

Lin Junjian

Book of Jin

Selected Translations with Contextual Materials

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Contents

Contents.....	1
Frequently Cited Sources.....	3
Translation of Titles.....	4
Preface.....	5
Annals.....	7
5. Chapter 5Emperor Xiaohuai & Emperor Xiaomin.....	7
Treaties.....	8
Biographies.....	9
62. Chapter 32 Liu Kun & Zu Ti.....	9
Liu Kun.....	9
Liu Qun.....	19
Liu Yu.....	19
Liu Yan.....	20
Zu Ti.....	22
Zu Na.....	26
Comment.....	28
94. Chapter 64 Hermits and Recluses.....	31
Sun Deng.....	31
Dong Jing.....	32
Xia Tong.....	33
Zhu Chong.....	34
Fan Can.....	35
Lu Sheng.....	37
Dong Yang.....	38
Huo Yuan.....	38
Guo Qi.....	39
Wu Chao.....	39
Lu Bao.....	40
Fan Teng.....	40
Ren Xu.....	41
Guo Wen.....	42
Gong Zhuang.....	43
Meng Lou.....	43
Han Ji.....	44
Qiao Xiu.....	44
Zhai Tang.....	45
Guo Fan.....	46
Xin Mi.....	46
Liu Linzhi.....	47
Suo Xi.....	48
Yang Ke.....	48

Gongsun Feng	49
Gongsun Yong	49
Zhang Zhong	50
Shi Yuan	50
Song Xian	51
Guo He	51
Guo Yu	52
Qi Jia	53
Master Qu Xing	54
Xie Fu	54
Dai Kui	54
Gong Xuanzhi	56
Tao Dan	56
Tao Qian	57
Comment	59
96. Chapter 66 Exemplary Women	61
Records	63
Preface	63
101. Chapter 1 Liu Yuanhai	65
Liu He	72
Liu Xuan	73
102. Chapter 2 Liu Cong	75
Liu Can	92
Chen Yuanda	94
103. Chapter 3 Liu Yao	96
Comment	113
104. Chapter 4 Shi Le Part One	116
105. Chapter 5 Shi Le Part Two	139
Shi Hong	155
Zhang Bin	159
106. Chapter 6 Shi Jilong Part One	162
107. Chapter 7 Shi Jilong Part Two	181
Shi Shi, Shi Zun & Shi Jian	186
Ran Min	191
Comment	194
Era & Events	198

Frequently Cited Sources

Referring to frequently cited sources by abbreviations is a matter of practicality and efficiency. These abbreviated references streamline academic writing and discussion, allowing readers to quickly recognize the works in question without the cumbersome repetition of lengthy titles. The abbreviations are the titles' initials in pinyin. Here is a list of some examples:

Abbr.	Pinyin	Chinese	English Translation
<i>BQS</i>	Bei Qishu	北齊書	Book of Northern Qi
<i>BS</i>	Bei Shi	北史	History of the North
<i>CS</i>	Chenshu	陳書	Book of Chen
<i>HYGZ</i>	Huayang Guo Zhi	華陽國志	Records of the Lands South of Mt. Hua
<i>HHS</i>	Hou Hanshu	後漢書	Later Book of Han
<i>HS</i>	Hanshu	漢書	Book of Han
<i>JS</i>	Jinshu	晉書	Book of Jin
<i>JTS</i>	Jiu Tangshu	舊唐書	Old Book of Tang
<i>LS</i>	Liangshu	梁書	Book of Liang
<i>NQS</i>	Nan Qishu	南齊書	Book of Southern Qi
<i>NS</i>	Nanshi	南史	History of the South
<i>SGZ</i>	Sanguo Zhi	三國志	Records of the Three Kingdoms
<i>SJ</i>	Shiji	史記	Records of the Grand Historian
<i>SoS</i>	Songshu	宋書	Book of Song
<i>SS</i>	Suishu	隋書	Book of Sui
<i>SSXY</i>	Shishuo Xinyu	世說新語	A New Account of the Tales of the World
<i>SLGCQ</i>	Shiliuguo Chunqiu	十六國春秋	Spring and Autumn Annals of the Sixteen Kingdoms
<i>TD</i>	Tongdian	通典	Comprehensive Institutions
<i>THY</i>	Tang Huiyao	唐會要	Institutional History of Tang
<i>TPYL</i>	Taiping Yulan	太平御覽	Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era
<i>WS</i>	Weishu	魏書	Book of Wei
<i>XTS</i>	Xin Tangshu	新唐書	New Book of Tang
<i>ZZTJ</i>	Zizhi Tongjian	資治通鑑	Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance

Translation of Titles

Pinyin	Chinese	English
Biejia	別駕	Attendant Officer
Boshi	博士	Erudite
Chengxiang	丞相	Chancellor
Cishi	刺史	Inspector
Da Jiangjun	大將軍	Grand General
Da Sima	大司馬	Grand Marshal
Guanglu Dafu	光祿大夫	Grand Master of Splendid Happiness
Jijiu	祭酒	Libationer
Ling	令	Prefect
Mu	牧	Shepherd
Shangshu	尚書	Imperial Secretariat/Secretary
Shizhong	侍中	Palace Attendant
Sikong	司空	Minister of Works
Sili Xiaowei	司隸校尉	Colonel Director of the Retainers
Sima	司馬	Commander
Situ	司徒	Minister of the Masses
Taichang	太常	Grand Master of Ceremonies
Taishou	太守	Administrator
Taiwei	太尉	Grand Commandant
Taizhong Dafu	太中大夫	Superior Grand Master of the Palace
Xianling	縣令	Prefect
Xianzhang	縣長	Chief
Yin	尹	Governor
Yushi Dafu	御史大夫	Censor-in-Chief
Zongzheng	宗正	Minister of the Imperial Clan
Zuo Zhonglang Jiang	左中郎將	General of the Palace Gentlemen of the Left

Preface

The "Book of Jin" (晉書) stands among the canonical works of Chinese historiography, documenting the Western and Eastern Jin dynasties (265-420) through 130 volumes. Commissioned by the Tang court in 646, this monumental work emerged at a pivotal moment when historical writing transitioned from private scholarship to imperial enterprise.

Under Fang Xuanling's stewardship, an assemblage of elite scholars—including Chu Suiliang, Xu Jingzong, and Li Chunfeng—completed this vast undertaking in a mere three years. Their work was distinguished by Emperor Taizong's direct engagement through his imperial commentaries, which provide invaluable insights into Tang dynasty interpretations of Jin-era governance and culture.

The compilation drew upon an extraordinarily rich documentary foundation. While the imperial edict cited 18 antecedent Jin histories as insufficient, *SS*, *JTS* and *XTS* suggest the existence of more than 20 such works. Zang Rongxu's earlier history, notable for its pioneering unification of Western and Eastern Jin narratives, served as the primary source text.¹ The compilers also incorporated diverse materials ranging from official documents to supernatural accounts found in works like "In Search of the Supernatural" and "Records of the Hidden and the Manifest."

The text's twenty volumes of treatises cover subjects from astronomy to law. While the geographical treatises have faced scholarly scrutiny for their accuracy, the work's overall achievement in systematizing Jin-era knowledge remains remarkable.

A distinctive feature of the *Jinshu* is its Records (*zaiji*) section, comprising thirty volumes dedicated to the Sixteen Kingdoms period. These Records, drawing from now-lost contemporary sources, remain our principal window into this era of profound political fragmentation. The work's comprehensive scope extends beyond political narrative to encompass social history, though this breadth occasionally prompted criticism from later scholars who perceived certain passages as privileging entertainment over historical accuracy.

Among these critical voices, Fang notably commented:

"Many of the historians were literati, prone to collecting odd and trivial details to expand the range of bizarre stories; their commentaries often leaned towards the ornate and neglected solid truth, thus drawing ridicule from scholars."

The "Siku Ti Yao" (《四庫提要》) echoes this viewpoint, suggesting *Jinshu* tends to "extol elegance and provide fodder for conversation." However, such criticisms warrant careful consideration. The oddities, trivialities, and unusual tales are not flaws in themselves. The comprehensive collection of varied materials is not a weakness but a defining feature of the *Jinshu*.

Jinshu, a work of many hands, shows unevenness and repetition across its sections. But seen whole, it is a model of history. Zhao Yi, in his "Twenty-Two Histories in Question and Answer," notes:

"The historians of that era, such as Linghu Defen, were masters of literature. Their chronicles and biographies are written with a clarity and energy surpassing those of the

Books of Wei and Song. The Records deserve praise - concise yet comprehensive, detailed yet not overwrought, peerless against the *SLGCQ*. The compilation and refinement of the biographies were executed with meticulous care." This judgment is well-founded.

Modern scholarship has been greatly facilitated by Wu Shijian and Liu Chenggan's "Annotations to the Jinshu," which synthesizes over three centuries of textual scholarship. This annotation, together with the "Dictionary of the Jinshu," provides essential tools for contemporary research into this complex historical period.

The present volume offers selected chapters in English translation, aided by contemporary technological tools while remaining grounded in traditional scholarship. As with any work of this scope, it may contain inadvertent errors or omissions, and we welcome scholarly feedback. Our aim is to make this crucial period of Chinese history more accessible to English-language readers while maintaining rigorous academic standards.

Lin Junjian

January 1, 2024

ⁱ As recorded in the "Biography of Fang Xuanling" in *JTS*:

"I received the imperial edict to revise *Jinshu* [...] The task was distributed among the compilers. We relied chiefly on Zang Rongxu's *Jinshu* as our principal source, while also consulting a variety of other documents. Through this process, we achieved a work of great thoroughness."

Annals

5. Chapter 5 Emperor Xiaohuai & Emperor Xiaomin

Treaties

Biographies

62. Chapter 32 Liu Kun & Zu Ti



Liu Kun

Liu Kun, courtesy name Yueshi, hailed from Weichang in Zhongshan. His blood traced back to Sheng, the Han Prince Jing of Zhongshan. His grandfather, Mai, had the skill to lead a country, who advised the Chancellor's army and served as an attendant cavalier. His father, Fan, was a man of stern integrity, known for his frugal ways, and he climbed to the rank of Grand Master of Splendid Happiness.

Kun, in his youth, was noted for his striking eyes and was as bold as Zu Na of Fanyang. At twenty-six, he served as an attendant officer within the Directorate of Retainers. At that time, Shi Chong, the General of Barbarian Conquest, possessed a peerless abode nestled in the valley of Jingu in Henan, where he was the host par excellence to poets and guests on a daily basis. Kun, being among these attendees, was lauded for his literary prowess. Jia Mi, the Imperial Library Supervisor, wielded influence over the affairs of state, captivating the hearts of scholars and noblemen of the capital. In the presence of Mi, literati such as Shi Chong, Ouyang Jian, Lu Ji, and Lu Yun, among others, demonstrated deference with their literary gifts. Kun, alongside his brothers, was counted among this esteemed group, known collectively as the "Twenty-Four Friends." The Grand Commandant, Prince Tai of Gaomi, made him his scribe. Kun ascended through the ranks, successively appointed as Gentleman of Literary Works, Erudite of the Imperial Academy, and Gentleman of the Imperial Secretariat.

When Prince Lun of Zhao wielded power, he made Kun the Supervisor of the Scribes,

then moved him to Middle Gentleman Attendant. Lun's son, Fu, wed Kun's sister, which brought trust upon Kun, his father, and his brothers from Lun. As Lun seized the throne, Fu rose to Crown Prince, and Kun became his Chief Attendant. In the revolt of the three princes against Lun, Kun was named Champion General, given the power to command. He joined Sun Xiu's son Hui with 30,000 palace guards, facing Prince Ying of Chengdu at Huangqiao. Kun faced a harsh defeat, fell back, and burned bridges to secure his ground.

After Prince Jiong of Qi assumed the regency and noted the significant reputations of Kun's father and brothers, he pardoned Kun. He appointed Kun's brother Yu as a Gentleman of the Palace Secretariat and Kun as the Left Deputy Director in the Imperial Secretariat, later shifting him to Chief Clerk of the Minister over the Masses. Following Jiong's fall, Prince Xiao of Fanyang, positioned in Xuchang, called on Kun to become his Marshal.

When Emperor Hui came to Chang'an, Prince Yue of Donghai sought to greet the imperial party. Kun's father, Fan, was named Protector of the Army in Huabei and Inspector of Yuzhou. During Liu Qiao's assault on Prince Xiao of Fanyang at Xuchang, Kun and his brother Yu, with Ru'nan's Governor Du Yu and others, marched for Xiao's aid. They were too late: Xiao had already lost. Kun, Yu, and Xiao escaped to Hebei, while Kun's parents fell into Liu Qiao's hands. Kun convinced Jizhou's Inspector Wen Xian to yield his post to Xiao. With Jizhou under Xiao, Kun was sent to Youzhou to gather forces from Wang Jun. Securing 800 cavalry, he and Xiao crossed the river, defeated Prince Mao of Dongping at Linqiu, pushed Liu Qiao south, and freed his parents. They also killed Shi Chao, subdued Lü Lang, and led troops to escort the Emperor to Chang'an. For his service, Kun was made Marquis of Guangwu, granted 2,000 households.

In the 1st year of Yongjia (307), Kun was named Inspector of Bingzhou, promoted to General Who Stirs Might, and dubbed Colonel of the Central Xiongnu. On his way, he penned a memorial:

"Your servant, due to his ignorance and limited aspirations, has found himself unduly elevated to this station. At the conclusion of the ninth month, I embarked on my journey, confronting paths fraught with danger and imposing mountains. With barbarians blocking the way, I fought many with few, braving risks to press on. I met with great hardships and peril, toiled greatly, and reached Hukou Pass today.

In traversing this realm, I have beheld dire poverty. The populace is dispersed, barely two in ten survive. They haul the old and aid the weak, endlessly trudging. Those left sell their kin, abandon the living, neglect the deceased. White bones litter the fields; cries of anguish fill the air. Tens of thousands of barbarians encircle the four mountains. At every step, we face plunder; at every turn, we see foes. Only at Hukou might we petition for grain.

These two roads are the lifelines of the nine provinces. Should but a handful obstruct them, hundreds dare not advance. The flux of public and private ventures results in numerous losses. Besieged within a beleaguered city, lacking fuel, forage, plowing oxen, and farming tools, my ineptitude meets these grave challenges. My anxieties are ceaseless, leaving me no peace for rest or nourishment.

Although this province is termed a borderland, it indeed lies proximate to the imperial heartlands. Southward, it adjoins Henei; eastward, it borders Si and Ji; northward, it shields from foreign ways; westward, it withstands fierce barbarians. It is the wellspring of stout bows, fine steeds, and valiant fighters. Provisioning is imperative to ensure its fate. I now implore

the Imperial Secretariat for an allotment of five million *hu* of grain, five million bolts of silk, and five million *jīn* of cotton. I beseech Your Majesty to promptly consider my petition and to grant me an expedited audience." The imperial court fulfilled his plea.

At that time, Duke Teng of Dongying, holding Jinyang and Ye, grappled with famine and scant resources in Bingzhou. The populace had trailed Teng southward, leaving fewer than 20,000 households behind. Bandits and raiders wreaked unending havoc. Roads were impassable. Kun rallied over 1,000 souls to carve a path to Jinyang. The official buildings lay in ashes, bodies strewn about. Survivors, gaunt from starvation, had lost their human semblance. Thickets had turned to forests; wolves prowled the paths. Kun slashed through the undergrowth, interred the dead, rebuilt the offices, and restored the markets and jails. Bandits struck with stealth, turning city gates to war zones. The people tilled with shields on their backs, plowed with arrows at their sides. Kun soothed and enlisted the tired and uprooted, securing the people's allegiance.

Liu Yuanhai was stationed in Lishi, some 300 *li* distant. Kun covertly dispatched agents to stir strife among Yuanhai's diverse barbarian troops, prompting over ten thousand to defect. Yuanhai, deeply alarmed, entrenched himself in Puzi. Before Kun's term ended, the displaced began trickling back, and the sounds of chickens and dogs filled the air again. Kun's father, Fan, came from Luoyang to be with him. Many who had fled or been dispersed rallied to Kun, who excelled at forging bonds but faltered in maintaining order. In a single day, thousands might flock to him, yet just as many would scatter. Despite his nature, lavish and fond of pleasures, he occasionally tried to rein himself in, only to slip back into his old, indulgent habits.

Xu Run of Henan, adept in music and favored by the influential, won Kun's favor and was made Administrator of Jinyang. Run, emboldened by Kun's favor, grew arrogant and interfered in Kun's governance. The forthright General Who Exhibits Might, Linghu Sheng, often protested this and pressed Kun to dismiss Run, but Kun ignored the counsel. Initially, Chanyu Yigui, for aiding Duke Teng of Dongying, had his brother Yilu honored by Kun as Duke of Dai Commandery, and they joined forces with Liu Xi in Zhongshan. Wang Jun, accusing Kun of encroaching on his lands, attacked repeatedly. Kun, unable to withstand, saw his influence and power diminish. Xu Run maligned Linghu Sheng before Kun, claiming, "Sheng shall soon urge you to don the imperial mantle." Without probing, Kun rashly executed Sheng. Kun's mother warned, "You, lacking in breadth of grand strategy and mastery over the valiant, seek to purge those superior to yourself for your own preservation. By what means do you envision your prosperity? Should this course be maintained, calamity shall surely befall us." Yet, her counsel was cast aside.

Sheng's son Ni fled to Liu Cong, recounting all. Cong, elated, made Ni his guide. Shangdang's Administrator Xi Chun defected to Cong, and the Yanmen Wuhuan revolted anew. Kun led his best to quell them. Cong sent his son Can and Linghu Ni to strike Jinyang amidst the chaos. Taiyuan's Administrator Gao Qiao capitulated to Cong, and Kun's parents were slain. Kun, allying with Yilu, struck Can, slaying half his force. Kun pressed on but couldn't clinch a decisive win. Yilu, doubting Cong's defeat, left Kun with livestock and vehicles, and withdrew, leaving generals Ji Dan, Duan Fan, and others to defend Jinyang. Kun, bent on vengeance but limited by his depleted ranks, wept blood over the dead, consoled the injured, and retreated to Yangyi City to regroup the remnants.

Upon Emperor Min's ascension, Kun was named Grand General, Commander-in-Chief of military affairs in Bingzhou, and further honored as Attendant Cavalier with the right to bear the imperial insignia. In gratitude, Kun penned a letter:

"Your Majesty has overlooked my manifold transgressions and acknowledged my slight virtues, showering me with divine grace and extraordinary favor. I am elevated with the cicada crown and the lofty rank of a Grand General. The imperial edict fills me with overwhelming gratitude.

I have taken to heart how Wen of Jin, with the support of Xi Hu, asserted his rule, and how Gaozu, with Han Xin as his general, laid the empire's base. Both were endowed with the profound virtue of poetry and the extensive knowledge of rites, coupled with an awe-inspiring martial might, thereby securing great achievements in Jingnan and establishing a formidable base in Hebei. I, of humble origin, aim to emulate the sages, yet I dread failure and the stain of dishonor. In history, Cao Mo thrice ventured north, securing his legacy at Ke's alliance; Feng Yi spread his wings at Mianchi, turning losses to wins, offsetting faults with feats. Your Majesty's mercy in forgiving transgressions is immense, yet my own attempts at reform stand unsteady. Though I fall short of these exemplars, I am acquainted with the teachings of old, holding onto a thread of hope for humility and propriety.

The reason I dare embrace this favor and command is to wholly serve the state, to perish in its defense, dedicating my life on the battlefield, fulfilling my duty as your subject. The honors and glory You bestow are beyond words of gratitude. Moreover, Shi Lan and Palace Middle Gentleman Wang Chun, among others, have delivered Your imperial commands. As I peruse the sacred decree, I am moved to tears.

The menace of barbarians, a recurring scourge through the ages, has seen the divine withhold their grace from those devoid of virtue. Savage tribes desecrate our sacred lands, and barbarian offspring wreak havoc upon our state. The seven temples lack their offerings, the hundred officials have forsaken the order of propriety. Imperial tombs are defiled, ancestral mounds unmarked, the land mourns eternally, and our thoughts linger with our ancestors. Your Majesty's dragon-like presence grows by the day, your enlightened spirit ever more luminous. You have lifted the realm from ruin and restored the sacred altars. Order is reestablished within the Four Seas, and the seeds of tradition and governance sprout anew across the nine provinces. Yet Your Majesty remains veiled in dust beyond the capital's reach, outside Qin's borders. The reverence of the steaming sacrifice fills my heart, yet my longing for home is unquenched.

I have held my post for years, my talents modest and my substance lacking. The discord of hills and mountains is evident, yet my contributions remain unseen. Recently, responding to the exigencies of the era, I was granted a title in name, yet achieved no victory over the enemy, accruing only burdens. I should face the law, to affirm the principles of demotion and promotion. Thus, in my prior memorial, I dared to voice my humble plea: to serve in the ranks of the former court, to maintain the role of a subordinate commander, to be pardoned for three defeats, and to be utilized for one success, to sate my longing for the battlefield and to quell the great rebellion. Even should I become naught but grass on the battlefield, I shall harbor no regrets in the yellow ruins.

Your Majesty's favor is exceedingly gracious, and I am undeservedly raised, now appointed as Grand General, assuming both the role and duties thereof. The duty of

conquest and pacification is mine to bear. I accept the command with trepidation, my heart in disarray, fearing I may falter and bring disgrace upon the court. In times past, Shen Xu defied his lord yet earned the merit of a ducal marriage; Wu Yuan departed Chengfu yet aided the Ying campaign. Though I am stubborn and fierce, not emulating the ancients, in donning armor and wielding arms, in dedicating myself to the enemy's defeat, such is the grace of Heaven and Earth, a bounty for which no creature can fully express its gratitude. Having received such profound favor, I do humbly submit this memorial to convey my sentiments."

Following Qu Yun's victory over Liu Yao and the execution of Zhao Ran, Kun submitted another memorial, stating:

"The insurgent barbarian Liu Cong dared to lead his hordes to defile the Imperial Carriage, inciting wrath among mortals and deities alike, igniting anger far and wide. Reading the imperial edict, I see the Grand Protector and Prince Bao of Nanyang, and the Grand Commandant and Inspector of Liangzhou, Gui, have bound two provinces in shared concern for the royal court. Champion General, Yun, and General Who Protects the Army, Chen, have marshaled six hosts in coordination, pouring their might into the nation's peril. The royal hosts triumphed grandly, capturing and slaying thousands. Banners and ensigns lead on Jin's roads, drums and trumpets echo along the river's bends. No longer does Liu's sacrilege sound alarms through Xiao and Han's passes, and peace is celebrated in Qian and Long's realms. This is the work of ancestral temples and earth's altars, wrought by Your Majesty's divine martial might. All beings with *qi* are drawn to this; how could my heart not soar?

In my last memorial, I was to meet the Xianbei Yilu this third month in Pingyang. Yet, on the third day of the third month, the Xiong-Jie Shi Le struck Ji City. The Grand Marshal and Duke of Boling, Jun, fell for their deceitful peace and was seized by Le, whose strength swelled. Now he aims to assail me. Cities and strongholds tremble, focusing solely on defense. Treachery brewed in Yilu's lands, but Lu, alert, swiftly quelled the traitors. This has put both north and south on guard, leading to missed chances, hence I weep blood into night, fists clenched, sighing deep.

