

I. Dynasty 273

Chapter 273: A Failed Imitation?

Chang'an's Machinery Department.

Early in the morning, the Firearms Camp delivered a cannon from Qingzhou.

Fang Chengyou circled around the cannon, taking precise measurements of its length, thickness, and barrel design. His body still felt a bit weak—a lingering side effect of last night's indulgence.

He recorded each dimension with utmost care. Just yesterday, Prince Zhao's heir Zhao Yuanliang had promised him that if he succeeded in replicating the cannon and handed over the production method, he would receive 100,000 taels of silver.

With that kind of reward—money and women alike—Fang was even more motivated.

After detailed measurement, he told the craftsmen:

"Start heating the wax."

At his command, the workers lit the fires and began melting wax from the storerooms.

Fang Chengyou planned to use the lost-wax casting method to replicate Qingzhou's cannon.

This technique involved suspending the cannon in a pool, then pouring molten wax over it to create a mold.

Once the wax solidified, the layers would be cut and reassembled to form a full-size model.

Then, clay would be packed around it, and the wax melted out—leaving behind a perfect cannon mold.

Seven days later, Fang had a complete clay mold.

“Director, the iron used in Qingzhou's cannon seems much higher quality than ours.”

One of the craftsmen commented before casting.

Fang already knew from Zhao Yuanliang that the last few replicas had exploded during test firing.

So he concluded that iron wouldn't work.

He also knew from his family's experience making fire lances that copper was far safer than iron.

“Use copper. No iron,” he commanded.

“Copper? But sir, for something this heavy, we’ll need a lot of it...” the craftsman hesitated.

Fang knew that a copper cannon would cost over ten times more than Qingzhou’s iron version.

But right now, the goal was to succeed—no matter the cost.

So he insisted:

“I said use copper!”

The workers obeyed, gathering all the copper they could find in the Machinery Department and casting the cannon.

Fifteen days later, a bronze cannon—matching Qingzhou’s in size and shape—stood ready.

Emperor Xiao Wenxuan was thrilled.

He immediately ordered the cannon transported to the Firearms Camp for a test.

Several key officials arrived to witness it.

“That cannon’s entirely bronze? Look at the color!”

Fei Ji practically ground his teeth as he said this. Such extravagance!

All that bronze—how much silver had they just melted?

Even Xiao Wenxuan’s initial excitement faded as he laid eyes on the golden-hued cannon.

“So this is what the Machinery Department came up with? It certainly looks impressive.”

The Crown Prince laughed.

In his eyes, it looked flawless.

Zhao Yuanliang’s eyes sparkled. He was impressed that Fang had actually pulled it off.

Using bronze hadn't crossed his mind—but now, looking at the cost, he couldn't help but feel it wasn't worth it.

He would rather buy Qingzhou's cheaper iron cannons.

"Begin the test." Xiao Wenxuan said coldly.

If this cannon didn't match Qingzhou's in power, he might just kill Fang Chengyou himself.

At the order, the artillery crew loaded the powder and cannonball.

"BOOM!"

The cannon fired—the ball flew forward into the woods... and thudded against a tree, falling to the ground.

The crowd of officials burst into laughter.

The power was nowhere close to Qingzhou's cannons.

Xiao Wenxuan's face turned stone-cold.

Even the Crown Prince and Zhao Yuanliang were confused.

The shape was perfect—why was the power so weak?

Fang Chengyou stood frozen, speechless.

“Well, Fang Chengyou?” an official said mockingly.

“This is what you call a success? It's ten times more expensive and a tenth as powerful. What use does the court have for this?”

Sweating profusely, Fang stammered:

“No... no, that shouldn't have happened. It's just like the Qingzhou model. Why is the power so low?”

“You're asking me?” Xiao Wenxuan roared.

“Who am I supposed to ask?!”

The emperor's hope of copying Qingzhou's cannons was fading fast.

Fang quickly offered,

"Maybe it's because iron cannons are more powerful than bronze? Please let me try again—with iron this time."

Xiao Wenxuan, though furious, wasn't ready to give up.

"One last chance. If you fail again, drop the matter."

Fang nodded eagerly and slunk back to the Machinery Department.

The Crown Prince and Zhao Yuanliang exchanged looks—disappointed.

Over the next month, Fang switched to iron.

But the same problems Zhao Yuanliang had faced appeared.

After just a dozen test shots, each iron cannon exploded—causing the deaths of dozens of skilled craftsmen.

And the cannon's range and power still didn't match Qingzhou's.

“Why? Why?!”

After another explosion, Fang stared at the Qingzhou cannon in despair.

No matter how much he adjusted the process, he just couldn't match its power.

In one night, Fang aged ten years.

“Director, His Majesty sent word through Minister Feng,” a craftsman said timidly.

“Stop wasting silver. The Emperor has called off the project.”

At that moment, Fang was completely crushed.

He had lost the emperor's favor—his career was over.

Zhao Yuanliang would abandon him too—he no longer had any value.

“Why? Why?” he muttered like a madman.

“Why can't it match Qingzhou's cannon, even though it looks exactly the same?”

News of the Machinery Department's failed imitation spread like wildfire among the court.

Everyone who had hoped to copy Qingzhou's cannons was now disappointed.

This meant only one thing:

They had no choice but to buy cannons from Xiao Ming.

At the same time, word of this reached Qingzhou.

Xiao Ming had already been informed by his artillery officers that Chang'an had tested a bronze cannon.

“Your Highness,” Pang Yukun asked curiously,

“They say this bronze cannon was nearly identical to ours. Why was its power so much weaker?”

Xiao Ming actually broke into a cold sweat when he heard the news.

The truth was: the bronze cannon from Chang’an was a qualified cannon.

In the early days of gunpowder warfare, bronze cannons and bronze-alloy cannons were the mainstream—until better-quality iron and steel became more widely available.

The reason the power was so low... wasn’t because of the cannon.

It was because of the gunpowder.

The artillery crew that went to Chang’an to assist had reported back:

Fang Chengyou had used locally made gunpowder—not Qingzhou’s formula.