

## Signaling in the Qin Dynasty

Wang Jian said, "If Your Majesty is determined to employ me, then I must have 600,000 men—no less will do!"

"Whatever you advise, General," said the emperor.

Wang Jian was accordingly put in command of a force of 600,000 men, and the emperor saw him off as far as the Ba River. As they were going on their way, Wang Jian requested the emperor for the gift of a great many fine fields and houses, gardens and ponds.

The emperor said, "Just go on your way, General. Why all this worry over poverty?"

Wang Jian replied, "Though many of Your Majesty's generals have achieved merit, they have never succeeded in being enfeoffed as marquises. So while I enjoy Your Majesty's favour, I want to use the opportunity to ask for fields and ponds for the sake of my sons and grandsons, that is all."

The emperor roared with laughter.

By the time Wang Jian reached the Hangu Pass, he had five times sent messengers back to the capital to repeat his request for suitable farm lands. Someone said to him, "Aren't you being a bit too persistent in the way you beg for rewards, General?"

"Not at all," replied Wang Jian. "The king of Qin is suspicious and puts no trust in others. Now he has emptied the state of Qin of all its armed men and turned them over to my sole authority. If I do not ask for a lot of fields and houses for the sake of my sons and grandsons and seem to be thinking only of my own interests, then I will just give him occasion to doubt my motives."

[Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Qin Dynasty*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 128–29]

Suggested by Wing Suen