Le holds Xiangguo, mountains between us. His raiders leave at dawn, reach my walls by dusk. Wickedness attracts its like, and his followers are many. Of the northeast's eight provinces, Le has razed seven; of those the former court granted, I alone stand. Thus, Le plots ceaselessly, targeting me, seeking my weaknesses, dispatching his marauders. Our soldiers can't shed their armor; our people can't till the soil. Though Heaven's nets are vast, divine grace eludes us, and I stand solitary amid foes. If I hold, Cong's punishment looms; if I strike, Le pounces from behind. Advance or retreat, we're ensnared, trapped, humiliated. I seethe with rage but am impotent, shamed before the campaign's troops, my heart aches, my head pounds. My flesh remains, but my spirit charges the enemy's gates. The autumn harvest is gathered, the barbarian steeds are stout. The armies' vanguard approaches, and I shall lead the charge, commanding the soldiers. My existence cannot abide both enemies; if Cong and Le aren't captured, I won't consider return. I trust in Your Majesty's formidable spirit, that my modest aims may come to pass. Only then can I perish in service to my country, dying without remorse."

In the third year [of Jianxing] (315), the emperor commissioned the Grand Herald, Zhao

Lian, with credentials to name Kun Minister of Works and military commander over Bing, Ji, and You. Kun refused the ministerial role but took up arms, vowing to ally with Yilu against Liu Cong. But soon, Yilu and his son turned on each other, and sickness claimed Lu and his nephew Gen, scattering their tribes. Kun's son Zun, once Lu's hostage, found favor with the tribes. Zun, with Ji Dan and others, brought 30,000 followers, 100,000 head of livestock to Kun. With this, Kun's might was restored, and he rode from Pingcheng with a few hundred horsemen to settle them.

As Shi Le laid siege to Leping, the local administrator, Han Ju, called for Kun's help. Kun, with his newly raised troops, was eager to demonstrate his strength. Ji Dan warned, "Though these be of Jin stock, having long dwelt on the frontier, they are strangers to benevolence and trust, and not easily governed by law. We ought now to gather the remaining grains of the Xianbei and seize the cattle and sheep of the weakened Hu, secure our passes, and strengthen key positions. Let us then give the land and our warriors respite. Once our way of life has taken root and they are moved by gratitude, then shall we employ them, and our success shall be lasting." Kun, giving no heed to these words, rallied his entire host, entrusting Dan with 20,000 foot and horse to lead the vanguard, himself to follow.

Le had seized the strategic heights. He laid an ambush that utterly routed Dan's forces, scattering the army and sending shock throughout the land. A severe drought ensued. Beset by hardship, Kun found himself unable to hold his position. Proposals from Youzhou's Xianbei Inspector, Duan Pidi, arrived, suggesting an alliance for the imperial cause. Kun led his followers to Pidi, traveling from Feihu to Ji. Pidi received him with full honors, and they formed a bond through marriage, taking an oath of brotherhood.

At this time, the western capital fell. Emperor Yuan assumed regency south of the Yangtze. Kun then commanded his Chief Clerk, Wen Jiao, to exhort Yuan to ascend the throne. Thereupon, 180 individuals from the He-Shuo garrisons, both barbarian and the Han, jointly submitted a petition. The contents were chronicled in the "Annals of Yuan":

"Jackals and wolves spread their venom, threatening to overturn the foundation of our state, and the myriad peoples languish in despair, their eyes cast towards us, bereft of any hope. The essence of ascending the throne lies in responding to the needs of all under heaven, to reinstate the divine sovereign, to erase the ignominy brought upon us by our adversaries. Who, then, could presume to undertake such a grave responsibility with levity? This is the depth of sincerity that is acknowledged across distant lands. Generations have favored you, elevating you to the zenith of loyalty, righteousness, and integrity, stirring the very heaven and earth. It is upon your far-reaching strategy that we rely, to navigate these tumultuous times. Though the north and south may lie far apart, our spirits are united; though thousands of *li* may divide us, our intentions remain as close as if within arm's reach. It falls upon you to pacify and govern both Chinese and the barbarians, to punish the wicked. We await the news of your decisions."

In the first year of Jianwu (317), Kun and Pidi planned to strike at Shi Le. Pidi elevated Kun to Grand Commander, sealing letters with blood to call the regional defenders to rally at Xiangguo. Kun and Pidi positioned themselves at Gu'an, awaiting the allied troops. Pidi's cousin Mobo, swayed by Le's heavy bribes, failed to advance, foiling their strategy. Outmatched, Kun and Pidi withdrew.

That same year, Emperor Yuan named Kun Imperial Attendant and Grand Commandant,

upholding his former ranks and gifting him a famed blade. Kun accepted, vowing, "With this sword at my side, I will sever the heads of our two foes."

Pidi attended his brother's funeral, and Kun sent his son, Qun, to accompany him. However, Mobo ambushed Pidi, defeating him and taking Qun captive. Mobo treated Qun with respect and offered Kun the position of Inspector of Youzhou. Together, they conspired against Pidi, with Qun's letter urging Kun to betray him from within. But Pidi's scouts intercepted the messenger, and Kun, stationed in a small city from a previous campaign, remained oblivious.

Pidi showed Qun's letter to him, saying, "In you, my trust wavers not. It's but for you to be informed of this matter."

Kun replied, "In forging an alliance with you, my aim is to honor the royal lineage. Upon your strength I lean, in hopes of effacing the shame that besmirches our realm. Even had the letter from my son reached my own hands, never would I, for the sake of a single child, betray our pact nor forsake righteousness."

Pidi, who held Kun in high regard and intended no harm, was minded to permit his return to the encampment. Yet, Pidi's brother, Shujun, a man of learning and cunning stratagems, held in high trust by Pidi, counseled him, saying, "We are but barbarians. The Jin submit to us for fear of our multitude. Now, as our own kin turn against each other, it's the opportune moment for their plotting. Should you empower Kun to ascend, it would herald the doom of our entire lineage." Pidi then resolved to detain Kun.

Kun's firstborn Zun, along with his Left Chief Clerk, Yang Qiao, and Bingzhou's Administrator, Ru Sui, fortified their position, ready for retaliation. Pidi's attempts at reconciliation failed, and he ordered an assault. Besieged and starving, Kun's general, Long Jimeng, killed Qiao and Sui and surrendered.

Departing Jinyang, Kun carried the burden of unavenged disgrace and peril. He understood that virtue alone could not subdue the barbarians, yet he clung to the hope that sincere appeals might sway the balance. He sought to inspire his troops with fervent speeches, bemoaning their desperate situation, ready to assail the enemy's fortifications. However, his plans unraveled, and Pidi took him captive. Confronted with his imminent demise, Kun remained composed. He composed a poem for his Attendant Officer, Lu Chen:

*A jade of worth in hand, a Jing hill treasure.
Like Tai Gong, once Wei's fisherman.
Deng Shen, stirred, journeyed far to find me.
Lucky Bai Deng, quelled by the Marquis.
Chong Er had five sages, Xiao Bai his archer's hook.
To honor a lord as the Two Dukes, why fret over sects or enemies?
At night, I sigh on my pillow, yearning to wander with the learned.
Aged, I am—why no dreams of Zhou?
Who claims a sage, knowing fate, is carefree?
Confucius mourned a unicorn's capture, the Western Hunt for Kong Qiu's loss.
My task undone, the sun hurries west.
Time won't pause for me; I drift off like clouds.
The strong wind fells the hardy fruit, autumn strips the lush flowers.*

*On the narrow road, the great canopy leans, the spooked horses snap the twin yokes.
Can steel, forged a hundredfold, ever bend to encircle a finger?*

Kun's poetry was profound, shrouded in allegory, expressing his grief and distant contemplations. He reflected on historical episodes like the Banquet at Hongmen and the Standoff at Baideng, aiming to rouse Chen's resolve. Chen, lacking grand strategic insight, responded with simple verses, which left Kun disheartened. Kun dispatched another poem, eliciting Chen's reply, "The grand ambitions of past emperors are not for subjects to discuss."

Kun - a loyal servant of the Jin dynasty and a respected figure - was detained for months, inciting widespread outrage. The leader of Dai, Pilü Song, plotted with Kun's allies—Yanmen's Wang Ju and Rear General Han Ju—to secretly attack Pidi. However, Han Ju's daughter, a concubine to Pidi's son, revealed their plan. Pidi captured and executed Wang Ju, Pilü Song, and their associates.

In secret, Wang Dun urged Pidi to kill Kun. Pidi, wary of insurrection, fabricated an imperial edict to arrest Kun. When Kun heard of Dun's unheralded envoy, he said to his son, "If Chuzhong's envoy arrives in silence, it portends my doom. Life and death are destined, yet I lament not avenging our disgrace, not being able to face my ancestors in death." Overwhelmed with sorrow, he wept. Pidi then executed Kun by strangulation at the age of forty-eight.¹ Four people - Kun, his sons and nephews - perished.¹ The court, recognizing Pidi's might and his importance in the conflict against Shi Le, remained indifferent to Kun's fate.

In the third year [of Daxing] (320), Kun's ex-Attendant Gentleman of the Palace Writers, Lu Chen, Cui Yue, and others, submitted a plea for Kun, stating:

"Your subjects recognize that to govern a nation, one must enforce clear laws and punishments; to establish policies, one must secure the passes. Ministers, vested with power over life and death, must rectify the wrong and deter betrayal. We witnessed the late Minister of Works, Marquis of Guangwu, Kun, during Emperor Hui's troubled reign, amidst factional conflicts, serving the imperial family with integrity and zeal. He led both Chinese and barbarians, faced arrows and stones; he executed Shi Chao, captured Lü Lang. He stabilized the state and restored the imperial carriage; Kun's contributions were vast, a testament to his loyalty.

Later, as the Inspector of Bing Province, Duke Teng of Dongying relocated to Linzhang, as Jin lay desolate, the people of Taiyuan and Xihe moved to the Three Wei. Kun, inheriting the troubles of Bing, found it sparsely populated upon assuming office. Amidst danger, on harsh terrain, he united the distressed and pacified the barbarians. In time, both public and private sectors flourished. When the capital was overrun, rebels roamed, and society collapsed. Kun, eschewing comfort and safety, could have closed Bing's gates, hoarded supplies, and sought support. But with unwavering loyalty and integrity, he deemed it dishonorable for an emperor to suffer humiliation while he lived in comfort. He traversed mountains and rivers to campaign. When Tuge exploited the power vacuum, Jinyang fell, and Kun's parents were killed, his family nearly annihilated. Had Kun chosen

¹ According to Lu Chen and Cui Yue's plea in the subsequent paragraphs, it appears that the victims included Liu Kun, his three sons, and two nephews, amounting to a total of six individuals. The mention of four individuals here seems to be an error on the part of the historian.

self-preservation, the sacred dynasty might have spared him punishment and his clan's destruction.

After Yilu's failure, disorder ensued, and Jin's people scattered; Kun welcomed the displaced at Pingcheng. General Ji Dan believed these long-isolated Jin people were beyond the reach of law and employment. Kun, however, showed them righteousness. Had he followed Dan's advice, prioritizing survival, he would have remained safe in Bing, not perishing in Yan, Ji. Kun, charged with a region, believed he couldn't maintain principles without justification, nor shoulder the great responsibility, hence he stayed among the Three Excellencies. When Your Majesty took the throne, he offered his resignation, his petitions heartfelt. He dispatched his Attendant Gentleman, Ji Dan, with his seal and ribbon to the capital, coinciding with Pidi's envoy Rong Shao's departure. Pidi, perceiving Kun as a royal official, feared losing control and envied Kun's renown. Sensing peril, Kun wished to relocate his family to the capital. If summoned to battle, he would serve; if Pidi turned hostile, his family might escape harm. He instructed Ji Dan to request an imperial decree for their safe passage. But when Wang Cheng escaped Pingyang, reporting Prince Bao of Nanyang had assumed a title in Longyou, strong and advancing to Guanzhong, Pidi harbored ambitions, delayed Rong Shao, and planned to dispatch envoy Bian Miao to Bao. Fearing Dan's journey south would reveal his intentions, Pidi blocked the passage. Kun's sincere efforts were thwarted.

Pidi, with a brother lost and an heir young and feeble, sought to usurp the country during the mourning period. Betraying the nation and overstepping family bounds, he feared ancestral wrath and thus conspired to rebel, intending to harm his cousins Lin and Mobo to seize control. Pidi's close associates warned Lin and Bo, who resisted; Pidi narrowly escaped. People presumed Pidi dead and rallied behind Kun. Had Kun desired to harm Pidi, capturing him would have been effortless.

As their relationship deteriorated, Pidi wished to relocate the Hu and Jin to Shanggu. Kun objected, counseling Yanci near the court. Pidi ignored the advice, bringing disaster upon Kun, his three sons, and his two nephews—all were lost. Facing death, Kun acknowledged Pidi's spite and confided in us, 'I've received the country's favor, yet I've failed to repay it. My abilities and strategies were insufficient, leading to this misfortune. But who escapes death? Life and death are destined. My only regret is not demonstrating my loyalty here and not repaying His Majesty with my earnestness.' His heartfelt words stirred us deeply.

Pidi, after killing Kun, falsely accused him of coveting sacred regalia and plotting treason. Kun, a man beyond the petty and the ignorant, held no fear of retribution for speaking truths. Amidst turmoil and a multitude of races, how could he conspire? Not even a simpleton would entertain such thoughts, much less a scholar renowned for loyalty and integrity!

Pidi professed to have dispatched Kun by a secret edict from Your Majesty. Yet, were Kun truly guilty of offense, Your Majesty would have meted out punishment openly, making an example of him in the marketplace and the court, for all to forsake, thereby making manifest, even to those of foreign customs, that a minister of the state should not be executed unjustly. For minor offenses fabricated under the guise of an imperial decree, retribution is warranted; for achievements claimed through the usurpation of imperial authority, no merit can absolve. The very foundation of the realm's continuity or demise

hinges upon this principle; the opening and shutting of the kingdom's gates is a matter that cannot be overlooked. Yet Pidi, with neither restraint nor regard, indulged in chaos and wanton slaughter, misappropriating the royal command, inflicting cruel death upon a principal minister, dashing the hopes of Xia, and corrupting the statutes of the royal household. Is this to be endured, and if so, what then is beyond endurance? Should the august court yet choose to forbear, not clarifying the overarching statutes, then those who are unruly, emulating Pidi's example, will take lives at their discretion, dispensing with likes and dislikes as they see fit. What means of censure will Your Majesty then employ?

To break the charge and weary the foe, only the generals who have triumphed in battle are preserved; to eradicate tyranny and quell disorder, solely the ministers endowed with sagacity and stratagem are requisite. Hence, the ancient adage proclaims, 'When fierce beasts prowl the mountains, the humble herbs are left ungathered,' a truth not lightly spoken. From the regions north of the Yellow River to the lands south of You and Bing, only Kun stood as a bulwark against the malevolent. Upon Kun's demise, malefactors exulted, their celebratory drums resounding unchecked across the central realms. This, verily, is the cause of profound lamentation among both the Han and the barbarians, from the greatest to the least.

We implore Your Majesty, with your discerning wisdom, charged with the dynasty's resurgence, as you establish laws and punishments to govern nations. Yet, the injustice against Kun remains profound, his grievance unaddressed, the court silent, the truth unexamined. The three elders of Hu Pass argued the case of Wei's crown prince, Gu Yong and Liu Xiang defended Chen Tang's merits; they distinguished between merit and crime below, enlightening the sovereign above. Our ancestors enjoyed extraordinary favor; serving within the jade curtains, emerging from the cinnabar chambers, we have not shouldered the burden, nor extended our influence, revolving around Kun, attending to matters from beginning to end. Therefore, we follow the righteousness of past ministers, present the complete account, dare to inform from above, look up, hoping the sacred dynasty will mercifully order a thorough investigation."

The Crown Prince's Attendant Gentleman, Wen Jiao, petitioned on behalf of Kun, leading to the emperor's edict: "The late Grand Commandant, Marquis of Guangwu, Liu Kun, was loyal and upright in supporting the dynasty - a true servant of the royal house. Faced with misfortune, his ambitions and honesty unrealized, I deeply lament his passing. Previous military engagements precluded the observance of mourning and sacrifices. Now, let mourning and sacrifices be conducted in Youzhou according to tradition." He was posthumously appointed as Palace Attendant and Grand Commandant, and given the posthumous title Min (the compassionate one).

In his youth, Kun was imbued with a spirit of ambition and a talent for diplomacy, adept at forging alliances with those superior to him, albeit prone to a touch of vainglory. He counted among his friends Zu Ti of Fanyang. Upon hearing of Ti's elevation, Kun penned letters to his kin and confidants, stating, "I rest upon my arms, eager to suspend the traitorous barbarians from the gallows, ever fearful lest Zu should outpace me in wielding the whip." Thus aligned were their aspirations. Besieged in Jinyang by barbarian horsemen, with the city's plight growing dire and strategies wanting, Kun took to the tower under the cloak of moonlight and let out a piercing whistle. This melancholy sound reached the ears of

the foe, stirring them to a profound sigh of lament. At midnight, he played the barbarian flute, evoking tears and heaving sighs from the foe, their hearts torn with longing for their homelands. With the approach of dawn and the flute's lament anew, the besiegers abandoned their siege and fled.

His son, Qun, succeeded him.

Liu Qun

Qun, courtesy name Gongdu, was named heir apparent of Marquis of Guangwu in his youth. With his father in Jinyang, he weathered chaos and led troops in campaigns. His prudence and decisiveness endeared him to his men. After Kun's death at Pidi's hands, Kun's men, Lu Chen and others, rallied behind Qun under Mobo.

Wen Jiao repeatedly stated in his memorials: "My nephew Liu Qun, my brother-in-law Cui Yue, Lu Chen, and others stand with Mobo, looking south. They have literary talent and deserve better. Call them, and Your Majesty's grace in restoring them will be unparalleled." In Xiankang's second year (336), Emperor Cheng called for Qun and the others. Yet Mobo's brothers, coveting their skills, cited dangerous paths for not releasing them.

When Shi Jilong crushed Liaoxi, Qun, along with Chen and Yue, were captured by the barbarians. Jilong, respectful, made Qun Prefect of the Palace Writers. After Ran Min's fall, Qun was killed. Le and Jilong had many officials and scholars executed. Only a few rose to high ranks and lived, such as Pei Xian of Hedong, Shi Pu of Bohai, Zheng Xi of Xingyang, Xun Chuo of Yingchuan, Fu Chang of Beidi, and over ten others, including Qun, Yue, and Chen.

Liu Yu

Yu, courtesy name Qingsun, was eloquent and adept. He and Kun, both nephews of the Imperial Secretary Guo Yi, were well-known at the time. In the capital, it was said, "Luminaries of Luoyang: Qingsun, Yueshi." Summoned to the Secretariat, Yu and his brothers scorned Sun Xiu. When Prince Lun of Zhao ascended, Sun Xiu, gaining power, ousted them. Yu's sister, wed to Lun's heir Fu, opposed Xiu, prompting Yu's reinstatement as Gentleman of the Household Cavalry. When Prince Jiong of Qi assumed regency, Yu was made Gentleman of the Palace Secretariat.

During the rebellion of Prince Yue of Donghai and Prince Xiao of Fanyang, Yu was appointed Administrator of Yingchuan. When Prince Yong of Hejian dispatched Liu Qiao to confront Xiao at Xuchang, a false edict was issued:

"Administrator Liu Yu of Yingchuan, conspiring with Prince Xiao of Fanyang, disobeys imperial orders, forms factions, plunders counties, and gathers troops. The Liu brothers, kin by marriage to the Prince of Zhao, have long abused their power. Deceptive and lawless, they have long merited death. Previously spared by amnesty, they retained their lives. These scoundrels, unrestrained, grow more wicked by the day. They have placed Gou Xi in Yanzhou,

cutting off imperial commands.

Hong, General of the Southern Garrison, Prince Shi of Pengcheng, General of Southern Pacification, and Zhun, General of Eastern Conquest, are to join Qiao at Xuchang. Now, we dispatch Right General Zhang Fang as Supreme Commander, with General who Establishes Might, Lü Lang, and Administrator of Yangping, Diao Mo, leading 100,000 troops to Xuchang to eliminate the Yu brothers. Ignoring this order will lead to the execution of the offender's entire family to the fifth degree. Whoever kills the Yu brothers and presents their heads will be made a Marquis of a county with 3,000 households and granted 5,000 bolts of silk."

Following Xiao's defeat, Yu retreated to Hebei with him. In Ye, Xiao appointed Yu General of Barbarian Conquest and Administrator of Wei Commandery. After Xiao's death, Prince Yue of Donghai intended to summon Yu, yet some cautioned, "Yu is still greasy; he'll stain others." Yue greeted Yu with suspicion. Yu meticulously examined the military rosters, granaries, livestock, armaments, and the lay of the land and waterways, memorizing everything. In those days, the state was entangled in warfare. At every council, from Pan Tao down, none knew how to respond. When Yu spoke with Yue, his sharp mind and eloquence caught Yue's attention, making him lean in to listen. Struck by Yu's acumen, Yue promptly made him his Left Chief Clerk.

Yue relied on Yu as his principal counselor. With halls teeming with visitors and desks heaped with documents, clerks dispatched thousands of papers daily. Yu, laboring into the night, won universal admiration. His directives were fluid, his responses comprehensive, and he was compared to Chen Zun. Within Yue's retinue, three were celebrated: Pan Tao for his immense talent, Liu Yu for his enduring talent, and Pei Miao for his unblemished talent. Yue's executions of Miu Bo, Wang Yan, and others were machinations of Yu. Yan's beloved consort, Lady Jing, was seized by Yu before Yan's body was cold. Before Yu could claim her, Wang Jun, an Attendant Officer of the Grand Tutor, laid claim to her. Imperial Censor Fu Xuan reported the dispute, and Yue dismissed Jun without reproaching Yu. Yu persuaded Yue to dispatch Kun to secure Bingzhou, cementing Yue's authority in the north.

Before Luoyang's downfall, Yu succumbed at forty-seven to a carbuncle on his finger. Posthumously designated General of Agile Cavalry, he was ennobled as Marquis of Dingxiang for his contributions and bestowed the honorific title "Zhen."

His son, Yan, succeeded him.

Liu Yan

Yan, courtesy name Shiren, first served as an aide to the Grand Commandant, then became a Gentleman of the Imperial Secretariat. He resigned to mourn his father, and after the mourning, he took up his father's title. The Grand Tutor, Prince Yue of Donghai, made him a Registrar. He climbed the ranks to Gentleman of the Crown Prince's Household and Yangping's Administrator. He fled from Luoyang to Kun, rising to General Who Assists the State and Administrator of Wei Commandery. As Kun faced Shi Le's threat, Yan, now General of the Household of the North and Yanzhou's Inspector, led a thousand brave men from

Linqiu. He decapitated Wang Sang, defeated Zhao Gu, and swelled his ranks by 7,000. When Shi Le attacked, Yan struck back, pushing him to retreat. Emperor Yuan made him Commander, Rear General, and granted him credentials. Later, besieged by Shi Jilong, Yan called for help from Shao Xu and Duan Yang. Yang's arrival made Jilong withdraw. Yan joined forces with Yang at Yanci, only to be killed there.

