Xiao Ming followed Chen Qi into the main factory area. The military factory was located in a ring-shaped mountain valley, with twelve workshops spread from south to north.

Each workshop focused on a different stage of cannon production, such as refining steel, forming clay and iron molds, casting, cleaning, and polishing. These workshops were spacious—each one about 100 meters long and 10 meters wide.

As they walked through the facility, Xiao Ming remarked, “Yesterday, Prince Wei’s envoy sent another three million taels of silver. Chen Qi, your factory is now the most profitable place in all of Qingzhou.”

Chen Qi grinned and replied, “Then maybe it’s time to expand, Your Highness. Build more workshops. And maybe raise the wages for the workers too?” Xiao Ming laughed. “You just got promoted to Factory Supervisor, and now you’re already defending your people?”

Chen Qi smiled sheepishly. “Your Highness, I used to be just a craftsman. I didn’t understand the pressure. But now I do. We have over ten thousand workers here, and everyone needs to eat. If we pay them well, they’ll work harder. Also, many of them are still slaves. You once said if they performed well, they could earn their freedom and Qingzhou household registration. A year has passed. They’re all waiting for you to keep that promise.”

Xiao Ming nodded. “You’re right. As their leader, it’s your duty to fight for their rights. And I can’t just keep making promises without delivering. Otherwise, people will say I don’t keep my word. Fine. Give me a list of the best workers. Since I’m here today, I’ll make some exceptions and reward them personally.”

Chen Qi was overjoyed. “Yes, Your Highness! I’ll get the list now!”

As Xiao Ming waited, he chuckled to himself—clearly, Chen Qi had planned this in advance. Still, it was something Xiao Ming had planned to do anyway. The year was ending, and it was time to review all the year’s work—reward the deserving, discipline the lazy.

Soon, Chen Qi returned with a roster. It was divided into two parts: one list of slave workers, and another for registered Qingzhou citizens. Each list contained thirty names, and each entry clearly stated why that person deserved a reward.

One name stood out: Song Changping, a craftsman who led a team that produced more cannons than anyone else—six per month.

In the factory, workers were organized into teams of 100, each with a team leader. There were about 100 teams total. Most teams could only cast three cannons per month.

The reason Song Changping's team outperformed others was because he had invented a new method called "continuous casting". Instead of making one cannon at a time, his system connected multiple molds together, allowing molten steel to flow into six cannon molds at once. This saved time and energy and also made the cannons more consistent in quality.

Seeing this entry made Xiao Ming smile. He had just been thinking of promoting this casting method, but the workers had figured it out themselves. This proved something he believed deeply: ordinary people have endless wisdom—all they need is proper guidance. His role was to help the people unlock their potential, so they could master new skills.

"This Song Changping is really clever," Chen Qi added with a grin. "He picks up skills instantly—almost smarter than me! And he's still a slave. I heard his parents work at the shipyard. If Your Highness could let them reunite during the New Year, he'd be very grateful."

Xiao Ming nodded slowly. What he lacked most now was talented people. And true talent could only be discovered through hands-on work. Chen Qi's energy was limited, and the workload of the military factory would only grow. The cannons alone were already enough to handle. Song Changping seemed like someone worth training, especially for future musket production.

“Doubling cannon production is a huge accomplishment. This deserves a reward,” Xiao Ming said.
“Gather all the workers now.”

Chen Qi nodded and gave the order. Soon, all the workers assembled in the courtyard.

Holding the list in his hands, Xiao Ming walked out and looked at the sea of craftsmen standing before him. A sense of steady pride and satisfaction welled up in his chest.