Yan's younger brother, Yin, fell to Wuhuan raiders while leading troops for Kun. Another brother, Yi, initially the Grand Tutor's aide, was killed along with Kun. Yi's siblings, Qi and Shu, and Kun's son Qun, first sided with Mobo, then Shi Jilong. Qi, as Jilong's Director of the Imperial Secretariat, returned home where Emperor Mu named him Front General and Palace Attendant. In the 9th year of Yonghe (353), Qi joined Central Army General Yin Hao's northern campaign, met defeat by Yao Xiang, and died in battle. Shu, once Jilong's Palace Attendant, followed Qi home and was appointed General of Agile Cavalry.



Zu Ti

Zu Ti, courtesy name Shizhi, was from Qiu in Fanyang. His lineage was steeped in officialdom, drawing a stipend of 2,000 *shi* [of grain], a venerable name in the northern lands. His father, Wu, had been a secretary at the Jin prince's court and Administrator of Shanggu.

Ti, orphaned young with five siblings, found his brothers Gai and Na to be of notable talent and promise. Ti himself, frank and open, paid little heed to manners, remaining unlettered at fourteen or fifteen. His elder brothers fretted over this. Yet Ti was magnanimous, a man of honor. In the countryside, he would dispense grain and cloth to the needy in his brothers' names, winning the esteem of kith and kin. In time, Ti mastered the texts and histories, ancient and current. His travels took him to the capital, where his abilities were acknowledged.ⁱⁱ He settled in Yangping. At twenty-four, he sat the imperial examination for a magistracy but failed, despite dual recommendations from the Colonel Director of Retainers.

Ti then served as the principal clerk of Sizhou, alongside Liu Kun, the Minister of Works. They became fast friends, sharing living quarters. One night, a rooster's crow roused them. Ti nudged Kun, declaring, "This bodes not ill." They rose and danced. Ti and Kun both possessed a hero spirit. In discussions of affairs of the world, they would rise from their seats in the dead of night and say to each other, "Should chaos ripple through the four seas and heroes rise, we must steer clear of each other on the Central Plains."

Ti was a registrar for the Grand Marshal, Prince Jiong of Qi, then served as a libationer for Prince Ai of Changsha. He was later prompted to principal clerk, and became an attendant of the Crown Prince and a lieutenant in the Household for the Prince of Yuzhang. During Emperor Hui's Northern Expedition, the imperial forces were defeated at Dangyin, retreating to Luoyang. As the emperor journeyed west to Chang'an, regional lords like Prince Xia of Fanyang, Prince Lue of Gaomi, and Duke Mo of Pingchang competed for Ti's allegiance, but he declined their invitations. Ti then advised Prince Yue of Donghai as a

military strategist and Administrator of Jiyin, resigning upon his mother's death.

With the capital in turmoil, Ti led his kin and a band of faithful followers to the Huai and Si rivers, transporting the infirm in his carriage, walking alongside, and sharing his medicine, clothes, and supplies. His ingenuity and leadership won him the reverence of young and old alike, and they named him their chief. Upon reaching the Si port, Emperor Yuan named him inspector of Xuzhou. Later, Ti took on roles as a military advisor and libationer for the expeditionary force, taking up residence in Jingkou, Dantu.

Ti was perpetually consumed by the urge to revive his state's former glory, especially when it teetered on the edge of ruin. He surrounded himself with a cadre of stalwart and daring companions, whom he cherished as if they were his own kin. In the lean days that plagued Yangzhou, hunger drove many to plunder the affluent. Yet Ti would soothe and remind them, "Does this not echo our foray into Nantang?" And when the law ensnared them, Ti invariably stepped in to liberate them. Despite the tongues that wagged in disapproval, Ti's demeanor remained unflappable.

During this period, the emperor's focus was on quelling unrest in the south, leaving no room for a campaign to the north. Ti proposed, "The turmoil within the Jin dynasty stems not from a sovereign's abandonment of the Way, nor from the treachery of his subjects, but from the internecine strife amongst the princes. Their fratricide flung open the gates for barbarians to overrun the Central Plains. The people suffer their brutality yet yearn to resist. Your Majesty, grant me command of your forces, and the valiant and the noble across the provinces will heed the call. The faint-hearted will find their courage and rally to our cause. We shall restore the dignity of our nation.ⁱⁱⁱ Pray, ponder my counsel." The emperor responded by naming Ti the General of the Campaign for Martial Might and the Inspector of Yuzhou, endowing him with the salary for a thousand soldiers and three thousand bolts of cloth, yet providing no arms or armor. Ti was left to muster and arm his own troops. He orchestrated the resettlement of over a hundred of his kin's households across the Yangtze River. As they crossed, Ti struck his oars before his men in the middle of the river, swearing, "Should Zu Ti fail to purify the Central Plains and rejuvenate the state, then let me be as this mighty river, never to return!" His words stirred the hearts of all. They established their base in Jiangyin, forging weapons and amassing an army exceeding two thousand. Thus began their campaign.

Earlier, Liu Yan, the General of the Palace Gentlemen of the North, was embroiled in conflict with Shi Le. Refugees had formed their own bastions, with leaders like Zhang Ping and Fan Ya stationed in Qiao county. Yan appointed Zhang Ping as Inspector of Yuzhou and Fan Ya as Administrator of Qiao county. They were joined by over ten other leaders, such as Dong Zhan, Yu Wu, and Xie Fu, each commanding a modest band of followers, all reporting to Ping.

Ti, however, persuaded Fu to eliminate Ping. Under the guise of a meeting, Fu assassinated Ping and delivered his head to Ti. The emperor lauded Ti's deed and decreed that provisions be dispatched to his aid. But the vast distance meant the supplies failed to arrive, plunging Ti's forces into dire starvation. Undeterred, Ti seized Taiqiu, only to face a nocturnal assault by Fan Ya's forces. They stormed the fortress, halberds at the ready, shouting as they surged towards Ti's tent, throwing his army into disarray. Ti commanded his men to stand firm and designated Dong Zhao to counterattack, successfully repelling the

enemy. Ti and his men pursued the retreating forces.^{iv} Meanwhile, Zhang Ping's remnants regrouped with Fan Ya's troops for another onslaught on Ti.

There was also Chen Chuan, the castle leader of Pengbei, who styled himself the General of Ning and Shuo and the Administrator of Chenliu. Ti dispatched an envoy to solicit his support. Chuan responded by sending his general, Li Tou, with troops to Ti's aid. Bolstered by these reinforcements, Ti succeeded in taking Qiao town.

Initially, when Fan Ya controlled Qiao, Ti found himself at a disadvantage and reached out to Wang Han, the Southern General of the Household Troops, for assistance. In response, Han dispatched Huan Xuan with soldiers to bolster Ti. Following Ti's successful capture of Qiao, Xuan and his forces withdrew. Upon learning of these events, Shi Jilong mustered his troops and laid siege to Qiao. Once again, Han sent Xuan to Ti's aid. The news of Xuan's impending arrival prompted Jilong to abandon the siege and retreat. Xuan remained to aid Ti in quelling the resistance of various strongholds that continued to defy submission.

Li Tou exhibited valor in his clash with Fan Ya, earning distinction on the battlefield. At this juncture, Ti came into possession of Ya's splendid horse. Tou coveted it but hesitated to voice his longing. Perceptive of his wish, Ti graciously bestowed the horse upon him. Tou's gratitude ran deep, and he often expressed, "To serve such a lord would leave me without a single regret in death." When Chuan learned of Tou's allegiance to Ti, he was incensed and had Tou executed. In response, Tou's comrade Feng Chong and his four hundred followers defected to Ti. Enraged further, Chuan dispatched General Wei Shuo to plunder various counties in Yuzhou, seizing children, women, carts, and horses. Ti countered by sending General Wei Ce to engage them at the Gu River, successfully recovering all captives and restoring them to their homes, demonstrating impartiality in his ranks. Chuan, stricken with fear, allied with Shi Le.

Ti advanced against Chuan, prompting Shi Jilong to mobilize fifty thousand soldiers for Chuan's aid. Ti outwitted Jilong, who, in defeat, ravaged Yuzhou during his retreat. Jilong reassigned Chuan to Xiangguo, leaving Tao Bao and others to defend Chuan's stronghold, taking position at the West Keep. Ti dispatched Generals Han Qian and others to secure the East Keep. Within the same fortress, the enemy routinely used the south gate to pasture their livestock. Ti's forces engaged from the east gate, and the conflict raged for forty days.

Ti devised a ruse, filling cloth sacks with dirt to resemble bags of rice, which over a thousand men hoisted to the keep. A few carried genuine rice, feigning exhaustion and resting by the road. When pursued by the enemy, they abandoned the sacks and fled. The enemy, seizing the rice, presumed Ti's soldiers were well-provisioned, while their own ranks starved, sapping their morale.

Shi Le sent General Liu Yetang with a thousand donkeys laden with supplies to reinforce Tao Bao. Ti dispatched Han Qian, Feng Tie, and others to intercept them at the Bian River, capturing the entire contingent. Bao, under cover of darkness, retreated to Dongyan city. Ti stationed Qian in Fengqiu to coerce Bao's surrender, while Feng Tie took control of both keeps, and Ti himself took position in Yongqiu. He repeatedly dispatched forces to cut off Shi Le, who found himself increasingly cornered. Ti's cavalry scouts often captured individuals from Puyang, whom Ti treated with magnanimity before sending them home, earning the local populace's appreciation. In gratitude, five hundred households surrendered to Ti. Le sent ten thousand of his finest cavalry to counter Ti, but they too were vanquished, with

many deserting to join Ti's ranks.

During this period, Zhao Gu, Shangguan Si, Li Ju, Guo Mo, and others were embroiled in mutual deception and trickery. Ti dispatched envoys to mediate, cautioning them about the repercussions of their strife. In time, they all acquiesced to Ti's leadership. Ti held the common folk in high regard, regardless of their humble origins or scant interactions with him. He extended kindness and respect, and consequently, Jin's influence solidified south of the Yellow River. Fortress owners along the river, with sons held hostage at the Hu camp, were coerced into obeying the enemy. Yet, they frequently staged feigned attacks on Ti, signaling their reluctance to fully align with the Hu. Local castle leaders, appreciative of Ti, kept him informed of any dubious activities among the Hu.

Through these measures, Ti amassed spoils and vanquished foes. He promptly rewarded even the slightest contributions. Living modestly himself, he promoted agriculture and sericulture, shunned the pursuit of wealth, and his kin toiled in the fields and gathered firewood. He ensured the proper burial of the deceased and upheld ancestral rites, actions that deeply resonated with the populace. At a grand assembly with wine, the venerable among those seated shed tears and declared, "We are aged! To once again behold our parents, what grievance could we harbor in death?" They then raised their voices in song, proclaiming, "Fortunate indeed are the remnants who escape captivity, to meet once more with benevolent forebears under the bright heavens. With dark wine, we dispel our toils and relish the sweet gourd; how then shall we not extol this grace with song and dance?" Thus did he capture the hearts of the people. Liu Kun extolled his virtues in missives to kith and kin. An imperial edict elevated him to the rank of General of the Western Garrison.

Shi Le, hesitant to venture into Henan, opted instead to refurbish the tomb of Ti's mother in Chenggao County and penned a letter to Ti proposing the establishment of a marketplace. Ti left the letter unanswered, yet he permitted the market's operation and reaped tenfold profits, bolstering both public and private coffers, with the ranks of soldiers and horses swelling by the day. At this juncture, Ti was poised to advance and sweep through the Ji and Shuo regions across the river. The court appointed Dai Ruosi as commander, a choice that troubled Ti. Though Ruosi hailed from Wu and possessed talent and renown, he lacked comprehensive knowledge and strategic foresight. Furthermore, Ti had already vanquished the impediments and claimed Henan's territories. Ruosi's arrival, with his dignified and refined air, caused Ti considerable unease. Hearing of Wang Dun's frictions with Liu Kai and others, Ti feared internal strife would thwart his grand ambitions.

Beset by worry and illness, Ti relocated his family to the base of the Great Wood Mountain in Ru'nan. The Central Plains populace believed Ti should press forward and seize Wulao, yet he risked his family's safety instead. Counsel against this move fell on deaf ears. Though beset by sorrow and frustration, Ti's commitment to progress never waned. He undertook the construction and fortification of Wulao city, which stood against the northern banks of the Yellow River and bordered Chenggao to the west, its presence discernible from afar. Concerned about the lack of southern defenses and potential enemy assaults, Ti instructed his nephew Ji, Administrator of Runan, Zhang Chang, Administrator of Ruyang, and Zhou Hong, the interior minister of Xincai, to erect a stronghold. However, before the fortress's completion, Zu Ti was struck by grave illness.

Previously, Hua Tan and Yu Chan sought the foresight of the soothsayer Dai Yang, who

prophesied, "Zu Yuzhou will perish in the ninth month." A comet streaked across the skies of Yuzhou, an omen observed by many. Chen Xun of Liyang had also forewarned, "A great general from the northwest shall fall." Ti too witnessed the comet and declared, "It heralds my end! Just as I am on the cusp of pacifying Hebei, the Heaven conspire to slay me. This bodes ill for the nation."

Ti passed away in Yongqiu at the age of fifty-six. The denizens of Yuzhou grieved as though they had lost their own progenitors. The communities of Qiao and Liang erected temples in his honor.^v In death, he was conferred the title of General of Chariots and Cavalry. Wang Dun had long harbored insurgent aspirations, yet Ti's presence had deterred him. Only with Ti's demise did Dun find the liberty to act on his desires. Ti's younger brother, Yue, assumed command of Ti's forces. He has a separate biography. Ti had an elder brother named Na.

Zu Na

Na, courtesy name Shiyen, was a man of integrity and conduct, a paragon of virtue and decorum, gifted with a lucid eloquence. His prose flowed with profound significance and grace. He was extremely filial. Orphaned and impoverished in his youth, he would toil over the stove and conduct rites, all to sustain his mother. The General Who Pacifies the North, Wang Dun, heard of this and bestowed upon him two maidservants, elevating him to the position of Attendant Gentleman of the Central Secretariat. Some mocked him, jesting, "A now worth twice that of a maid." Na retorted, "Why then should Baili Xi be deemed worth less than the skins of five rams?"

His path led him next to serve as a Gentleman of the Three Ducal Ministers in the Masters of Writing, and he rose in time to become a Central Regular Attendant of the Crown Prince. Throughout his career, Na was a force of reform, tirelessly amending and enhancing the workings of the state.

In the time when Prince Jiong of Qi unfurled the banner of revolt, Prince Lun of Yue, with swift justice, clapped in irons both Jiong's kin, Prince Shi of Beihai, and the kin of Dong Zuo from Hongnong, his brother Ai, who had cast their lots with the rebel cause. Their heads were poised to drop. Yet Na, with a plea that cut through the clamor for blood, stayed the executioner's hand, and mercy was their unexpected boon.

Later, Na ascended to the ranks of Protector of the Army and the Grand Tutor to the Crown Prince, his deeds crowned with the title Duke of Jinchang. Sensing the stirrings of turmoil in Luoyang, he turned his gaze to the sanctuary of the southeast.

Na enjoyed playing chess, a pastime that drew the remark from Wang Yin, "Yu [the Great] treasured each fleeting moment and was not one to dally with games."

Na retorted, "I turn to chess to cast away my sorrows."

Yin spoke thus, "I have learned that the ancients, when faced with adversity, found their purpose in their deeds, and if not in success, then in their discourse. This was the way of old, and it ought to be the same today. Before the Jin, there were no chronicles, and the world knew chaos; the old ways were lost. You, who have come of age in the five capitals and wandered the four quarters, have seen the ebb and flow of our kin. Why not document these

times? Ying Zhongyuan penned 'Fengsu Tong,' Cui Zizhen composed 'Political Discourses,' Cai Boyi authored 'Exhortation to Learning,' and Shi You crafted 'Urgent Exhortations.' These texts endure, granting their scribes eternal voice. Though I lack their genius, my aspirations are no less lofty. Thus, I toil without rest, that I might not vanish from this world in silence. Moreover, the annals of our nation chart the course of triumphs and tribulations, uniting fragments of the past. This endeavor could be ours together; why must one resort to chess to escape sorrow?"

Na exhaled deeply and confessed, "It is not that your path displeases me, but that I am wanting in vigor."

He then addressed the emperor, proclaiming, "Even the smallest of states in ancient times kept historians, much less a grand office such as ours. How can we fail to establish one?" He commended Yin to the throne, extolling him as a man of purity and brilliance, upright in character, with a mind both deep and agile in its learning. Well-versed in the breadth of the Five Classics and myriad histories, Yin was, above all, a devoted scholar and adherent of virtue. The emperor turned to his Army Advisor Zhong Ya for counsel. Ya responded, "While the one Na champions possesses the aptitude for historiography, he has not yet ripened to the task of its foundation." With this, the discussion was laid to rest. Yet, it was Na who sowed the seeds for the office of the historian.

Na's half-brother Yue, born of the same mother as Ti, shared a bond of particular closeness with him. Na, however, born of another mother, harbored a quiet discontent. In a clandestine appeal to the emperor, Na warned, "Yue carries the seed of discord; contained, he may be controlled. Yet, close to the emperor's ear and armed with authority, he is fated to breed turmoil." Some whispered that Na's grievance sprang from envy, for Yue basked in favor and stood high in rank, unlike himself. In a bold move, Na laid bare his petition for Yue to see. The rift widened, and Yue came to view Na with the eyes of an adversary. The court's embrace of Na cooled, and he found himself cast aside. Once sidelined, Na immersed himself in the world of letters, seeking refuge in the study of literature and history. When Yue's rebellion unfurled, the court and the common folk voiced their regret, acknowledging that Na's foresight had pierced the veil.

Wen Jiao, who esteemed Na as a luminary of his own hometown and political circle, paid him due reverence. As Jiao's star rose, he championed Na's standing and virtues, paving the way for Na's elevation to the dignified post of Grand Master of Splendid Happiness.

Na once queried Mei Tao, "What is your verdict on the monthly assessments instituted in your region?"

Tao replied, "Should it extol virtue and censure vice, it stands as a commendable practice."

Na countered, "It serves no good."

In that moment, Wang Yin, also in attendance, interjected, "The 'Book of Documents' decrees, 'Triennial reviews to guide promotions and demotions.' How can one reconcile monthly allocations of praise and blame?"

Tao retorted, "That is the law of the officials. The monthly review is but a local custom."

Yin argued, "The *Book of Changes* states, 'A household that amasses good deeds will surely reap ample fortune, while one that gathers misdeeds will surely encounter calamity.' Does this not extend to officials? Virtue and vice must accrue over time to manifest. What

distinction lies between the public and private sphere? The elders proclaimed, 'When a just soul perishes, it is the woe of their forebears; when a cruel being thrives, it is the legacy of their ancestors.' Such truths emerge over spans, not within the span of a month. Should we insist on monthly scrutiny, then even Yan Hui, amidst hunger, could be branded a glutton; and Zhi, though a thief, when guiding the young, might be hailed as honorable. Sowing at dawn and reaping at dusk, the nature of good and evil remains unripe."

In those days, Mei Tao and Zhong Ya engaged in various debates, with Na often confounding them, declaring, "You Ruying scholars are sharp as awls; we from Youji are blunt as mallets. With my crude mallet, I shall hammer your sharp awls, and they shall all be crushed."

"There exist divine awls no mallet can crush," Tao and Ya both claimed.

"If divine awls exist, so too must divine mallets," Na rejoined.

Ya found no words to counter.

Na eventually died at home.

Comment

The historian notes: Liu Kun, in his youth, displayed no remarkable traits. He wandered through Jia Mi's hall, borrowing chopsticks under [Si]Ma Lun's canvas. Could it be said that in those days, he was truly among the frivolous and sly? Zu Ti - he scattered grains to aid the destitute and danced at the crowing of the rooster in the dark. He longed for the signal fires of the Central Plains, bearing the manifold trials of the heavenly path. Was his deep-seated ambition merely to be numbered among those who hungered for turmoil?

When authority fell, the cosmic pivot slipped, emperors were cast out in succession, succumbing to the indignity of a swine's life. The six tribes of barbarians laid waste to the realm, spreading the venom of the great serpent. In such times, the purest of silks darkened, the slackened bowstring found new resolve, each revealing their innate prowess and lofty spirit. Confronted by the era's demands, they were stirred to act within the upheaval, applying their vigor to the imperiled nation, braving the gales to demonstrate their valor. They reinforced their virtue, like the steadfast pine upholding its tenets, all securing their fame in their era with the tripartite office. The ancients proclaimed, "In disarray, the faithful and virtuous emerge." This is precisely their meaning.

Heaven did not smile upon Jin, as the barbarians awoke. Yueshi, solitary and besieged, faced the fierce assault of the whale and the giant salamander. He entrusted himself to a foreign tribe, and his end came in a cell. Alas, a fate most grievous! Shizhi, an agent of resurgence, succeeded in recapturing half of the Nine Provinces. Yet a calamitous comet signaled strife, and his chariot became unoccupied. Alas, such a pity!

Eulogy

In Jin lands where Fen River flows,
Yueshi stood, his valor to show.

With weapon as pillow, cloak cast aside,
For honor and loyalty, he'd not hide.
He struck a pact with barbarians far,
A distant alliance, under the star.
Yet treachery came, as Duan's deceit unfurled,
A weary path, in a turbulent world.

Mister Zu, fierce in his youthful glow,
Held principles high, would not stoop low.
Midstream he pledged to cleanse the vile,
And made the base neighbors reconcile.
A legacy left, to joy convert,
But heavens signaled an alert.
How cleanse the stain of national shame,
When celestial omens his downfall proclaim?

ⁱ In Wang Yin's *JS*, Kun was appointed as the Inspector of Bingzhou at the age of 35. According to this biography:

- In the first year of Yongjia (307), Kun was appointed as the Inspector of Bingzhou.
- Liu Kun was executed in the fifth month of the first year of Daxing (318).

If we accept the information from Wang Yin's account, Kun would have been 46 years old at the time of his death, not 48.

ⁱⁱ *TPYL516*:

Wang Yin's *JS* states:

[Zu Ti], together with his brother Yue, took their mother to Luoyang and established connections with influential figures. Ti's uncle, Cheng Xuanliang, and Xuanliang's brothers Wei and Shou, all served as clerks in the imperial government and held sway in Luoyang, further supporting their two nephews. Thus, they were granted clear passage through the official ranks. Initially, Ti served as the Registrar for the Governor of Sizhou, was recognized for his talent, and became an official under the Grand Marshal, the Prince of Qi, displaying the demeanor of a general and commander.

ⁱⁱⁱ *TPYL516*:

Wang Yin's *JS* states:

"[...] If Your Majesty can indeed appoint commanders to let individuals such as Ti take the lead with spear in hand, to redeem the nation's honor for the state above and to advocate for the common folk below, then the valiant men of the provinces and states will undoubtedly be inspired to rise, and the populace, long mired in misery, will welcome this resurgence with joy."

^{iv} *TPYL315*:

Wang Yin's *JS* states:

Zu Ti's forces faced extreme starvation and advanced to take the city of Shiquanqiu. Fan Ya dispatched over sixty men to infiltrate Ti's camp, who then drew their halberds and charged, shouting loudly towards Ti. Ti's troops, uncertain of the size of the attacking force, were on the verge of scattering in the night. Ti, doubting they faced a large force, urged

those around him to stand firm and counter the assault. Just then, Protector Dong Zhao arrived to join the fray, and together they repelled the intruders, who dispersed and retreated along the old path.

^v *TPYL336*:

Yuan Hong's "Inscription for Zu Ti" states:

Ti held the post of Inspector of Yuzhou. At the time of his death, as his coffin had yet to be returned, marauders encircled the city. With the city gates nearly breached and surrender imminent, five hundred valiant soldiers, gripping their halberds, wept in unison, "If not for Lord Zu, for whom else would we lay down our lives?" Rallying their courage, they charged in unison. Their armor clashing like thunder, they penetrated the enemy's stout ranks, and emerged victorious, shouldering their spears.



94. Chapter 64 Hermits and Recluses

The vastness of sky and soil, in their grandeur, captivates those who desire simplicity. The *Wen* and *Xi* [in the Book of Changes] delve into the mysteries of the universe, while the principles of integrity and solitude are embodied in the teachings of Confucius and Master Sun.

To be gentle and simple is the nature of man. Excess leads to decay of the spirit. The ancient sages embodied such virtues, transcending the mundane, nurturing their souls. Their words resounded beyond rivers and seas; their deeds marked the bustling world. They cleared their minds, stirred their clarity, hid their brilliance yet displayed their talents. They defined their ideals sharply, let go of wants to embrace the void. They shone like jade, stood like peaks. They followed the path of utmost joy, found pleasure in boundless peace. They moved forward without looking back, found calm in solitude. They protected themselves by perfecting their nature, avoiding sorrow and regret. The poet of *Kao Pan* sang of their merits.

Even when the Mandate of Heaven shaped institutions, when strife and penalties ceased, they kept their peace, their inner harmony. Rituals of invitation unfolded in their stone retreats, jade and silk were offered in private chambers. As the Monthly Ordinances prescribe, "In spring's third month, summon the good, esteem the wise." This is the mark of true nobility!

Since the Dianwu's fortune (Jin dynasty) began, numerous individuals have sought solitude. Qiao Yuanyan withdrew from the mundane, and Jiang Sijun praised the joys of the woods. They chose purity, casting off earthly ties, urging others by example. Now, we honor their noble qualities and enshrine them in our texts.

Sun Deng

Sun Deng, courtesy name Gonghe, hailed from Gong in Ji County. With no kin, he

dwelled in a cave on his county's northern mountain. In summer, he donned woven grass; in winter, his own hair was his cover. He found joy in the Book of Changes and the melody of a single-stringed *qin*, pleasing all listeners. Never did anger or bitterness touch him. Even cast into water to provoke ire, he emerged laughing.

Often, he roamed among the people. Houses he passed offered food and clothes; he accepted graciously yet left all behind upon his leave. At Mount Yiyang, a charcoal burner recognized his uncommon air. The burner spoke. Deng stayed mute.

Emperor Wen, hearing of him, sent Ruan Ji to visit him. Ji spoke, but no word returned. Ji Kang, too, walked with him for three years, inquiring of his aims to no avail, which left Kang sighing in dismay. At their parting, Kang pressed, "Master, have you naught to impart?" Deng answered, "Know you of fire? It gives light; unused, it's naught. Men have talents; unused, they're naught. To use light, one needs fuel to keep it bright. To use talents, one must see truth, keep repute. With talents aplenty but scant wisdom, worldly troubles are hard to dodge. Do you not see?"

Kang failed to grasp its meaning and later faced misfortune. He penned "The Bitterness of Solitude," lamenting, "Once beneath Liuxia, now dwarfed by Sun Deng." Some murmured that Deng's ties to Wei and Jin aroused suspicion, spurring his retreat. His end remains a mystery.

Dong Jing

Dong Jing, courtesy name Weinian, was a man of unknown origin. He entered Luoyang with Longxi officials, roamed with loose hair, reciting verses, often staying at the White Society. He begged in the market, taking only cloth scraps, shunning fine silks and cottons. Insults and harm never stirred his temper.

Sun Chu, a scribe of the Imperial Library, conversed with him at the Society, proposed to join him, but Jing declined. Chu wrote him, comparing their times to Yao and Shun's, questioning Jing's withdrawal when the Way was obscured. Jing replied in verse:

"Zhou's Way is lost, its songs hushed. Xia's rule wanes, virtues vanished. The sage looks back upon a world in strife, yet the writer finds peace. Is it not a joy to see the cosmos change? I am alone, unable to partake. Frivolity brings me no delight; I drink from pure streams, feast on noble ideals. Why should I choose exhaustion? Even the lowly see fish ensnared, birds trapped. Ancients kept their riches in spirit; plain cloaks brought no warmth, royal garb no splendor. They flowed like rivers, still as pools. Parrots talk, chimes ring – mere toys for the crowd. The phoenix unseen, unharmed; the hawk flies far, ready to perish. The carp hesitates, turns, then without water. Alas! Fish and birds, age-old, yet uncomprehending. But some enlightened, who probe deep mysteries, may see me and depart, frowning. All else is cheap, man alone is dear. In motion, Nine Provinces seem small, in stillness, the world vast."

Years passed, Jing vanished, leaving a stone slip and two poems. One read: "Heaven's Way, firm and simple; Earth's Body, true and dense. Great Simplicity, vast, unbounded, thus portrayed. In this age of rush, words supplant essence, the world misled. I depart this void, to

my natural home." The other: "Confucius, misunderstood, felt the unicorn's sorrow. Oh, unicorn! Why not retreat, to keep the truth?"

Xia Tong

Xia Tong, courtesy name Zhongyu, from Yongxing in Kuaiji, was orphaned young and raised his kin with filial piety. Close to his siblings, he gathered wood, foraged, returning home by night, sometimes catching insects and crabs by the sea. He excelled in talk and argument.

His kin pressed him to seek office, saying, "With your honesty, you could serve as a county magistrate or at court, surely gaining distinction. Why waste away in mountains or by the sea?" Tong, displeased, retorted, "Do you see me thus? In peace, I'd have counseled with Yuan Kai; in corruption, shared Qu Sheng's fate; in chaos, toiled in fields, suffered. To lower myself to county or court? Your words raise my hairs, bring sweat to my brow, set my heart aflame, my tongue to shrink, my ears to close." His words shamed them. Henceforth, Tong never met with his kin again.

During his mother's sickness, Tong administered her medicine, which allowed the family to come and see her. His uncle, who had conducted ancestral rites in Jingning Temple, called upon the female shamans, Zhang Dan and Chen Zhu. Both were of extraordinary beauty and wore splendid garments. They excelled in song and dance, and they possessed the ability to vanish from sight. As night fell, with the ringing of bells and the beating of drums, accompanied by the strains of string and wind instruments, Dan and Zhu brandished their swords and sliced their tongues, swallowed blades, and spewed flames. Enveloped in clouds and mist, their act was as enigmatic as it was brilliant, with bursts of light flashing like lightning.

Tong's cousins, eager for the spectacle, struggled to convince him. They concocted a ruse, saying, "Our uncle has shaken off his sickness, and there's rejoicing all around. We're going to offer our congratulations during his sacrificial rites. Will you come with us?" Tong agreed. As he entered, he was suddenly confronted with the sight of Dan and Zhu in the courtyard, dancing lightly, their laughter and movements ethereal, teasing and touching with a supernatural grace. Tong was startled and bolted, not through the gate, but by crashing through the fence to escape. Once back, he chastised them, "In the past, when lewd customs emerged, Duke Wen of Wei lamented them; when ill omens were seen, the upright would not even point at them; when Ji Huan received a woman from Qi, Confucius beat a hasty retreat; when Zilu encountered Xianan, he was filled with outrage. I have always regretted not having the resolution of Shu Xiang or the blindness of Hua Fu to avoid such scenes. How could you gentlemen welcome these sorceresses to frolic and carouse with you into the night, succumbing to wanton delight, surrendering to excess and debauchery, disturbing the proper relations between men and women, and tearing apart the fabric of purity and honor? Why?" He then retired to his bed, lay down with his hair in disarray, and fell silent. The kin, mortified, promptly dismissed Dan and Zhu and scattered.

When his mother grew gravely ill, Tong ventured to Luoyang's market for medicine. It

was the *shangsi* [third day] of the third month, and Luoyang's high and low gathered at the Floating Bridge, the way lit by carriages and candles. Tong was on a boat, drying his purchased herbs. Many notables approached, but he gave them no heed. Grand Commandant Jia Chong, intrigued, inquired of his identity. At first silent, when pressed, Tong declared, "I am Xia Zhongyu from Kuaiji."

Chong asked of his homeland's ways, and Tong spoke, "Its folk are gentle, kind, still honoring Great Yu's legacy. They live by Tai Bo's tenets, embodying righteousness, humility; they're strict as Yan Zun, virtuous as Huang Gong." Chong queried, "By the sea you dwell. Skilled with water, are you?" Tong replied, "Yes." He seized the oars, his boat leapt like a fish, sailed as a dolphin, soared as a bird. With bare hands, he caught creatures, even snatched long boat tails. Amidst tempestuous winds, waves, clouds, and mist, white fish leapt aboard. All marveled, Chong especially. He sought to enlist Tong for service, but Tong stayed silent.

Chong then mused, "Yao and Shun once sung. To sing with another, one must first solo, then harmonize. The ancients all sung. Can you sing a local tune?" Tong replied, "My ancestor dwelled on Mount Ji, enlightened many. At his passing, his grace widespread, a song 'The Longing Song' was born. Then Cao E, fourteen, of filial fame, surpassed Yue, Liang, Song women. Her father lost to the river, she cried skyward, plunged after him. United in death, they were buried. Her piety inspired 'The River Goddess.' Wu Zixu, loyal, unheeded by Wu's king, executed, cast to sea. His devotion birthed 'The Little Sea Song.' These I can sing." The crowd cheered, "Good!"

Tong stamped the boat, throat open, sang with fervor. Winds whipped up, rain gathered, lightning struck, thunder boomed. The crowd, frightened, sought to halt him. They said, "Without seeing him on the Luo River, how to believe he's real? 'The Longing Song' conjures Great Yu's visage. 'The River Goddess' brings tears, as if Lady Bo Ji stands before us. 'The Little Sea' evokes Zixu, Qu Ping beside us."

Chong aimed to dazzle with a display of his literary and martial entourage, seeking to capture his attention and earn his gratitude. He commanded the hoisting of crimson banners, mustered the flags for review, and segmented the cavalry into units, positioning the soldiers in orderly ranks. Shortly, the din of drums and horns filled the air, the sustained tones of the exotic reeds resonated, while chariots and horsemen wove through the thoroughfares. He also directed the company of courtesans, clad in sumptuous silks and resplendent with gold and jade, to encircle his boat thrice. Tong sat unperturbed, as if deaf to it all. Chong and the rest dispersed, remarking, "This Wu lad's heart is stone." Tong returned to Kuaiji, never to be heard from again.

Zhu Chong

Zhu Chong, courtesy name Jurong, hailed from Nan'an. From youth, he was of good character, serene and content. He was a lover of learning, yet lived in poverty, often toiling as a farmer. When a neighbor's calf went astray and mistakenly mingled with Chong's herd, he later found his own calf in the woods. Ashamed, the neighbor tried to return Chong's calf, but he declined it. When a cow damaged his crops, he fed it hay without ire. The cow's

owner, embarrassed, refrained from causing further disturbances.

In the fourth year of Xianning (278), an edict named him an Erudite, but Chong feigned sickness to decline the post. Another edict followed, " Officials of the Eastern Palace must be men of virtue, well-versed in the classics. We hereby appoint Chong as the Crown Prince's Right Attendant Officer." Hearing of summons, he would vanish into the mountains, leading some to compare him to Liang Guan. Chong dwelt near barbarian lands. The Qiang held him in high esteem as if he were a lord, and he treated them with equal respect and kindness, setting an example for the local population. On the roads, lost items remain untouched; in the villages, no villains are found; even venomous creatures and fierce beasts cause no harm. Chong passed away of old age.

Fan Can

Fan Can, courtesy name Chengming, hailed from Waihuang in Chenliu. He was the grandson of Han dynasty's Laiwu governor Dan. Can was renowned for his noble and upright character, inheriting Dan's integrity. He was well-read and had an excellent memory. Many sought his teaching, coming from near and far for his instruction. His demeanor was neither pretentious nor overly serious, yet all who met him accorded him great respect.

During the Wei era, he received numerous invitations from provincial offices, which he declined. In time, he took up a post as an administrative assistant and was later promoted to attendant officer. He was named an aide to the Grand Commandant and Gentleman of the Imperial Secretariat. Ultimately, he served as a commander to the General of Western Conquest, earning a commendable reputation in each role he assumed.

Under Emperor Xuan's regency, Can was elevated to Administrator of Wuwei. Upon his arrival in the commandery, he selected capable officials, established schools, and encouraged agriculture and sericulture. At that time, nomadic tribes often threatened the borders, yet Can fortified the defenses so effectively that the the enemy dared not invade, ensuring unobstructed trade with the Western Regions without the necessity of signal fires for alerts. The commandery prospered, abounding in wealth, which Can managed judiciously to discourage excess. He resigned his office due to his mother's advanced age. Given that the province was adjacent to hostile lands and Can's departure was perceived as leaving a vital position undefended, the imperial court disapproved and relegated him to the role of Prefect of Leguan.

Later, Can became a Gentleman in the Grand Preceptor's Household. His observance of mourning for his mother's passing was a testament to his filial devotion, and after the mourning period, he returned to his previous position. When Prince Fang of Qi was relegated to Jinyong, Can, dressed in mourning attire, paid his respects, stirring deep sorrow among the onlookers. During Emperor Jing's regency, he skipped an official gathering, but his reputation spared him from repercussions. Claiming illness, he remained at home and was later designated as an imperial attendant, dispatched to Yongzhou. Feigning mania, he kept silent and slept in his carriage, never setting foot on the ground. His sons and grandsons sought his counsel on crucial matters such as marriage and official appointments.

His tacit consent or his restless disapproval guided them.

In the Taishi era (265-274), as Emperor Wu reigned, Can's townsman Sun He, the Crown Prince's Attendant, recommended Can to the emperor, citing his virtue and prolonged illness. He proposed Can's travel to the capital for imperial medical aid, hoping for his recovery and benefit to the state. The emperor ordered local officials to treat Can, granting him a yearly salary of 2,000 *shi* [of grain] and a hundred bolts of silk for medical costs. Can's son Qiao, citing his father's grave illness, declined, but the emperor insisted.

Can died in Taikang's sixth year (285), at eighty-four, silent for thirty-six years, passing in his carriage. His eldest son was Qiao.

Qiao, courtesy name Bosun, was two when his grandfather, Xing, was dying. Xing stroked his head, mourning, "Alas, to not witness your coming years!" and left him his beloved inkstone. At five, learning the inkstone's tale from his grandmother, Qiao wept holding it. By nine, he yearned to study, speaking with eloquence among peers. Reaching adulthood, he studied with Jiang Guoming of Le'an. Liu Gongrong of Jiyin, discerning of talent, esteemed Qiao. Liu Yanqiu, his respected friend, remarked, "Fan Bosun is pure, harmonious, thoughtful. I seek flaws but find none." Li Quan, Grand Master of Splendor, debated Yang Xiong's merit over Liu Xiang. Qiao, valuing Xiang's timeless works, penned "A Comparison of Liu and Yang," too extensive to record here.

A devoted scholar, Qiao halted his studies to tend to his father Can, who feigned madness, remaining mute. After Can's demise, they remained in their hometown. Liu Yi, Colonel-Director of Retainers, argued in court, "Should Fan Wuwei's ailment be less grave, he'd rival Boyi and Shuqi. If his condition is true, he merits imperial pity. His son, long his father's caretaker, boasts a fine name and warrants official recognition."

In the Yuankang era (280-289), an edict called for the modest, selfless, and frugal, regardless of rank, to be considered for office. Wang Kun, a scribe of the Imperial Secretariat, proposed Qiao, stating, "Qiao embodies true virtue, high morality, deep Confucian wisdom, and a profound grasp of the classics. He leads a simple life, accepts poverty, and resides humbly. He exemplifies modesty, a beacon of virtue in a decadent age." At that time, Zhang Hua served as Minister of Education, and of the seventeen nominated, Qiao stood out. Chi Long, Assistant Minister of Personnel, scoured the land for hermit scholars, and Qiao was upheld by the Hengmen community into his twilight years. Offered the post of Le'an magistrate, he declined due to sickness. Thrice nominated for the Imperial Examination, he never passed. He was also recommended for his integrity, modesty, and austerity, yet never held office.

Initially, a local felled his tree on Winter Solstice's eve. Informed, Qiao feigned ignorance. The townsman, ashamed, returned the tree. Qiao chided him, "You sought only holiday firewood to honor your parents. Why the shame?" This showcased his knack for guiding hearts. Gao Jun, Waihuang magistrate, lauded him, "Rare is the gentleman unswayed by self-gain, but Fan Bosun stood unyielding and upright, his name unsullied by officialdom. His character is truly laudable!"

He passed away in the eighth year of the Yuankang (298) at the age of seventy-eight.

Lu Sheng

Lu Sheng, courtesy name Shushi, hailed from Dai Commandery. From his youth, he was known for his talent and uprightness, and he served as an assistant in the imperial library. At the beginning of the Yuankang era (291), he was appointed as the Prefect of Jiankang. Upon assuming office, he penned "On Rectifying Heaven," stating: "After the winter solstice, by erecting a sundial to track shadows, one can gauge the courses of the sun, moon, and stars. My observations show the sun and moon's journey to be near a hundred li, not a thousand; the stars, ten li, not a hundred." He presented a memorial to debate these findings with the eminent officials and scholars. "Should my logic hold," he contended, "we must amend the inaccuracies of our ancestors and set straight the chronicles of the cosmos. Should it prove unfounded, I shall bear the punishment for the transgression of deceit." Yet, his proposal received no response.

Once, predicting numerous calamities through his stellar readings, he claimed illness and resigned. Zhang Hua, the Director of the Palace Secretariat, sent his son to coax Sheng back into service, offering him posts such as Erudite and Gentleman of the Palace Secretariat, but he refused them all.

His writings were held in high regard by his contemporaries, yet were lost amidst the turmoil. Only his commentary on "The Debates of the Mohists" remains, its preface stating:

"Names serve to discern likeness and difference, to define right from wrong. They are the portal to moral tenets and the benchmarks for administration and reform. Confucius asserted, 'Names must be made correct. If names are not right, then words do not carry, and work does not come to fruition.' Mozi penned treatises and devised 'The Canon of Dialectics' to lay the groundwork of nomenclature. Hui Shi and Gongsun Long propagated his doctrines, elucidating and differentiating terms for all to comprehend. Albeit Mencius levied criticisms against Mozi, on matters of logical discourse and accurate terminology, he found accord with the Mohists. Xunzi, Zhuangzi, and others assailed the School of Names, yet their doctrines stood unaltered.

A name must possess form, and in examining form, naught surpasses the differentiation of hues, hence the discourse on hardness and whiteness. A name must be lucid, and lucidity is best attained through the concepts of being and non-being, hence the discourse on the precedence of existence and non-existence. 'Is' that is not 'is', 'can be' that cannot be, these are names bearing dual potentials. Alike yet distinct, distinct yet alike, this is termed debating likeness and unlikeness. Utmost likeness devoid of unlikeness, utmost unlikeness devoid of likeness, this is termed debating absolute likeness and absolute unlikeness. Likeness and unlikeness beget right and wrong; right and wrong beget fortune and misfortune. By debating a singular object, one can explore the ultimate in the world's blemishes and grandeur; this is the acme of naming.

From Deng Xi to Qin, scholars of names crafted works that were largely arcane. Subsequent scholars ceased to convey these teachings, and over the past five hundred years, they have vanished. 'The Debates of the Mohists' comprises upper and lower 'Canons,' each accompanied by 'Commentaries'—four texts total, surviving only as a collective. Now, I have paired the commentaries with the canons, appending them to each chapter, and have left

uncertainties as they stand. I have also compiled various miscellanies to form two chapters, 'Punishments' and 'Names,' briefly elucidating and indicating their purposes, to await the judgement of the discerning. Perchance those who revive the subtle and continue the discontinued may also find delight in this!"

Dong Yang

Dong Yang, courtesy name Zhongdao, hailed from Juyi in Chenliu. In the Taishi era's outset, he came to Luoyang, shunning personal ambition and renown. Upon Empress Yang's fall, Yang sought knowledge at the Imperial Academy. There, he entered the hall, bemoaning, "What end does this hall serve? Reading imperial pardons, I find traitors and grave offenders spared, yet the parricide remains unforgiven. This aligns with royal edicts. How do courtiers, officials justify their deeds under ceremony and ritual's guise, fueling disorder, upending nature's course? The realm is in profound disarray." He authored "Discourse on Non-Transformation" to decry such norms.

In the Yongjia era, Luoyang's northeast at Buguangli witnessed a sinkhole from which two geese emerged. The gray one took flight, the white one grounded. Yang heard of this and lamented, "Here, Zhou forged a pact with the Di. The gray goose symbolizes the barbarians, the white the state. This portends the times." He counseled Xie Kun and Ruan Fu, "The Book of Changes holds true wisdom in discerning the divine. Bear this in heart." He then ventured to Shu with his spouse, their fate thereafter unknown.

Huo Yuan

Huo Yuan, courtesy name Xiuming, hailed from Guangyang in the Yan state. He was a man of lofty ambition and resolve. When his uncle faced execution, Yuan defended him in court, enduring the officials' cruel tortures, and ultimately saved his life. At eighteen, he joined the Imperial Academy to study rites and ceremonies, opting to stay on for further learning. The nobility's sons revered him, seeking his company, and arranged nocturnal meetings to avoid unwarranted attention, for he was of lowly birth. His father's friend, Liu Dai from the same county, intended to recommend him but fell ill and perished before he could. On his deathbed, Dai enjoined his son Shen, "Huo Yuan dedicates himself to the Way, destined for greatness. You must recommend him." Yuan eventually returned to his hometown.

Xu Meng of Gaoyang, aware of Yuan's repute, aimed to make him Inspector of Youzhou, but his chief secretary dissuaded him from leaving his post. Meng was left with disappointment and regret.

Yuan withdrew to a mountain for years, teaching over a hundred disciples. The Prince of Yan sent sheep and wine monthly. In the Yuankang era, Liu Shen, now Grand Preceptor, proposed Yuan's elevation to second rank, but the Minister of Works resisted. Shen petitioned, and the emperor instructed the Minister to reconsider. Zhang Hua, Director of

the Palace Secretariat, advocated for Yuan's advancement to the first rank, and the emperor consented. As the Yuankang era waned, Yuan, among virtuous men like Wang Bao, was beckoned to serve the state but declined, retreating to his mountain.

Later, as Wang Jun rose to power and sought Yuan's service, Yuan's silence bred suspicion of conspiracy. In Liaodong, over three hundred prisoners-turned-bandits plotted to abduct Yuan as their chieftain, a scheme never realized. A rumor spread, "Where is the Son of Heaven? He hides in a bean field." Jun read "bean" as "Huo" and had Yuan seized, executed, and his head displayed publicly. His disciples, grieving, clandestinely retrieved and interred his body under cover of darkness. The news of his wrongful demise reverberated, stirring sorrow in distant hearts.

Guo Qi

Guo Qi, courtesy name Gongwei, was a native of Jinyang in Taiyuan. From youth, he was celebrated for his integrity, magnanimity, and deep understanding of the Five Elements. He authored "Astronomical Records" and "Records of the Five Elements," and annotated over a hundred volumes of "Guliang" and "Master Jing's [Commentary on the Book of] Changes." Townsfolk, including Wang You, were his disciples. Emperor Wu, intending to appoint Qi as an aide to the Masters of Writing, consulted Guo Zhang, a high-ranking kinsman of Qi. Nursing an old resentment, Zhang claimed, "I don't know him." The emperor retorted, "If so, a Wuwan servant lad might serve you, fit to be a Master of Writing." Resolved, he decided to employ Qi. Later, usurper Prince Lun of Zhao sought Qi's service, but Qi demurred, "Having served Emperor Wu, I cannot serve another in this era." He lived out his days in domestic seclusion.

Wu Chao

Wu Chao, courtesy name Shiming, hailed from Hanshou in Wuling. Known since youth for his genteel nature and devotion to Daoism, he harbored little interest in worldly pursuits. A studious man, he nonetheless refused the position of an Erudite. When inspector Liu Hong put forth his name for Administrator of Lingling, the authorities dismissed the notion, deeming him unqualified. The Imperial Secretary Hu Ji lodged a memorial, asserting, "Amidst this era's turmoil and decay, aspirants chase advancement for selfish ends, while those steadfast in their principles go unnoticed. This neglects the promotion of the virtuous and able, eroding the ethos of modesty and humility. Chao, however, has immersed himself in scholarship and the Way, aloof from temporal concerns. He has preserved his integrity and convictions, eschewing opportunism. A singular talent in the Yangtze's south, an exemplar of the virtuous elder. We ought not delay in making him a county magistrate, as was done in Han times, to foster and extol the virtues of excellence." The motion carried, yet Chao spurned the appointment, living out his days in retirement.

Lu Bao

Lu Bao, courtesy name Yuandao, was a native of Nanyang. He studied with diligence and was well-versed, relying on his own talents for a livelihood amidst poverty. Post the Yuankang era (291-299), disturbed by the avarice and degradation of his age, he hid his name and penned "On the Nature of Money" in critique. The essence of the essay is thus:

"Money, akin to the image of heaven and earth, is square within and round without. It gathers like hills and courses like streams, moving and pausing aptly, circulating with measure. Facile in trade, it resists loss and decay. Hard to break, it symbolizes longevity. Never lacking, it embodies the Way. Thus, it endures long, becoming a divine treasure of the world. Deem it a brother, name it 'Kongfang (square hole).' In its absence, one is destitute and feeble; in its presence, affluent and mighty. Money soars sans wings, scurries sans feet. It coaxes smiles from sternness, loosens tongues from silence. The wealthy precede, the needy trail. The former, as lords, revel in surplus; the latter, as serfs, suffer in want. The Book of Poetry laments: 'Alas! Fortunate are the wealthy, pitiable are the lonely and poor!'

Money, a fount of discourse, pervades and penetrates. Scholars and officials in the capital, weary of study and pure discourse, who fall asleep in discussions, all are astonished at the sight of my brother. Money heralds luck and achievement. Why toil in studies to achieve wealth and nobility? Lü Gong once cherished an empty board, Han Gaozu ascended with two coins, Lady Wenjun forsook plain for brocade, Xiang Ru mounted a lofty carriage, unhitching a calf's snout. High office and fame were all brought about by money. Empty boards pale to tangible coin; though two coins are few, they brought closeness. Money, they say, is magic. Honored without virtue, valued without power. It accesses the purple chambers, bypassing the golden gates. It brings peace to chaos, life to the dying, lowliness to nobility, and death to the living. No wrath can win without it, no stalemate break, no grudge settle, no command issue.

Those in Luoyang clad in crimson, those encountered on the road, all love my brother as if he were their own. They clasp my hand, enfold me without heed to station or years. Guests swarm, and my door is always as busy as a market. It's said, 'Money, though deaf, prompts spirits to stir.' People nowadays care only about money. Thus, sans money, troops won't muster; sans reward, they won't depart. Better to return to the fields than lack intermediaries. Yet even with intermediaries, sans my brother, 'tis as winged yet flightless, footed yet rooted."

Those who criticize the times have these writings widely circulated. Bao held no office, and his fate remains unknown.

Fan Teng

Fan Teng, courtesy name Wuji, hailed from Dunhuang. Recommended for his filial piety and integrity, he was appointed to a central government post. Amidst nationwide war chaos, he resigned and went home. Administrator Zhang Bi sought him out, but Teng barred his entry, rebuffed his overtures, and accepted no tokens. He lamented, "Being born in

tumultuous times, one avoids disaster by embracing poverty despite high status." He gave five hundred thousand in family wealth to his clan, lived modestly with just a fence and a garden, finding joy in his *qin* and books. Zhang Gui called him to serve as a Marshal, but Teng retorted, "Once the gate is sealed, shall it be unsealed?" He refused, fell ill for over two months, and died.

Ren Xu

Ren Xu, courtesy name Cilog, hailed from Zhang'an in Linhai. His father, Fang, was Administrator of Nanhai under Wu. Left an orphan early, Xu devoted himself to study from youth. As a man, he lived plainly, shunning the trappings of the world, and was beloved in his native place. The local military chief, Jiang Xiu, spotted his talents and made him a clerk. Xiu, however, was venal and lawless. Xu rebuked him sharply, to no avail. Disgusted, Xu resigned and withdrew to his studies and self-cultivation. When Xiu was later seized for his misdeeds, Xu visited him with reluctance. Xiu lamented, "Ren the Clerk is a true gentleman. I ignored his counsel and look at my fate now. What more is there to say?" Xu was offered posts as a junior official, magistrate, and censor, but he refused them all to return home.

In the early Yongkang era (300-301), Emperor Hui sought upright and able men. Administrator Qiu Fu commended Xu for his integrity, simplicity, and wide learning. The emperor sent gifts and a summons, but Xu, preferring solitude and seeing the court's turmoil, feigned sickness and stayed away. Chaos soon spread, and Chen Min rebelled. Many in Jiangdong were constrained, but Xu and He Xun stood resolute and unbowed. Min could not shake them.

When Emperor Yuan first ruled Jiangdong, he called on Xu's renown and beckoned him as a military advisor. The emperor wrote personally, pressing Xu to come, but Xu pleaded illness and declined. Later, as Grand General of the Eastern Garrison, the emperor summoned Xu again. And when he became Left Chancellor, he offered Xu the role of Sacrificial Official, but Xu refused once more. During Zhongjian (323), Xu was called to court but could not go due to his mother's death. Then, the Minister of Works, Wang Dao, set up a school and sought the learned far and wide. Xu and Yu Xi of Kuaiji were invited, but Wang Dun's revolt and the emperor's abrupt demise thwarted the plan.

Emperor Ming, too, called Xu to office, but Xu claimed grave sickness and for years did not appear. The Ministry of Personnel struck him from the rolls for his long absence, though the Deputy Director of Personnel, Xun Song, protested. At Taining's end (323-326), Emperor Ming decreed Xu's presence again, but the emperor died before he could respond. Xu himself died in the second year of the Xianhe era (327). The regional governor, Feng Huai, proposed honoring Xu posthumously with the rank of Nine Columns, but Su Jun's rebellion left the suggestion unrealized.

Xu's son, Ju, ascended to Grand Minister of the Imperial Clan. He died at home.

Guo Wen

Guo Wen, courtesy name Wenju, hailed from Zhi in Henei. From youth, he cherished mountains and rivers, dreaming of hermitage. At thirty, he roamed hills and woods, sometimes lost for weeks. His parents gone and mourning done, he shunned marriage, journeying to famed peaks and exploring the southern crags of Mount Hua's stone retreats. When Luoyang fell, he shouldered his few possessions and withdrew to a secluded glen in the Dabi Mountains of Yuhang, Wuxing. There, he propped against a tree, thatched his cover, dwelling without walls or fences amidst beasts that preyed on men. Yet, alone in the wilds for a decade, he came to no harm. Clad in deerskin, his head crowned with twisted vines, abstaining from wine and flesh, he cultivated beans and wheat, bartered bamboo leaves and nuts for salt.

When folk shortchanged him, he accepted without fuss. Recognizing his virtue, none dared to cheat him again. He shared surplus grain with the needy. Gifts given, he took only the coarsest part, refusing nothing. A beast once felled a great deer near his hut. Wen spread the word, and when they sold the deer and offered him a share, he said, "Had I wanted it, I'd have sold it myself. I told you because I had no need." All who heard marveled.

Once, a beast bared its fangs at Wen. He saw a bone lodged across its jaws, so he reached in and freed it. Come dawn, the creature laid a deer at his door. Hunters often overnighted, and Wen fetched water through the dark, never weary.

Gu Yang, the Prefect of Yuhang, and Ge Hong visited Wen and escorted him back. Yang, thinking of Wen's mountain treks, offered him leather trousers. Wen declined and retreated to the mountains. Yang had the trousers left in Wen's hut, but Wen stayed silent, and the trousers decayed unused.

When Wang Dao learned of Wen's renown, he dispatched an envoy to invite him. Wen shunned boat and carriage, shouldering his pack and walking. Arriving, Dao lodged him in the Western Garden, amidst fruit trees and wild creatures, and there Wen dwelled. Court officials flocked to see him, but Wen sat unmoved, as if alone.

Wen Jiao once queried Wen, "Men cherish family and friends for companionship. Why forsake them?" Wen answered, "I sought the Way and found chaos. I wished to return but found no path, so here I am." Jiao pressed, "Hunger brings thoughts of food, growth brings thoughts of home. It's natural. Why are you devoid of feeling?" Wen countered, "Feelings spring from memories. No memories, no feelings." Jiao probed further, "Alone in barren mountains, illness could leave you to the birds. Does that not scare you?" Wen retorted, "The buried are consumed by ants. What's the difference?" Jiao asked, "Beasts harm men, men fear them. Why don't you?" Wen replied, "Harm no beast, and no beast harms you." Jiao asked, "If the world's in strife and you can aid, what then?" Wen responded, "What can a mountain recluse do for the world?"

Dao once hosted a feast with music and summoned Wen. Wen strode through opulence as if in the woods, unswayed. Guests offered deep insights, but Wen claimed not to grasp their words. His own thoughts were deep and enigmatic, beyond others' reach. Wen Jiao remarked, "Wen has a sage's nature, not his talent. He's like Liuxia or Liang Qi."

In the Yongchang era (322-324), plague swept the land, and Wen fell sick. Dao sent

medicines, but Wen declared, "Life's span is heaven's will, not medicine's. Our days are fate's decree."

Wen resided in Dao's garden for seven years, never venturing out. Abruptly one day, he sought to return to the mountains, but Dao denied him. Wen later fled back to the mountains of Lin'an, erecting a hut for himself. The Prefect of Lin'an, Wan Chong, received him and settled him in the county. Amidst Su Jun's rebellion, as Yuhang fell, Lin'an stood unscathed. People marveled, crediting Wen with profound foresight. Afterward, he ceased speaking, communicating only by hand gestures or pointing.

Falling gravely ill, Wen wished to return to the mountains, to lie upon a rock, eschewing funerary rites, but Chong did not comply. Wen fasted over twenty days, yet his frame did not wither. Chong inquired, "How many days remain, sir?" Wen lifted his hand three times, foretelling his demise in fifteen days, and so it came to pass. Chong interred him at his dwelling, conducting a service in his honor. Ge Hong and Yu Chan penned his biographies, extolling his virtues.

Gong Zhuang

Gong Zhuang, courtesy name Ziwei, hailed from Baxi. He lived purely, gaining fame with his townsman Qiao Xiu. His father and uncle, victims of Li Te's violence, left Zhuang in extended mourning, but his frailty barred him from vengeance. When Li Shou, garrisoned in Hanzhong, clashed with Li Qi, Te's grandson, Zhuang saw his chance. He counseled Shou, "Seize the west, pledge to [Jin], and the people will rally to you. Forsake the lesser for the greater, trade peril for security. This is supreme strategy." Shou assented, vanquishing Qi. Yet, still assuming false titles, Shou sought to reward Zhuang with office, but Zhuang, vowing never to serve, spurned all gifts.

Incessant rains brought famine. Zhuang implored Shou to yield to Jin, heed the populace, and secure his lineage's fortune as a loyal vassal. Shou, abashed by the missive, kept it hidden. Later, Shou dispatched envoys to the Hu, against Zhuang's counsel, which was disregarded. Zhuang held loyalty and filial duty paramount. He argued Shou, having slain Qi for personal revenge, ought to prove his fealty at Jin's court. Shou demurred, so Zhuang feigned deafness and paralysis, never again setting foot in Chengdu. He devoted his days to the classics and essays, dying in Li Shi's era.

Initially, Zhuang often lamented the Central Plains' erudition compared to Ba and Shu's backwardness. The Li's reign of terror left him no disciple, so he composed "Discourse on Cultivating Virtue," too expansive to recount here.

Meng Lou

Meng Lou, courtesy name Shaogu, hailed from Wuchang. He was the great-grandson of Meng Zong, Wu's Minister of Works. His elder brother Jia was the Chief Clerk for Huan Wen's western expedition. Lou, from youth, was a paragon of rectitude, living on vegetables,

clad in plainness, delighting in solitary study, shunning society. He hunted and fished alone, his whereabouts often unknown even to kin. His mother's death left him gaunt, life's thread nearly severed, abstaining from wine and meat for a decade. Kin pressed him, "Shaogu! Who does not have parents? Who keeps them forever? The sages set rites so the worthy may serve, the unworthy yearn. To perish without issue is more unfilial." Moved by these words, Lou eventually heeded their advice.

His renown spread far ever since. When Emperor Jianwen reigned as regent, he named Lou military advisor, but Lou feigned sickness and declined. Huan Wen visited him. Some advised Wen, "Meng Lou, of noble virtue and Confucian mastery, should grace the government." Wen lamented, "If Kuaiji's prince fails to sway him, who am I to try?" Learning of this, Lou remarked, "Huan refrains only for my illness. Among the unappointed multitudes, scarce are scholars like me. My ailment, not arrogance, bars me from the prince's bidding." His fame only swelled thereafter.

Lou mastered diverse fields, excelling in the Three Rituals. His commentaries on Confucius' Analects spread widely. He died of old age.

Han Ji

Han Ji, courtesy name Xingqi, hailed from Guangling. His forebears fled to Jiaying in Wu amid upheaval. His father Jian served Wu, ascending to Grand Herald. Ji, from youth, cherished literature and solitude. Clad in simple garb, subsisting on greens, he shunned contemporary society, earning esteem in the east. Wang Dao, the Minister of Works, hearing of Ji's repute, bid him become a secretary, but Ji declined.

At the end of Xiankang period, Kuaiji's Interior Minister, Kong Yu, extolled Ji in a memorial. The court, proffering silk and carriage, summoned him. Zhuge Hui, of the Imperial Secretariat, cautioned that Ji's fame was yet unripe for high honors, so he was named an Erudite. Claiming age and ailment, Ji never assumed the role, dying quietly at home.

At that time, Liu Gu of Gaomi (courtesy name Changyu) and Bing Yu of Chengyang (courtesy name Hongwen) also gained note. Gu, disinterested in worldly matters since youth, revered antiquity, committed to study and stern in conduct, he swayed townsfolk and villagers. Yu, Wei hermit Yuan's great-grandson, mirrored Yuan's purity and restraint, spoke with care, eschewed rumors, and moved with decorum.

During the Xiankang period, Emperor Cheng sought the talented and upright. Gu and Yu, lauded by officials and scholars alike, were, following Ji and Zhai Tang's example, appointed Erudite. Yu, citing sickness, declined; Gu, aged, journeyed to the capital but refused the post. Both died in tranquillity.

Qiao Xiu

Qiao Xiu, courtesy name Yuanyan, hailed from Baxi. His grandfather Zhou, a Confucian luminary, held high esteem in Shu's court. Xiu, naturally reticent, shunned society from youth.

Anticipating turmoil, he renounced worldly ties, shunning even kith and kin. He declined roles as county scholar and provincial graduate. When Li Xiong seized Shu and parts of Baxi, Xiu's fame reached Xiong's uncle Xiang and cousin Shou, who sent envoys with gifts to recruit him, but Xiu refused. He chose a rustic life, tilling mountain soil, clad in rags and a straw hat. Gong Zhuang often lauded him.

Upon Huan Wen's conquest of Shu, he commended Xiu to the court. Yet, due to Xiu's advanced years and seclusion, the court merely sent emissaries to check on him. During Fan Ben and Xiao Jing's insurrection, Xiu sought sanctuary in Dangqu, sustained by a host of kin and villagers. Living past eighty, when villagers offered to carry him, he demurred, "Each has their own elders to tend. I can still fend for myself. Why impose my years on you?" He died beyond ninety.

Zhai Tang

Zhai Tang, courtesy name Daoshen, hailed from Xunyang. He was a man of pure simplicity, kind and upright, eschewing the affairs of the world. He lived by the plow and would not accept gifts or offerings, even a pot or jar. At the close of the Yongjia era (307-313), bandits and rebels scourged the land, yet none dared harm Tang, his virtue and kindness well known. His neighbors looked to him for protection.

Wang Dao, Minister of the Masses, called for him, but Tang hid away in the southern mountains of the county's edge. Gan Bao, Administrator of Shi'an, knowing Tang, sent a boat with supplies. He told his men, "Mr. Zhai is a man of integrity and humility. Deliver the letter, leave the boat, and return." With no one to send back, Tang traded the supplies for silk and returned them by boat. Bao, moved by his kindness, wished to repay him, but Tang declined, returning the favor with humility.

In the Xiankang era (335-342), Yu Liang, Grand General of the Western Conquest, recommended Tang to the court, and he was named Erudite at the National Academy. Tang refused. At the start of the Jianyuan era (343), Yu Yi, General of the Western Pacification, led a northern campaign against Shi Jilong, drafting many for war. The court spared Tang from the draft. He tasked local officials with returning the official notice, refusing any reward. Tang freed his own servants from the draft, registering them as commoners. Later, Emperor Kang summoned him as a Palace Attendant, but citing age and illness, Tang declined. He died at seventy-three, at home.

His son, Zhuang, styled Zuxiu, was known for filial piety and friendship from youth. He lived as his father had, shunning society for the simplicity of the farm, speaking little of worldly matters, preferring to fish and hunt. With age, he forsook hunting. Someone asked, "Fishing and hunting are both matters that harm living beings, yet you, sir, have ceased only one. Why is that?" Zhuang replied, "Hunting is for personal joy, fishing for the fish's need. Not yet free of desires, I quit the greater harm. And who faults the fish for biting the bait?" Many admired his words. In later years, he too gave up fishing, living on bean porridge and water. Though offered posts by local and imperial offices, he declined them all. He died at fifty-six.

His son, Jiao, upheld the family's moral stance, refusing office multiple times. His son, Faci, called by Emperor Xiaowu to be a Cavalier Attendant, also declined. The family was marked by their reclusive ways.

Guo Fan

Guo Fan, courtesy name Changxiang, hailed from Wuchang. His uncle, Ne, served as the Inspector of Guangzhou, and his father, Cha, as the Administrator of Ancheng. Fan, from youth, held lofty ambitions, shunning government service and declining recommendations for his virtue. His household in Linchuan, he kept distant from worldly concerns, favoring fishing, hunting, and archery for diversion. Impoverished and without position, he sought to till unused land, first erecting a sign for a year to test for claimants. When none came forth, he commenced his labor. As the rice neared harvest, a man laid claim, and Fan ceded the crop. The county prefect, learning of this, sought to restore the rice to Fan, who would not accept it. On an occasion, journeying over a hundred li with a cart for hunting, he encountered an ailing traveler and offered his cart, returning home on foot. The fish and game he sold, he often gifted to those lacking means, neither seeking recompense nor revealing his identity. Thus, he earned widespread esteem.

Yu Liang recommended him to the court alongside Zhai Tang, but Fan declined the appointment as an Erudite at the National Academy. At the close of the Xiankang era, he ventured to Wuchang by skiff to visit the tombs of his ancestors. Yu Yi, the General of the Western Pacification and imperial uncle by marriage, personally sought Fan, pressing him to accept official duty. Fan protested, "Each man bears his flaws. How can you compel me?" When Yi proposed joint travel on his grander vessel, Fan retorted, "Sir, do not demean me so. My humble craft suits my rustic self." Yi, conceding, boarded Fan's modest boat, and they spent the day together.

Another time, Fan's knife plunged into the water, and a bystander endeavored to retrieve it. Fan offered the knife to him, which he declined. Fan queried, "Had you not retrieved it, how could I possess it now?" The man answered, "Were I to take it now, the gods and spirits would hold me to account." Realizing the man's resolve, Fan cast the knife back into the depths. The bystander, disheartened, yet fetched it once more. Fan, refusing to owe a debt, presented him with tenfold the knife's worth. Fan died at his home.

Xin Mi

Xin Mi, courtesy name Shuchong, hailed from Didao in Longxi. His father, Yi, was the Inspector of Youzhou, esteemed among elite families. From youth, Mi aimed for greatness, was well-read, and excelled in writing, especially in cursive and clerical scripts, setting his era's standard. A man of silence and reserve, he shunned social entanglements. Despite multiple invitations, he declined roles as an attendant to the Crown Prince and as a scholar for princes. At the Yongjia period's end (307-313), Mi was appointed Attendant-General to

comfort and stabilize Guanzhong. He accepted, foreseeing Luoyang's imminent fall. When Chang'an fell to Liu Cong, Cong named him Superior Grand Master of the Palace, which Mi refused. Offers from Shi Le and Jilong too were spurned. Amidst chaos, he stood unswayed, indifferent to renown or wealth.

When Ran Min usurped the throne, he summoned Mi to serve as the Grand Master of Ceremonies with full honors. He wrote back, "In the past, Xu You declined Yao's offer to rule under the Heaven, preserving his integrity and lofty principles. Bo Yi abandoned his state, and Zitui shunned rewards. Their tales are eternally celebrated in historical records. These men followed their path without looking back. Yet, a virtuous man, even in power, is like one in the mountains and forests, aiming to exhaust principles and fulfill his nature. Who truly understands this? They shirk not calamity nor hardship, but fixate on their aims and encounter serendipity. I have heard that extremes must change, as with winter and summer. Reaching too high invites danger, like in a game of stacking. Your Majesty stands triumphant, but prolonged rule portends ill for the realm's peace and order. Thus, I propose post-victory, you return to the [Jin] court. Then, you could match Xu You and Boyi's integrity, enjoy the longevity of pines, and stand as a world pillar. Wouldn't that be splendid?" Consequently, he refused food and died.

Liu Linzhi

Liu Linzhi, courtesy name Ziji, hailed from Nanyang and belonged to Dan's clan, who was the Grand Master of Splendid Happiness. Noted for his simplicity and austerity from a young age, Linzhi shunned material wealth and societal norms, preferring the solitude of mountains and forests. On an excursion to Mount Heng for herbs, he chanced upon a stream flanked by two stone pools to the south—one sealed, the other open. The stream, too broad and deep to ford, left him disoriented on his return. A local hunter guided him back. Rumors swirled of elixirs and immortal treasures within the pools, yet despite his yearning, Linzhi never relocated them.

General of Chariots and Cavalry, Huan Chong, taken with Linzhi's renown, sought him as Chief of Staff. Linzhi declined. Chong once came to his dwelling and found Linzhi perched upon a mulberry branch. His envoy delivered the invitation, to which Linzhi replied, "Since the noble envoy has taken the trouble to visit, it is proper to first pay respects to my father." Chong, embarrassed, agreed. Linzhi, in his plain attire, spoke with Chong, who was offered simple wine and vegetables by Linzhi's father. Chong's attendant offered to serve, but Linzhi's father refused, stating, "To let another serve would betray the essence of a countryman." Chong, touched by the gesture, remained until evening before leaving.

Linzhi, despite his noble lineage, epitomized humility, and benevolence. He engaged personally in the common folk's weddings and funerals. His abode in Yangqi, adjacent to the official road, was a haven for travelers, whom he served without reservation, causing even scholars and officials to refrain from imposing upon him. He never accepted gifts or favors.

Over a hundred // from Linzhi's home, an old woman lived alone, nearing death's door. She lamented, "Who will see to my burial? Only Chief Liu would. But how could he know of

my plight?" Linzhi had already learned of her distress and thus set out to attend to her. As she drew her last breath, he crafted her coffin with his own hands, and ensured her proper burial. His compassion and empathy were such as this. He eventually died of old age.

Suo Xi

Suo Xi, courtesy name Weizu, hailed from Dunhuang. He was a man of study, avoiding the summons of local officials and refusing the title of Filial and Virtuous on account of illness. He immersed himself in the study of yin and yang and wrote more than ten volumes on astronomy and geography, which stirred up much discussion. He kept to himself, often muttering, laughing alone, sighing, weeping, or ignoring questions put to him.

Under Zhang Mao's rule, Dunhuang's Administrator, Yin Zhan, marveled at him and visited. A day passed unnoticed as he proclaimed, "Suo is a sage, fit for grave counsel." Desiring to uphold the local tradition of the village archery ceremony, Zhan invited Xi to serve as one of the three elders, saying, "Now, as people converge from every direction in Ning for the village archery ceremony, you, sir, with your venerable age and esteemed wisdom, surpass your peers. The responsibility to cherish the elderly is indeed fitting for a scholar of virtue. Though you are not a wutong tree, your presence is as rare as a phoenix's descent; though you are not a vessel of Cao Gong, you are as worthy as Gai Gong to join us. This is no exaggeration. The greatest sages responded without being summoned; Mencius, with his profound virtue, appeared without an invitation, eager to broaden and clarify grand principles and to shed light on the path of transformation. The reverence we extend today, by following the path of righteousness and upholding the teachings, indicates that true greatness does not hinge on official position. Do you concur?"

At the age of seventy-nine, Xi fell ill and passed away before the ceremony. Zhan, donning plain mourning clothes, attended his funeral and honored him with a modest gift of twenty thousand. Zhan said, "What the world desires is wealth and status; what pleases the eye are the five colors; what delights the ear are the five sounds. Yet the master forsook what many pursue and cherished what many neglect. Amidst chaos, he found no flavor in the flavorless, and amongst the countless marvels, he revered the profound. His home was not grand, yet his aspirations encompassed the Nine Provinces; his body resided in the ordinary, while his spirit soared beyond the heavens. Not even the esteemed heights of Qian Lou or the transcendence of Zhuangzi exceed his stature." Therefore, he was posthumously named "Master Who Dwells In Mystery."

Yang Ke

Yang Ke was from Tianshui. From his youth, he admired the Book of Changes and chose to remain a bachelor as he aged. He was a devoted scholar with hundreds of disciples. His diet was plain, his drink water, and his attire a simple, coarse robe. Though his appearance pained others, Ke was untroubled, indifferent to visitors and music. He only considered

students his close disciples after formal initiation. To discuss or share knowledge, he'd wait for privacy, then instruct these disciples, who'd relay his teachings.

When Liu Yao seized power and offered Ke the Grand Minister of Ceremonies role, Ke declined and vanished into the Long Mountains. After Yao's defeat by Shi Le and the Qin's forced migration east, Ke remained in Chang'an. Shi Jilong, upon claiming the throne falsely, beckoned Ke with dark red silk and a carriage. Ke refused, feigning sickness, but under duress, he complied. At their meeting, Ke neither bowed nor responded to Jilong. Ordered to stay at the Yi Residence in Yongchang, officials saw Ke's conduct as insolent and suggested punishment for grave disrespect. Jilong disagreed, instead bestowing upon Ke the positions he held in high regard.

In Yongchang, Ke would have his disciples pen and return his gracious replies to Jilong's gifts. These letters, beautifully crafted, touched all who read them. Curious about Ke's character, Jilong sent a woman to tempt him at night, but Ke showed no interest. Then, Jie soldiers seized Ke's disciples, threatening and stripping them, yet Ke watched, unafraid. He often slept on a dirt bed with just a cloth, no cushions or bedding. Xun Pu, a scholar intrigued by Ke's reputation, sought discourse on the classics, but Ke, eyes shut, remained silent. Pu laughed at Ke's exposed form, but Ke was undisturbed. Many believed Ke followed Jiao Xian, his wisdom's depth unfathomable.

Later, Ke penned a memorial expressing his longing for home, requesting to return. Jilong sent him off in comfort, exempting ten households from taxes for his support. Back in Qinzhou, Ke resumed teaching. When the Qin people fled to Liangzhou, Ke's disciples transported him by ox. They were captured and slain by the garrison.

Gongsun Feng

Gongsun Feng, courtesy name Ziluan, hailed from Shanggu. He dwelt in seclusion among Jiucheng's valleys in Changli. Braving winter in a single garment and sleeping on a dirt bed, in summer he let his food spoil before consumption. His days were spent playing *qin* and singing, reveling in carefree joy. Many marveled at him, yet none could grasp his essence. Summoned by Murong Wei to Ye in a comfortable carriage, Feng neither spoke nor bowed to Wei, as if still amidst Jiucheng's solitude. Rarely engaging with visitors, he succumbed to illness after several years.

Gongsun Yong

Gongsun Yong, courtesy name Ziyang, hailed from Xiangping. A studious and modest man since youth, he secluded himself in the southern mountains of Pingguo. Unmarried and self-sufficient in food and clothing, he sang and recited poetry in the caves, delighting in unfettered contentment. He lived past ninety, unwavering in his convictions.

Called to Ye with Gongsun Feng by Murong Wei, Yong did not bow to Wei. When visited by nobles and officials, he remained silent, enduring through bitter winters and

scorching summers with equanimity. After over a year, he feigned insanity, prompting Wei to return him to Pingguo. Later, Fu Jiān also extended an invitation with gifts, but age and distance deterred Yong. Before Jiān's envoys could reach him, Yong died. Jiān lamented his passing and posthumously bestowed upon him the title "Master Who Reverses Emptiness".

Zhang Zhong

Zhang Zhong, courtesy name Juhe, hailed from Zhongshan. During the chaos of Yongjia (307-313), he sought solitude on Mount Tai, embodying tranquillity, and contentment. He lived on herbs and stones, seeking the way to nourish life. Clad in a coarse robe for winter and a mere belt in summer, he stood stiff as a dead man, indifferent to music and the classics. His teachings emphasized emptiness and inaction, imparted through silent example rather than discourse. His abode was a cave nestled in a secluded valley, with disciples dwelling in caverns sixty steps away, visiting every fifth day. Atop his cave was a Daoist shrine where he greeted the dawn. His meals were from earthenware, his cooking in stone. He refused neighbors' gifts of food and clothing.

A young man once inquired about omens of drought or flood, to which he responded, "Heaven keeps its silence, yet the seasons turn and life thrives. The ways of *yin* and *yang* are beyond this old mountain hermit." Worldly things he forsook, maintaining health and sharp senses into advanced age.

Fu Jiān sent an envoy to summon him. Upon the envoy's arrival, Zhong bathed, addressing his disciples, "My years wane; I cannot defy our ruler's will." After bathing, he boarded the carriage. In Chang'an, Jiān offered him formal robes and a headdress, which he declined, saying, "I am old, my hair gone; I cannot wear these. Allow me to attend in my simple clothes." Jiān consented. At their meeting, Jiān lauded, "Master, you've secluded yourself, probing deeply into the Way. Your virtue of living well alone is great, but you have yet to serve the world. So, I've inconvenienced you to come from afar, hoping to make you Minister of Qi." Zhong replied, "Once, war drove me to Mount Tai, where I lived with birds and beasts, preserving my life. In Yao and Shun's time, I would have served the sages. Now, my ambition fades with age; I cannot take such a post. I belong in the mountains; my heart is with the stones and caves. Let me return to end my days on Mount Tai." Jiān sent him away in a comfortable carriage.

Reaching Mount Hua, Zhong sighed, "I am a Daoist of the Eastern Peak, yet I'll die on the Western Peak. It is my fate; what can I do?" After another fifty li, he died at a pass. The envoy reported back quickly, and Jiān sent Wei Hua, a Yellow Gate Gentleman, with a staff to mourn him. They offered grand sacrifices, dressed him in ceremonial clothes, and named him "Master Who Contents with the Way."

Shi Yuan

Shi Yuan, courtesy name Hongsun, claimed to be from Ju in Beihai. He wandered

without a home, never took a wife, shunned trade, and cared little for savory foods. His garments were always plain and tattered. If given new clothes, he passed them to others. At a person's passing, he'd arrive with a staff to express sympathy. His travels were heedless of distance or the seasons, and at times, he appeared in multiple places simultaneously. He could grasp objects in pitch darkness as though in broad daylight. His fate after Yao Chang's uprising remains a mystery.

Song Xian

Song Xian, courtesy name Ling'ai, hailed from Xiaogu in Dunhuang. From youth, he harboured grand ambitions, living serenely and aloof from the mundane, dwelling in the southern mountains of Jiuquan. An adept in astronomy and geography, he instructed over three thousand disciples. He refused to serve as an official in any province or commandery, and only associated with Yin Yong and Qi Hao. He declined official posts in any province or commandery, keeping company only with Yin Yan and Qi Hao. During Zhang Zuo's time, Administrator Yang Xuan painted his image on the upper gallery. As he came and went, he gazed upon it and composed an encomium saying: "What stone serves as his pillow? What stream as his wash? His form is unseen, his name untraceable."

The Jiuquan Administrator, Ma Ji, was a man of high nobility and imposing presence. Accompanied by the ringing of bells and the beating of drums, he sought out Xian. Yet Xian resided in a lofty tower, refusing to meet him from afar. Ji lamented, "His renown spreads wide, yet his person is hidden. His virtue exalted, but his shape elusive. Now I see the Master is a dragon among men." He inscribed on the stone wall: "Cliffs tower a hundred *zhang*, walls stretch ten thousand *xun*. Exotic trees thrive, recalling Deng's lush forests. The man is jade, a national gem. His home is near, yet he remains distant, capturing my heart indeed."

Xian annotated the Analects and penned myriad poems. Even at eighty, his zeal for learning never waned. Later, Zhang Zuo dispatched envoy Zhang Xing to invite Xian as a friend to the crown prince. Xing pressed him to accept, but Xian demurred, "I lack Zhuangzi's virtue, Ganmu's talent. How can I match those graced by heaven's decree?" He journeyed to Guzang with Xing but, citing illness, met neither the prince nor accepted gifts. Soon appointed Grand Preceptor to the prince, he petitioned the emperor: "A recluse I've lived, admiring the ancients. Life brings me no joy, death no fear. I leave kith and kin scattered in mountains and by rivers, transient as dew on grass and earth. Spare my family news of my demise. As my end nears, I wish my desires honored." He then starved to death at eighty-two. He was posthumously known as "Master of Mysterious Emptiness".

Guo He

Guo He, courtesy name Chengxiu, hailed from Lueyang. His six-generations-removed ancestor, Zheng, lived in the era of Emperors An and Shun of Han. He was summoned eight times by the government office and called upon five times by the imperial envoy, yet he

never heeded these summons. From Zheng to He, his lineage consistently sought knowledge and secured official posts through their erudition. He himself excelled in the study of history and classics and declined to take up officialdom in any province or commandery. Zhang Zuo dispatched an envoy to summon He to serve as an Erudite and Libationer, compelling him to accept. Upon his arrival, he was named a friend of the crown prince. He submitted a petition to Zuo, requesting to return home. Zuo assented, sending him back to the Eastern Mountains in Zhangye with a carriage escort. He died at the age of eighty-four and was posthumously titled "Master of Mysterious Virtue".

Guo Yu

Guo Yu, courtesy name Yuanyu, hailed from Dunhuang. From a young age, his nature stood apart from the ordinary. He journeyed east to Zhangye, there to study with Guo He, and fully absorbed his mentor's wisdom. Versed in the classics and articulate in debate, Yu was talented and skilled in literature. Upon He's passing, Yu grieved as for a father who begot him, a teacher who molded him, a lord who esteemed him. Though custom called for lesser mourning for a teacher, Yu, in sage-like humility, donned a son's mourning garb and kept vigil by the grave three years.

His mourning duty done, Yu retreated to Xie Valley in Linsong. There he hewed a home from the cliffs, sustained himself on cypress nuts to lighten his body, and penned "Ink Explanations of the Spring and Autumn Annals" and "The Filial Piety Classic with Variegated Threads." His disciples, who transcribed his teachings, surpassed a thousand.

Zhang Tianci sent envoy Meng Gongming, bearing a staff of authority, with a carriage of dark red silk and a full complement of gifts to summon Yu. He wrote to Yu, " Master, you shroud your light in distant wilds, holding fast to truth in solitude. Your spirit aligns with the profound, your resolve shifts with the turning of seasons. Surely, you perceive the masses in dire straits, the world in need of deliverance. I, though unworthy, am charged with the fate of our era, shouldering immense duties. I long to champion the Imperial Way with those of wisdom and virtue. In times past, Fu Shuo ascended in the Yin dynasty (1600-1046 BCE), Shangfu ascended in the Zhou (1046-256 BCE), Confucius's chariot kept to its course, and Mozi's carriage awaited not the morning light. All driven by the plight of the people, for no ruler stands alone; the Way is enriched by the masses. Now, the nine provinces fracture into barbarian territories, both capitals overrun by nomads, the Son of Heaven secluded east of the river, and the righteous teachings fallen to the heterodox. The disaster is without precedent, no escape known. You, Master, endowed with the capacity to aid the world, yet remain idle. This puzzles me, questioning your compassion and wisdom. Thus, I send an envoy with a vacant seat to your left, earnestly inviting you to cast your gaze upon the realm below."

Upon Gongming's arrival at the mountain, Yu gestured to a high-flying swan, remarking, "This bird, how can it be confined?" With that, he vanished without a trace. Gongming detained his disciples, prompting Yu to lament, "I escape not from wrongdoing, but from office. How can my quest for virtuous retreat inflict suffering upon my disciples!"

Consequently, he reappeared and heeded the summons. Arriving in Guzang, he learned of Tianci's mother's death. Yu shorn his hair to enter and pay respects, leapt thrice in mourning, and departed, retreating to the southern mountains.

When Tianxi's reign crumbled, Fu Jiān once more beckoned Yu with a ceremonial chariot to establish rites and rituals, a summons cut short by his father's death. Xin Zhang, the Administrator, dispatched three hundred scholars to learn from Yu. As the Fu dynasty's dominion waned, Prince Mu of Lueyang rallied forces in Jiuquan to bolster Zhang Dayu, extending an invitation to Yu. Yu lamented, "To rescue a man drowning by the river, one does not divine his lifespan; to heal an ailment over three years, one does not withhold his meals. Lu Lian, in his righteousness within Zhao, held not his tongue; how much more should I refrain from saving those compelled to wear their robes left over right!" He mustered an army of five thousand with Suo Gu of Dunhuang and conveyed thirty thousand *shi* of grain to aid Prince Mu. Mu named Yu Deputy Director of the Imperial Treasury and Military Advisor General. Despite his elevated rank, he recited the teachings of Huangdi and Laozi, aspiring to emulate Bocheng once peace was restored.

Mu, swayed by deceit, turned west to confront Suo Gu. Yu counselled him, "In the past, the Han dynasty solidified its rule before chastising its meritorious subjects. Now, before our cause is secured, you plot against them, and soon deer will roam in this courtyard."ⁱⁱ Mu ignored the counsel. Yu departed the city, weeping loudly, saluted the city walls, and declared, "I shall see you no more!" He then retreated, enshrouded himself in his bedding, concealed his face, ceased all communication, and fasted for seven days. He grew ill, praying for death day and night. One night, he dreamt he ascended to the heavens on a green dragon, halting atop a roof. Upon awakening, he sighed, "The dragon soars skyward, yet now halts on a roof. The character for 'roof' harbors the radical for 'corpse' beneath. The dragon's flight to the 'corpse' portends my demise. The sages of yore did not perish in their inner chambers; how much less should I, a man of honor!" He then withdrew to the Red Cliff Pavilion in Jiuquan's southern mountains, held his breath, and died.

Qi Jia

Qi Jia, courtesy name Kongbin, hailed from Jiuquan. In his youth, he was impoverished yet devoted to learning. When barely past twenty, one night a voice called to him through his window, "Qi Kongbin, Qi Kongbin! Go into hiding, go into hiding! The embellishment of this earthly domain is replete with toil, irreconcilable. What you acquire is trivial, mere hair's breadth, yet what you forfeit resembles the vastness of a mountain's rim." At daybreak, he absconded and ventured westward to Dunhuang, where he joined a scholarly official and engaged in book recitation. Destitute, without adequate clothing or sustenance, he eked out a living by tutoring pupils, thus amassing extensive knowledge of the classics and delving into their profound meanings. He journeyed further westward to the sea islands, instructing over a hundred disciples. Zhang Chonghua made him a Libationer within the Confucian grove. He was kind and magnanimous, ceaselessly educating his disciples, and inspired by the "Classic of Filial Piety," he crafted the "Twenty-Nine Divine Classics." Over two thousand

individuals, encompassing court dignitaries, regional governors, and the likes of Peng Hezheng, sought his tutelage exclusively, prostrating at his bedside. Tianxi called him Master, leaving his name unspoken. He died of old age.

Master Qu Xing

Master Qu Xing was a man of indeterminate name, his origins largely obscured. As the Taihe era waned, he claimed the Wenji hills near the Xuancheng commandery as his abode, often sighted with Qu and Xing - halberds and a whetstone - which inspired his appellation. The Grand Marshal Huan Wen once sought him out. Upon arrival, he beheld Master Qu Xing clad in deerskin, seated within a stone chamber, his countenance the picture of tranquillity. Wen, accompanied by scores of followers, was confounded by his enigmatic presence, prompting him to commission Fu Tao to inscribe an ode in his honor. He met his end amidst the mountains.

Xie Fu

Xie Fu, courtesy name Qingxu, hailed from Kuaiji. He was celebrated for his tranquil demeanor and dwelt atop Taiping Mountain for over a decade. Though the military commander Chi Yin proposed him as Chief Clerk and the imperial court as an Erudite, he declined both appointments.

Once, the moon encroached upon the "Shao Wei" constellation, home to the "Star of the Scholars." An astrologer foretold that it spelled dire misfortune for a man of letters. Dai Kui, a renowned scholar from Qiaoguo, was thought to be the one at risk. Yet, it was Fu who soon after passed away. It prompted the Kuaiji people to scorn the Wu people, "The esteemed Wu scholar who, despite his earnest quest, could not find death's embrace."

Dai Kui

Dai Kui, courtesy name Andao, hailed from Qiaoguo. From his youth, he was erudite and eloquent, adept in writing, qin, painting, and versed in diverse arts. While still young, he crafted "The Zheng Xuan Stele," mixing egg whites with powdered tiles, inscribing it himself, creating a work of splendid wonder. His talent left many in awe. He scorned worldly ways, finding solace in the qin and literature. A disciple of Daoist Fan Xuan in Yuzhang, he wed his niece to deepen his learning.

The Grand Minister, Prince Xi of Wuling, recognizing Kui's proficiency with the qin, summoned him. Upon the envoys' arrival, Kui shattered his qin, proclaiming, "Dai Andao shall not play the entertainer at the court!" This incensed Xi, who then commanded Kui's elder brother, Shu, to attend in his stead. Shu obeyed with pleasure, taking up the qin to visit

the prince.

Subsequently, Kui moved to Shan county in Kuaiji. A man of integrity and strict in observing etiquette, he often saw the loss of restraint as a failure in manners. This belief led him to write the following essay:

"Men who do not return home from gathering herbs after their kin's death are unfilial sons; officials who abandon their posts when their ruler is in peril are self-serving servants. Why didn't the ancients condemn these acts as improper? Because they understood the intention. When the intention is clear, one isn't confused by the form.

People of the Yuankang era (291-299) were known for missing the essence and not seeking the root cause, leading to neglecting the essential for the trivial, sacrificing substance for reputation. This is like admiring Xi Shi for her frown rather than her beauty, or emulating a sage by just copying his hat. What is admired isn't what makes the person admirable; it's an obsession with superficial likeness. Just as purple dye can spoil the red, because it resembles red, so can a semblance of moderation spoil virtue, and a pretence of wisdom degrade the Way. The recluses of the Bamboo Grove were genuine in their eccentricity, but those of the Yuankang era lacked virtue and were merely pretentious in their attire. Such distinctions must be recognized!

Moreover, Confucians who prize reputation did so to foster virtue. Once they lose this goal, they adopt shallow acts. Embracing facade while losing genuineness, they mislead with appearances, leading to the decay of morals. Daoists who dismiss titles do so to pursue authenticity. If they forget this principle, they too will engage in excesses. When both feeling and propriety are absent, they will neglect to look up and offer praise, resulting in the erosion of basic principles. Those who are insincere and superficial are not just betraying their own principles; they use these principles to excuse their wrongdoings. The Way has its timeless truths, but corruption has no set form. Thus, even the Six Classics can be misread, and royal rule can falter. If one strays from the basics, not even the sages and wise can correct it.

Alas! Those who follow the Way must inherently understand it fully and naturally, not blindly groping. How can they not strive to match the fervour of the ancients, to compare themselves to past glories? If they proceed without comprehension, and speak without thought, they should first determine the ultimate purpose of their actions, find the root of their intentions, capture the core of their efforts, and comprehend the reasons behind their deeds. In this way, though paths may diverge, their ends are worth watching; though methods may be disordered, their concords will not clash. Otherwise, they will wander aimlessly, lost in the chaos, swayed by events, deluded by lies, outwardly showy but inwardly void of truth. They will presumptuously take what is real, and with dust and grime cloud what is naturally clear, becoming a mockery for a millennium. How can one not be vigilant?"

During Emperor Xiaowu's reign, Kui was repeatedly called to serve, first as a cavalier attendant, then as an Erudite, but he declined due to his father's sickness. Pressed by officials, he fled to Wu. There, he visited Wang Xun, the local historian with a villa at Wuqiu Mountain, and they spent weeks together. Xie Xuan, the historian from Kuaiji, fearing Kui might not return, wrote a memorial: "Observing Dai Kui of Qiaoguo, I recognize his heart is pure, unblemished by the worldly. He values his secluded life, finding joy in music and books. Despite repeated calls, he stays away, true to his beliefs. Now elderly and weak, the elements

could aggravate his health. Your Majesty has favored him; I suggest we grant him his solitude, without further summons." The emperor agreed, and Kui withdrew to Shan.

Later, Wang Xun became the director of the imperial clan. He recommended Kui to serve as the National Libationer and to be elevated to a cavalier attendant. Kui was called again, yet he did not present himself. In the twentieth year of the Taiyuan era (395), the Crown Prince left the East Palace. His Grand Tutors, Wang Daozi from Kuaiji, Junior Tutor Wang Ya, and Retainer Wang Xun, submitted a memorial saying: "Kui embodies uprightness and strict discipline, indulging in his distinct interests, his time with the aged, his spirit growing ever purer. The Eastern Palace is deficient in virtue; hence, he extends his duty beyond its confines. He merits a distinguished role among the counselors and attendants. Kui, who prizes the ways of hermits, will likely view promotion as an honor. It is appropriate to send him a full ceremonial invitation to his home." Kui died from illness.

His eldest son, Bo, inherited his father's character. At the start of the Yixi era (405), he was called as a Cavalry Attendant Gentleman but declined the offer and soon after passed away.

Gong Xuanzhi

Gong Xuanzhi, courtesy name Daoxuan, hailed from Hanshou in Wuling. His father, Deng, once held posts as Minister of Changsha and cavalier attendant. Xuanzhi, a man of quietude and diligence, embraced simplicity in a narrow lane. As a provincial scholar, he was courted by the state but declined its call. Emperor Xiaowu proclaimed, "In the era of a sage king, the quest for hermits bore fruit. Thus, we have verses lauding the recluse in distant glens and the wandering scholar's rites. Dai Kui from Qiaoguo and Gong Xuanzhi of Wuling, both paragons of virtue, seekers of wisdom, lovers of ease, keepers of pure hearts, and assiduous in study, have long earned my esteem. Let them be cavalier attendants, let them be Erudite. Dispatch them with honor from their domains. Treat them not as mere officials, but as exemplars from the fringes." Local authorities pressed, yet he, citing sickness, refused the summons. At fifty-eight, he died.

His pupil, Yuan Shou, too, was a man of integrity, shunning officialdom. Though named a provincial scholar, and later beckoned to serve as an Erudite from the Imperial Academy, a cavalier attendant, and an attendant for imperial petitions, he rebuffed each overture. He died at home.

Tao Dan

Tao Dan, courtesy name Chujing, was Kan the Grand Commandant's grandson. His father, Xia, was discharged for lacking conduct. Left an orphan early, Dan turned to the arts of nurturing life, believing immortality within reach. By fifteen or sixteen, he forsook grains and did not wed. His family was wealthy, with servants aplenty. Yet Dan lived in stillness, never meddling in their affairs. He favored the Book of Changes, mastering divination and

prophecy.

Dan built a mountain hut near Linxiang in Changsha. His companion was a white deer. When kith or kin sought him, he'd cross streams, eluding their reach. Chosen for the provincial exams, Dan escaped to Mount Pi in Luo County and vanished - his end a mystery.

Tao Qian

Tao Qian, courtesy name Yuanliang, was the great-grandson of the Grand Marshal Kan. His grandfather Mao served as Administrator of Wuchang. Young Qian harbored grand dreams and was well-versed in letters. A man of singular freedom, he sought his true self, earning the esteem of his villagers. In "Biography of Master Five Willows," he penned, "Master Five Willows, origin obscure, his courtesy and surname unknown. Named for the five willows by his house. A man of few words, indifferent to riches and renown, he read not for profundity. Each new understanding brought joy so intense, he'd forget to eat. Fond of wine, yet seldom could afford it. His family knew this; he'd drink and be merry when given the chance. Drunk, he'd be himself, unrestrained. Though wind and sun breached his modest home, he fretted not. His garb was tattered and rough, his sustenance in basket and gourd, often bare. He lived unapologetic, writing for joy, leaving dreams unfulfilled." This preface stood as a true testament to Qian's life.

Burdened by the care of his elders and the weight of poverty, he first took up the post of Libationer within his province. Yet he could not bear the duties of an official and soon resigned, returning to his home. The province summoned him to serve as Registrar, but he refused, choosing instead to work the soil for sustenance, a choice that brought upon him a delicate illness. In time, he lent his counsel to the military, advising both the Garrison Commander and the General Who Establishes Might. To kin and comrades, he mused, "Would it not be enough to strum a tune, to sing, to live by the simplest of means?"

The officials heard this and named him Prefect of Pengze. In the county, he decreed that the public fields be sown with sticky millet, proclaiming, "With this, I shall have wine for a lifetime." His family pleaded for the cultivation of common rice. Yielding, he allocated one *qing* and fifty *mu* for the sticky grain, and another fifty for the common sort. He held fast to simplicity and honesty, never seeking the favor of those above him. When a supervisory courier came from the county, his clerks urged him to don formal attire for the occasion. He exhaled a weary sigh, "For a mere five *dou* of rice, I cannot stoop; nor will I fawn over the village's small-minded men!"

In the second year of Yixi (406), he relinquished his seal of office, departed the county, and penned "Homeward Bound I Go." His words went:

"Ah! Homeward bound I go. Should I not return to my rustic home where fields lie overgrown? My heart serves this mortal frame, why then should I feel forlorn and alone? I see no use in chiding what's past, for the future still lies within my grasp. Though I've strayed, I'm not far astray, knowing that today differs from yesterday. My boat skims distant waves, my clothes billow in the breeze, and I ask a wayfarer for the road ahead. I lament the dim morning light. I then gaze at my old abode, in which I once took delight. Servants and

children rush out to greet on sight. The three paths now wild, yet pines and chrysanthemums still survive. I usher the young ones inside, our cups brimming with wine. I pour from a jug, admiring the garden's trees, lean on the southern window, delighting in my ease. The garden's face changes with each day. Though there's a door, it stays closed all day. I rest on my staff, content to linger, often looking afar. Clouds drift lazily from the valley; the weary bird knows its nest. The land is veiled in mist and shade; I sooth my lone pine and choose to roam.

Ah! Homeward bound I go, let the world be, my roaming done. Their desires are not what please me, so why should I chase after what cannot be! Joy comes in news from kin, in strumming the *qin*, in reading to ease my grief. The farmer warns spring nears its end; I must tend to Western Hill's needs. Sometimes by carriage, sometimes by boat, I navigate hidden valleys, cross rugged peaks. The woods stir my spirit, the springs run fresh and clear. They remind me good comes in its own time, and my year is nearly complete.

It is all over now! My days are numbered, how long must I be in this world so lumbered? Why not let my heart wander free, rather than drift without purpose? Riches and pomp hold no sway over me, and the empire's fate I cannot foresee. I'll set out at dawn, alone, to roam afar, planting my staff, then tilling the earth. I'll climb Eastern Heights, raise my voice in song, gaze upon clear streams, and craft my verse. I'll revel in life's natural cycle, journeying to the end, trusting Heaven's will, without discord or strife!"

Later, when they sought to name him Gentleman of the Imperial Library, he turned it down. He steered clear of court assemblies and avoided visits with provincial dignitaries. Old friends, the likes of Zhang Ye from his own town, Yang Songling from Zhouxuan, and Chong Zun, would call him out to drink. Together, they'd find a tavern, and though Qian was a stranger to the keeper, he'd drink with joy and never stir trouble. His life's work bore no grand marks. His haunts were but the farmsteads and the picturesque reaches of Mount Lu.

In the Yuanxi period (419-420), Inspector Wang Hong held Qian in high regard, even making the journey to his home. Qian feigned sickness, declining the visit. He later confided, "I am not one for society's embrace, having withdrawn due to illness. It's not for fame or wealth that I shun a high-ranking official like Wang. It's unseemly for a man of my low stature to be courted by him, drawing the ire of Confucian scholars like Liu Gonggan. Such a misstep is no trifling matter."

Hong had men keep tabs on Qian and learned he was bound for Mount Lu. He dispatched Qian's old comrade, Pang Tongzhi, among others, with wine to intercept him. Encountering the wine, Qian led them to a humble pavilion and drank freely. Hong emerged and they reveled the day away. Qian, shoeless, was fitted for a pair by Hong's command. When asked for a fitting, Qian sat and offered his feet. Asked by Hong how he'd return to the capital, Qian said, "A chronic foot ailment had me in a rickety carriage, but now I can make my own way." Hong instructed a disciple and his sons to bear Qian in a palanquin back to the capital. They shared laughter and jests along the way. Qian showed no envy for his grand dwellings. Post-meeting, Hong would often find Qian in the woods or by the lake. When Qian's stores of wine and food dwindled, Hong shared his own.

Qian's kith and kin would often come bearing wine and food, and he never turned them away. In his cups, he was joyful and untroubled. He paid no mind to his livelihood, leaving all domestic matters to his children and servants. He was never overtaken by joy or rage, and

drank whenever wine was at hand. Without wine, he recited poems with a refined ease.

Qian once shared that in the languid summer months, he'd recline on an elevated platform by the north window. With the cool breeze as his company, he'd fancy himself Emperor Yu, the venerable sage-king. Though not a musician, he owned a simple qin, its strings and frets incomplete. When friends joined him for a drink, he'd pluck at the qin, harmonizing with its silence, and say, "If only you knew the qin's delights, you'd understand the superfluity of strings!"

Qian passed away in the midst of the Yuanjia era under the [Liu] Song Dynasty, aged sixty-three. His writings endure, still pored over and cherished.

Comment

The historian notes: "The journey of the noble is marked by distinction and withdrawal. In governance, he wields fairness and justice, guiding by the Way to shape events. In seclusion, he rises above the din, tending to his own affairs. In seeking truth, he finds enlightenment.

Gonghe dwelled in a cave, garbed in grass, instructing Shuye [Ji Kang] in the art of clear contemplation. Weinian, of the Society, in simple attire, stood before Zijing, declaring, 'Such recluses, elusive and untraceable, fall short of Liu Qin and Shang Ping's stature.' Xia Tong, celebrated for filial devotion and amity, earned familial and friendly regard for his candor and integrity. His rendition of 'Little Sea' echoed Wu [Zi] Xu's presence. His resolve mirrored the unyielding virtue of stone. Gong Lyu, in their midst, felt a profound modesty, and at times they would amble by the Luo's banks, a veritable truth. Song Xian, from youth, held high aspirations and was lauded for his exemplary nature. Yang Xuan extolled him in portraiture, and Ma Ji esteemed him as a dragon among men. The moniker of enigma suited him well.

Others shunned office feigning illness, penned works to amend mores, faced the world with pride and scorn, or withdrew to the wilds, hunting, and fishing, nurturing their pure and precious core. They trod the path of rectitude, their luster veiled. Their dignified mien will surely inspire for ages."

Eulogy

Riches call, they sculpt their fame, desires met with zestful game,
Eminent 'mongst peers, they rise, from worldly ties, they claim their name.
In mountain's keep, their spirit's pure, forest's tune, their solace claim,
They rouse the soul to shun the greed, their lasting torch, an endless flame.

ⁱ In *SJ118*:

臣聞子胥諫吳王，吳王不用，乃曰：“臣今見麋鹿游姑蘇之台也。今臣亦見宮中生荊棘，露沾衣也。”

Your subject has heard that when Zixu admonished the King of Wu, the king did not

heed him, and thus he said, "Now I see deer roaming the terraces of Gusu." Now, your subject also sees thorns growing in the palace, and dew soaking the clothes.

The phrase "deer-roam" came to be used as a metaphor for a place of prosperity turning into desolation, hinting at the downfall of a nation.

96. Chapter 66 Exemplary Women

Where the Three Talents¹ are aptly aligned, the ways of the household flourish and shine; where two kinships in concord unite, the noble virtues of loyalty and valor manifest. With a lofty spirit, they stand unrivaled - the records of Lu² flourish with brilliance; With firm resolve, like a solitary pinnacle - the chronicles of Zhou³ thrive abundantly. Radiant with courage, grace and diligence, they were unfailingly gentle. Spanning generations with shared hopes, their legacy was surely not woven of a single thread.

Thus did Yu rise at Gui's conflux,⁴ and Xia flourish at Mount Tu.⁵ Yousong⁶ and Youshen,⁷ with their remarkable achievements, laid the foundations of Yin's enterprise; while Tai Ren⁸ and Tai Si,⁹ through their progeny, amplified the ethos of the house of Ji. In the Han dynasty, the matrons Ma¹⁰ and Deng¹¹ were paragons of thrift and modesty; and in

¹ "三才" (sān cái, lit. "The Three Talents") is a philosophical term originated from the *Book of Changes*. It encompasses Heaven (天 tiān), Earth (地 dì), and Humanity (人 rén).

² The *Spring and Autumn Annals* was the official chronicle of the State of Lu. It covers a 241-year period from 722 to 481 BCE.

³ The *Rites of Zhou* was a work on bureaucracy and organizational theory. It was listed among the classics of Confucianism.

⁴ "媯汭" (guī rùi, lit. "Gui River's conflux") refers to the two wives of Yu Shun, E'huang and Nü Ying. Yu Shun lived at Gui River's confluence, hence he adopted [Guī Rùi] as his clan's name. (*Shuowen Jiezi*)

⁵ Yu married a woman from the Mount Tu clan. He also convened a tribal alliance at Mount Tu for a campaign against the Miao.

⁶ "有娥" (yǒu sōng) was an ancient state in the Chinese mythology. It is notably linked to Dì Kù (帝嚳), a sage emperor of ancient China. According to myth, Dì Kù had a consort named Jiāndì (簡狄) from the Yousong clan. She was the mother of Qì (契), an ancestor of the Shang dynasty. The state of Yousong is also mentioned in the context of the last days of the Xia dynasty. Tang of Shang (商湯), the founder of the Shang dynasty, launched a campaign against the last Xia ruler, Jié (桀). The battle took place at Míngtiào, often associated with the location of Yousong. Tang's victory over Jié led to the fall of the Xia dynasty and the rise of the Shang. It symbolized the dynastic cycle and the Mandate of Heaven in Chinese historiography.

⁷ "有娀" (yǒu shēn) was an ancient state in the Chinese mythology. It is notably linked to the narrative surrounding Tang of Shang and his consort, who was a woman of the Youshen state. She bore Tang sons - Zhōngrén (仲壬, first ruler of the Shang dynasty) and Wàibīng (外丙, second ruler).

⁸ Tai Ren (太任, c. 12th - 11th century BCE) was the mother of King Wen of Zhou, Ji Chang. Tai Jiang (Chang's wife), Tai Ren, and Tai Si (Chang's wife) were collectively known as the "Three Tais." The term "Tai Tai" (太太) has been used as an honorific for married women, signifying virtues and qualities that aspire to match those of the Three Tais.

⁹ Tai Si (太姒, c. 12th - 11th century BCE) was the wife of King Wen of Zhou and is revered as a highly respected woman. She was a descendant of Yu and a mother of ten sons, including King Wu of Zhou - founder of the Zhou Dynasty - and his younger brother the Duke of Zhou.

¹⁰ Empress Ma (馬皇后, late 30s - 79), formally Empress Mingde (明德皇后, lit. "The understanding and virtuous empress"), was an empress during the Eastern Han Dynasty from 60 until 75, then empress dowager from that year till her death. Her husband was Emperor Ming of Han. As empress, she was described as humble, solemn, thrifty and well-read. Emperor Ming often consulted her on important matters of state.

¹¹ Deng Sui (鄧綏, 81 - 121), formally Empress Hexi (和熹皇后, lit. "moderate and pacifying empress"), was an empress of the Eastern Han dynasty through her marriage to Emperor He of Han. She was recognized as a merciful, intelligent leader who guided the dynasty well through a period of natural disaster, famine, court intrigues, economic inflation and military conflicts. She was a staunch opponent of corruption and bribery and a patron of education and arts. She is considered to be one of the Han Dynasty's last effective rulers.

Wei's era, Empresses Xuan¹² and Zhao¹³ exemplified dignified grace and virtue. These paragons, embodying propriety and righteousness, stood out as extraordinary, their luminance surpassing the ordinary realm of women.

Furthermore, Gongjiang's¹⁴ oath of chastity, Mencius' mother seeking benevolence,¹⁵ Hua guiding and instructing the state of Qi, Fan¹⁶ giving counsel and enabling Chu to gain hegemony, the chastisement of Duke Wen at the presentation of the sword, the yielding to Zi Fa in the sharing of beans, Shaojun following the proprieties and rites, and Meng Guang's tacit resolve - all illuminated the principles of women and demonstrated the models of motherhood.

Zizheng¹⁷ edited these chronicles earlier, while Yuankai¹⁸ compiled them later. Together, they set forth the norms of female conduct, benefiting the education of women.

Thus, from the Taishi era to the reigns of [Emperors] Gong and An (266-420), individuals of singular virtue and talent have been recorded and biographed in this work. Among them were imperial consorts and individuals whose deeds were elevated through their spouses or sons. Each person has been given a dedicated biographical account, and thus, their stories are not included in the present collection. In several rebellious states, royal decrees were momentarily hindered. Yet the innate benevolence under Heaven served as a testament to moral exhortation. The accomplishments of women from these regions have also been documented and are included at the end of this article.

¹² Lady Bian (卞氏, 161 – 230), formally known as Empress Wuxuan, was an empress dowager and later grand empress dowager of the state of Cao Wei. She was the wife of Cao Cao and bore Cao Pi, who ended the Han dynasty and founded Wei in 220.

¹³ Lady Zhen (甄氏, 183 - 221), was the first wife of Cao Pi. She was posthumously honored as Empress Wenzhao when her son Cao Rui succeeded Cao Pi as the emperor of Wei.

¹⁴ The term Gongjiang refers to the wife of Viscount Gong of Wei (? - 813 BCE). It later refers to widows who never marry again.

¹⁵ Mencius's mother is often held up as an exemplary female figure in Chinese culture. One of the most famous traditional Chinese idioms is 孟母三遷 (mèngmǔ-sānqiān, lit. "Mencius's mother moves three times"). This saying refers to the legend that Mencius's mother moved houses three times before finding a location that she felt was suitable for the child's upbringing.

¹⁶ Consort Fan (樊姬, died in the 7th century BCE) was the Queen consort of King Zhuang of Chu (reigned 613-591 BCE). She acted as the political adviser of her spouse, and has been portrayed as a positive role model for women. She was noted for her clever methods of demonstrating her opinions and convincing people to change. In one famous story, she felt her husband was hunting too much, so she stopped eating meat, as a subtle reproach to him. He noted her actions, and ceased his inappropriate hunting.

¹⁷ Liu Xiang (77 – 6 BCE), courtesy name Zizheng, was an astronomer, historian and writer of the Western Han dynasty. He compiled the *Biographies of Exemplary Women*. It includes 125 accounts of exemplary women taken from early Chinese histories. The book served as a standard Confucianist textbook for the moral education of women for 2000 years.

¹⁸ Du Yu (223 – 285), courtesy name Yuankai, was a classicist, general and politician of Cao Wei during the late Three Kingdoms period and early Jin dynasty. He wrote *Praise of Women's Records* (女记赞), which has been lost to time.

Records

Preface

The emperors and kings of antiquity were of a unique breed: descendants of Chunwei¹ and the lineage of Count Yu.² Could they indeed be reckoned as of alien kind? Clad in the hides of beasts, feasting upon the raw and the rank, imbibing the murky draughts, they wrought astonishment upon the Middle Kingdom, their origins raced to distant lands. Heaven, unrepentant of the calamity unleashed, allowed their lineage to proliferate. Their mores, steeped in deceit and danger; their essence, wild and impetuous. Historical records have meticulously chronicled their tales. Emperor Xuan[yuan], troubled by their defiance of order, embarked on punitive expeditions;³ King Wu banished them to the wilderness, to live among the beasts. Yet, in the chill of the dew-covered fields, under the moon's light and the blowing winds, they exploited every crack to raise dust, seizing every moment to wreak havoc. The border towns were forced to constant vigilance, leaving the populace without hearth and home.

Confucius said, "Without Guan Zhong, I would have had my hair disheveled and my robe fastened on the left." These words can instruct soldiers, organize chariots and armor, secure the borders, and ensure peace within the realm. Thus, Yan's construction of bulwarks near Zaoyang's fields, Qin's digging of trenches in Lintao's perilous terrains, the ascent of the Tianshan peaks, the severing of the earth's veins, the enclosing of Xuantu, the advance upon the Yellow River, were all measures taken to prevent the chaos brought by barbarians upon the Middle Kingdom, a defense meticulously prepared.

Emperor Xuan of Han welcomed Huhan[ye], granting him residence in Tingzhang as a sentinel, thereby initiating a policy of conciliation towards the nomadic tribes. Guangwu similarly relocated tens of thousands from the southern court to Xihe, and later to Wuyuan, across seven commandries. Dong Zhuo's upheaval, in turn, left the Fen and Jin borders deserted. Guo Qin submitted a memorandum to Emperor Wu, and Jiang Tong proposed a strategy to Emperor Hui. Both advocated for relocating the Wei populace, who were living among barbarians and near the capital, to the frontier deserts, urging the adoption of Yin and Zhou attire. Tong was concerned about the unification of the tribes; Qin worried about alliances at river fords. Their warnings had barely left their lips when Yuanhai appeared. The proverb "missed by a hair's breadth" thus became a disgrace for Jin's dignitaries.

Cong vowed to campaign eastward, subjugating the land of Qi; Yao launched an expedition westward, crossing the Long Mountains, overwhelming both capitals, and

¹ Chunwei was a descendant of Yu the Great and a son of Jie of Xia. After the fall of Xia, Tang of Shang exiled Jie to Mingtiao, where he died three years later. Chunwei (or Xunyu) then married his father's concubines and wandered to the northern wilderness in search of pasture lands. Their people were later mentioned as Xiongnu.

² Yu the Great was a legendary king in ancient China. His establishment of the Xia dynasty inaugurated the dynastic rule in China.

³ The Battle of Zhuolu was a battle fought between the Yanhuang tribes led by the Yellow Emperor and the Jiuli tribes led by Chiyao.

decimating millions. The Son of Heaven, relegated to south of the Yangtze, maintained control over strategic locations. Yet, when he looked upon the Central Plains, he found himself powerless to intervene, effectively abandoning the territories north of the Yangtze and Huai. The barbarians exploited our turmoil and incited chaos on horseback. Some Jin officials, on the other hand, either hindered military efforts or engaged in misconduct.

In general: In the first year of Emperor Hui's Yongxing era (304), Liu Yuanhai declared Han in Lishi. Nine years on (313), Shi Le founded Zhao in Xiangguo. Prior to these events, the Zhang clan had already seized control of Hexi. Thirty-six years following Shi Le's declaration (349), Chonghua proclaimed himself King of Liang. The ensuing year (350) saw Ran Min claim the throne of Wei from Ye. Another year later (351), Fu Jiān established Qin in Chang'an. The Murong clan had controlled Liaodong and declared Yan this year. A year after Fu Jiān (352), [Zhang] Jun usurped the Title. Thirty-one years later (383), Murong Chui of Later Yan took Ye. Two years hence (385), Murong Chong of Western Yan took E'pang. That year (385), Qifu Guoren declared Qin from Fuhun. The following year (386), Murong Yong seized Shangdang. That same year (386), Lü Guang declared Liang from Guzang. Twelve years on (398), Murong De founded Southern Yan from Huatai. That year (398), Tufa Wugu and Duan Ye declared Southern and Northern Liang from Lianchuan and Zhangye, respectively. Three years later (401), Li Xuansheng claimed Western Liang from Dunhuang. The next year (402), Juqu Mengxun killed Duan Ye, taking Liang. Four years after (406), Qiao Zong became King of Chengdu. Two years thereafter (408), Helian Bobo declared Da Xia from Shuofang. Another two years on (410), Feng Ba killed Li Ban, establishing Northern Yan from Helong.

In total, eight out of ten territories under the Heaven were lost - each flying the dragon banners, each wearing the imperial robes. They erected temples and altars in both civilized and barbarian lands. Some seized the crossroads of mighty cities, others held sway over several provinces. Their ambitions collapsed internally while external conflicts merged. The devastation caused by their wars exceeded the gains of their victories, resulting in countless lives lost to spears and arrows. This Warring States period lasted for 136 years. Yuanhai was often regarded as the catalyst for these disasters.

101. Chapter 1 Liu Yuanhai

Liu Yuanhai was a Xiongnu from Xinxing and a descendant of Modu. He bore a name tabooed by Gaozu's temple [name], hence we use his courtesy name here.¹ Initially, Gaozu of Han betrothed a woman of his clan under the guise of a princess to Modu, forging a fraternal alliance. Modu's descendants henceforth adopted the surname Liu.

In early Jianwu era (25-56), Chanyu Wuzhuliuruodi's son, Bi, the Right Aojian Rizhu Prince, named himself Southern Chanyu, settling his court at Meiji in Xihe. The very court to which the Chanyu relocated stands in what is now Zuoguo City in Lishi.

During the Zhongping period (184-189), Chanyu Qiangqu sent his son Yufuluo to help the Han quash the Yellow Turban. After Qiangqu fell to his own people, Yufuluo stayed with the Han and named himself Chanyu. In Dong Zhuo's turmoil, he raided Taiyuan and Hedong, making camp in Henei. Yufuluo's demise saw his brother, Huchuquan, ascend, who named Yufuluo's son Bao, Yuanhai's father, as Left Wise Prince. Wu of Wei split their forces into five divisions, naming Bao as the commander of the left. All other commanders shared the Liu surname. During the Taikang period (280-289), a reorganization introduced commandants (Duwei), placing the left division in Zishi, Taiyuan; the right in Qi; the south in Puzi; the north in Xinxing; and the central in Daling. The Liu clan, though divided into five divisions, dwelt along Fen River's banks in Jinyang.

Lady Huyan, Bao's wife, prayed for a son at Longmen during Wei's Jiaping period (249-254). Suddenly, a majestic fish, adorned with two horns, emerged from the depths. Its elegant fins flapped gracefully as it leaped towards the altar, lingering there before departing. The shamans marveled and spoke in unison, "An auspicious omen!" That night, Lady Huyan dreamt of the fish transforming into a man. In his left hand, he held an object, half-egg-sized, its radiance unparalleled. He handed it to her, pronouncing, "This is the essence of the sun. Consume this to beget a noble son."

She woke and recounted this vision to Bao, who declared, "A fortuitous sign indeed! Zhang Jiong of Handan's mother, Lady Situ, once read my facial features. She envisioned for me a lineage of eminent descendants, ensuring our house's grandeur for three generations. This vision, it appears, is the harbinger of that prophecy's fulfillment." Thirteen months on, Yuanhai was born. He bore his name's character on his left hand, and he was thus named.

As a child, Yuanhai showed exceptional intellect and wisdom. At seven, he faced his mother's loss. He beat his chest, jumped, shouted and yelled. His cries touched both neighbors and his wider clan and tribe, who collectively mourned and marveled at his profound sensitivity. Wang Chang of Taiyuan, then Minister of Works, upon hearing of his virtues, praised him and sent condolences and a gift to mourn with him.

Yuanhai, from youth, cherished learning and studied with Cui You of Shangdang. He delved into "Mao's Poetry," "Jing's Changes," "Ma's Book of Documents," showing keen interest in "Zuo's Spring and Autumn Annals" and "Sun and Wu's Art of War," reciting most by heart. He mastered histories like "Records of the Grand Historian," "Book of Han," and

¹ Liu Yuan shared personal name with Li Yuan, Emperor Gaozu of Tang. Hence, he is called Liu Yuanhai by the Tang compilers.

numerous philosophical works. To his fellow disciples Zhu Ji and Fan Long, he once remarked, "Reading books and annals, I often find contempt for Sui [He] and Lu [Jia], devoid of martial prowess, and scorn for [Marquis of] Jiang and Guan [Ying], bereft of scholarly grace. Indeed, the path to eminence is broadened by one's own endeavor. Ignorance in any matter is indeed a mark of dishonor for the nobleman. Both men, having served under the august Emperor, failed to erect a legacy meriting the rank of marquis. Moreover, in the reign of Taizong, their inability to embellish the academic landscape is a matter of great lamentation!" Henceforth, he devoted himself to the martial arts, surpassing the common throng. With arms as dexterous as those of the ape, he excelled in archery. His strength, too, transcended that of ordinary men.

Yuanhai's presence was both towering and majestic, with a height of 8 *chi* and 4 *cun* (c. 202 cm), and a beard that cascaded over 3 *chi* (70 cm) in length. Directly above his heart grew three strands of crimson hair, each stretching to 3 *chi* and 6 *cun* (85 cm). Connoisseurs of physiognomy like Cui Yizhi of Tunliu and Gongshi Yu of Xiangling, upon beholding Yuanhai, exclaimed in astonishment, "Never before have we encountered a man of such extraordinary demeanor!" Their admiration for him was profound, so they forged a cherished alliance. Wang Hun of Taiyuan, with an open heart, extended his friendship to him, and commanded his son, Ji, to pay him homage.

During the Xianxi era (264-265), Yuanhai, held in Luoyang as a political hostage, was held in high esteem by Emperor Wen. In the Taishi era (266-274), Hun persistently recommended him to Emperor Wu. The emperor, upon summoning and conversing with Yuanhai, was greatly delighted and thus addressed Wang Ji, "Liu Yuanhai has a bearing and an insight that even You Yu and Midi could scarcely rival."

Ji responded, "Indeed, Yuanhai's bearing and insight reflect Your Majesty's words. Moreover, his prowess in both the scholarly and martial arts far surpass that of these two gentlemen. Should Your Majesty appoint him over the affairs of the southeast, the pacification of Wuhui would be effortlessly achieved." The emperor lauded this perspective.

Kong Xun and Yang Yao then counselled, "Observing Yuanhai's talents, I fear there is none his equal in our times. Should Your Majesty underestimate his followers, the endeavor might not succeed. Yet, if granted excessive power, after Wu's subjugation, I fear he may not deign to return northward. 'Those not of our kind, their hearts surely differ.' To entrust him with his native tribe, I secretly harbor concerns for Your Majesty. And to award him a fortress that lies against the heaven's boundary may indeed be unwise." The emperor remained silent.

Following the downfall of Qin and Liang, the emperor convened his generals for counsel. Li Xi of Shangdang proposed, "Should Your Majesty indeed marshal the formidable forces of the Xiongnu's five divisions, and bestow upon Yuanhai a title of General, leading westward to the beat of drums, victory could be ours by appointment."

Kong Xun retorted, "The counsel of Excellency Li fails to thoroughly dispel our woes."

Indignant, Xi contended, "With the Xiongnu's fierce bravery and Yuanhai's adeptness in military strategy, under the sacred edict's awe, how could we not dispel them all?"

Xun replied, "Should Yuanhai pacify Liangzhou and decapitate Shujineng, I fear it's Liangzhou itself that might find predicament. A dragon, upon encountering clouds and rain, is no longer confined to the pond." The emperor thus desisted.

Later, Wang Mi came through Luoyang on his return east. Yuanhai bid Mi farewell at the bank of the Jiuqu. With tears streaming, he spoke to Mi, "Wang Hun and Li Xi, through ties of our locale, came to know me well. Oft did we laud each other's virtues, yet through slander, discord was sown against my deepest inclinations, bringing naught but strife. Ambition for office holds no sway in my heart. Only you understand me. My dread is to perish in Luoyang, eternally separated from you!" Then, overwhelmed with profound emotion and heaving sighs, he surrendered to the wine and issued a long, piercing cry. His voice was resonant and stirring, moving those seated to weep.

At that moment, Prince You of Qi found himself at Jiuqu. Stirred upon hearing such news, he hastened to verify with his own eyes. Upon sighting Yuanhai, he addressed the emperor, "Should Your Majesty not decree the removal of Liu Yuanhai, I fear peace in Bingzhou may soon be breached!"

Wang Hun stepped forward, asserting, "Yuanhai, being a senior, has my assurance of loyalty to the sovereign. Furthermore, our Great Jin, now embracing a policy of trust towards diverse cultures and extending kindness to the distant, stands as a beacon of virtue. How can we, then, in the shadow of unfounded suspicion, execute a man before his progeny, thus tarnishing the expansive virtue of Jin?"

The emperor acknowledged, "Hun's words ring true."

As Bao passed, Yuanhai ascended as Commander of the Left Division. At the end of the Taikang era, he rose to be Commandant of the Northern Division. He purified the penal codes, eradicated deceit and malice, lived frugally yet with open-handedness, and engaged with sincerity, drawing to him the eminent from all five divisions. Scholars of renown from You and Ji, alongside men of distinction from afar, traversed thousands of *li* for his audience. Upon Yang Jun seizing the regency, Yuanhai was hailed as the General Who Establishes Might, the Grand Commandant across the divisions, and was ennobled as Marquis of Hanguang Village. By the close of the Yuankang era, he was stripped of his station due to a renegade from his ranks who fled the boundaries. When Prince Ying of Chengdu held Ye, he championed Yuanhai for the role of General Who Calms the Frontier, entrusting him with the martial stewardship of the Five Divisions.

During Emperor Hui's reign, bandits and thieves rose in swarms. Yuanhai and his great uncle, the erstwhile Commandant of the Northern Division and Left Wise Prince, Liu Xuan, among others, deliberated in secret, "In days of yore, our ancestors pledged brotherhood with the Han, sharing weal and woe as one. Since the fall of Han, Wei and Jin have risen in succession. Though our Chanyus were granted titles, they were left without a *chi* of soil to call their own. Our princes and marquises were demoted to mere commoners. Now, as the Sima clan engages in fratricidal strife, chaos engulfs the Four Seas. The time has come to revive our state and restore our legacy. The Left Wise Prince Yuanhai, with his peerless intellect and foresight, stands unmatched in this era. If the Heaven did not favor our Chanyu's ascension, they would not have bestowed such a soul upon us."

Together, they resolved to acclaim Yuanhai as the Grand Chanyu. They dispatched their associate, Huan You, to Ye to disclose their scheme. Yuanhai petitioned to return for a funeral, yet Ying forbade it. Hence, he commanded You to precede him, instructing Xuan and the rest to muster the five divisions and unite the various Hu from Yiyang, ostensibly to back Ying, yet in truth, to defy him.

When Ying ascended as the imperial heir, he entrusted Yuanhai with the role of Colonel of the Heir Apparent's Cavalry. As Emperor Hui waged his campaign against Ying, they encamped at Dangyin. Ying honored Yuanhai as the General Who Assists the State there, tasked with the northern city's defense. Following the downfall of the six armies, Ying elevated Yuanhai to the Champion General and bestowed upon him the title of Marquis of Lunu. The Inspector of Bingzhou, Duke Teng of Dongying, and the General Who Maintains Peace in the North, Wang Jun, rallied forces against Ying.

Yuanhai counseled Ying, saying, "Currently, the two garrisons swell unchecked, their numbers surpassing a hundred thousand. I fear they elude the control of the usual palace guards and the local nobility. I wish to return and entreat the five divisions to rally against this crisis besetting our nation."

Ying replied, "Can the multitudes of the five divisions be readily summoned? Even if such a feat were possible, the Xianbei and Wuhuan are as fleeting as the wind and clouds. How feasible is it to stand against them? My desire is to guide the imperial chariot back to Luoyang, evading their cutting advance. In due course, I plan to disseminate edicts across the realm, commanding allegiance and suppressing rebellion through the dichotomy of loyalty and dissent. What do you think?"

Yuanhai said, "Your Highness, son of Emperor Wu, bears distinguished honors within the royal lineage. Your magnanimity and benevolence are revered across the Four Seas. Who would hesitate to sacrifice their life for Your Highness? What challenge lies in rallying support? Wang Jun is naught but a miscreant, and Dongying, a distant kin. How could they vie with Your Highness? Departing Ye Palace signifies a display of vulnerability. Can we, then, ever hope to return to Luoyang? Even if we were to reach Luoyang, authority and dominion would no longer reside with Your Highness. Who would regard a decree or a missive? Furthermore, the ferocity of the eastern barbarians does not surpass that of our five divisions. I beseech Your Highness to soothe and solidify our forces, employing two divisions to vanquish Dongying and three to behead Wang Jun. The heads of these two miscreants could soon be displayed." Ying was pleased and bestowed upon Yuanhai the titles of Northern Chanyu and Advisor to the Chancellor on military matters.

Yuanhai proceeded to Zuoguo City, where Liu Xuan and others acclaimed him Grand Chanyu. Within 20 days, their forces swelled to fifty thousand, congregating at Lishi.

Wang Jun sent General Qi Hong with the Xianbei to assault Ye. Defeated, Ying fled southward to Luoyang, escorting the emperor. Yuanhai said, "Ying disregarded my counsel, hastening his own downfall—verily the act of a bonds slave. Yet, having pledged my word to him, I cannot abandon his cause." He commanded Prince Liu Jing of the Right Yulu and Prince Liu Yannian of the Left Dulu, along with others, to marshal twenty thousand foot and horse to engage the Xianbei.

Liu Xuan and his men vehemently protested, saying, "The Jin reigns without righteousness and rules us as slaves, which sparked the uncontrollable wrath of Right Wise Prince Meng. As the reins of Jin remain slack, and the great cause unfulfilled, the prince met his end on the field, a blemish upon the Chanyu's honor. Now, the Sima clan cannibalizes itself, a sign that Heaven has forsaken Jin's virtue to favor us instead. The Chanyu, enriched in virtue, commands respect among the Jin. It is time to uplift our tribe and restore the endeavors of Huhanye. With the Xianbei and Wuhuan as our allies, why resist and aid our foe?"

Heaven is extending its hand to us. We must not spurn it! To defy Heaven is to court disaster, to oppose the multitude is futile, to ignore Heaven's aid is to invite its censure. May the Chanyu harbor no doubts."

Yuanhai replied, "Well said. We ought to strive for the summit of towering peaks, rather than content ourselves with forming mere hillocks! Have emperors and kings ever known permanence? Great Yu emerged from the Western Nomads, and King Wen was birthed by the Eastern Barbarians. It is virtue alone that determines sovereignty. Now, with our hosts numbering over a hundred thousand, each warrior a match for ten of Jin's, to march against and shatter the disarray of Jin is akin to uprooting desiccated stalks. In our highest ambition, we emulate the feats of Gao[zu] of Han. At the least, we shall not fall short of the Wei. Nevertheless, the hearts of Jin's folk may not yet be with us. The Han dynasty commanded the realm for ages. its benevolence and righteousness ingrained in the people's hearts. Thus, even when Emperor Zhaolie was confined to a province's rugged lands, he stood in defiance against Under Heaven. As a nephew to the Han lineage, bound in brotherhood, should the elder brother fall, does not the duty of succession fall to the younger? Moreover, by proclaiming ourselves as Han and honoring the last ruler posthumously, we can kindle the hopes of the populace." Subsequently, he relocated to Zuoguo City. Tens of thousands from afar rallied to his cause.

In the first year of Yongxing (304), Yuanhai erected an altar in the southern suburbs and presumptuously ascended to the throne as the King of Han. He proclaimed:

"In days of yore, our supreme progenitor, Emperor Gao, with divine martial prowess, seized the destined moment to broadly carve out our great enterprise. Emperor Xiaowen, our illustrious forebear, furthered this legacy with his luminous virtue, elevating and pacifying the Han path. Emperor Xiaowu, our sovereign ancestor, expanded our territories and repelled the barbarians, surpassing the realms in Tang's days. Emperor Xiaoxuan, our central progenitor, sought out and elevated the talented, filling the court with virtuous scholars. Thus, our ancestral path has outstripped that of the Three Sovereigns, and our achievements have towered above the Five Emperors, hence our reigns have outlasted those of Xia and Shang, and our lineage has surpassed that of the Ji family.

Yet, under [Emperors] Yuan and Cheng, deviations were many; [Emperors] Ai and Ping saw brief reigns, and the treacherous minister Wang Mang committed an overwhelming usurpation. Our world progenitor, Emperor Guangwu, endowed with sacred martial virtues, restored our grand foundation, offered sacrifices to Han alongside Heaven, preserving the ancient relics, allowing the three celestial lights to dim and then shine anew, and the divine regalia to be obscured and then revealed. Emperor Xiaoming and Emperor Xiaozhang, our illustrious and venerable ancestors, successively rekindled the glory of our flame.

Since the era of [Emperors] He and An, the imperial principles have gradually declined, the heavenly steps have become arduous, and the continuity of our nation has been frequently interrupted. The Yellow Turbans stirred the seas across the nine provinces, and bands of eunuchs poisoned the four seas, leading to Dong Zhuo's unrestrained tyranny, followed by the vile succession of Cao Cao and his progenies. Thus, Xiaomin abandoned the myriad states, Zhaolie wandered beyond the Min and Shu, in hope of a reversal to restore peace, turning back to the old capital. Who would have thought that Heaven had not yet repented its calamity, and the Later Emperor found himself in distress.

Since the downfall of our state altar, our ancestral temples have gone without sacrifices for forty years till now. Now, Heaven has reconsidered its heart, regretting the calamity upon the Han, causing the Sima family members to eliminate each other in succession. The common people suffer, with nowhere to turn.

I, though unworthy, am now pushed forward by the public to continue and restore the enterprise of our three ancestors. Considering the current weakness and the chaos of war, I am deeply unsettled. But with the great shame not yet avenged and the state without a master, I reluctantly follow the public opinion."

Following this, he decreed amnesty across his lands, inaugurated the era name Yuanxi, posthumously venerated Liu Shan as Emperor Xiaohuai, and erected divine tablets for the three ancestors and five sovereigns down from Gaozu of Han for sacrificial honors. The establishment of the hundred officials saw Liu Xuan named Chancellor, Cui You as Imperial Censor, and Liu Hong as Grand Commandant, with others appointed in their respective roles.

Duke Teng of Dongying sent General Nie Xuan to the fray. Their forces clashed at Daling. Defeated, Teng, gripped by fear, led upwards of 20,000 households from Bingzhou to Shandong, turning to banditry in their wake. Yuanhai, in response, sent forth his General who Establishes Martial Might, Liu Yao, to sweep through Taiyuan, Xuanshi, Tunliu, Changzi, and Zhongdu, each falling to his campaign. In the second year [of Yongxing] (305), Teng rallied once more, deploying Sima Yu, Zhou Liang, Shi Xian, and others, who took their stand at Fen City near Lishi. Yuanhai countered with his General of Martial Ivory, Liu Qin, at the helm of six armies, to meet Yu and his cohorts. After four engagements, Yu's forces were bested on all fronts, with Qin returning in victory. Amidst this, a severe famine struck Lishi, prompting Yuanhai to relocate to Liting in search of granary stores. He left Grand Commandant Liu Hong and Protector of the Army Ma Jing to secure Lishi, while dispatching the Minister of Agriculture Bu Yu to ferry grain in support. Yuanhai then elevated Front General, Liu Jing, to the rank of Envoy with the Imperial Insignia, Grand Commander for Expeditions, and Grand General, charging him to confront the Inspector of Bingzhou, Liu Kun, at Banqiao. Their efforts were thwarted by Kun, who subsequently seized Jinyang. Palace Attendants Liu Yin and Wang Yu, in earnest counsel, addressed Yuanhai, stating:

"Since Your Highness has rallied the troops, a full cycle has nearly passed, yet you have been ensconced in distant lands, and the royal authority has yet to thunder across the realm. Should you decree your generals to strike forth in all directions, with a decisive cast of the die, to behead Liu Kun, to stabilize Hedong, to ascend as Emperor, to beat the drums and march southward, to seize Chang'an for your throne, and to sweep through Luoyang with the masses from Guanzhong as effortlessly as turning one's hand—this would mirror the actions of Emperor Gaozu in laying the grand foundation and vanquishing the formidable Chu."

Yuanhai, delighted, responded, "Indeed, this aligns with the desires of my heart."

Thus, he pressed forward, seizing Hedong, storming and taking Puban and Pingyang. Yuanhai then made his entrance, establishing Puzi as his capital, with every county, fortress, and wall within Hedong and Pingyang yielding to his command. In this period, Ji Sang mustered forces in Zhao and Wei. Lu Zhuyan of the four Xianbei divisions from Shangjun, alongside the Di chieftain - Grand Chanyu Zheng, Wang Mi of Donglai, and Shi Le, among others, consecutively pledged their allegiance to him. Yuanhai, in turn, bestowed upon them

official titles and ranks.

In the second year of Yongjia (309), Yuanhai presumptuously assumed the imperial throne, declared a general amnesty across the land, and changed the era name to Yongfeng. He elevated his Grand General, Liu He, to Grand Marshal, bestowing upon him the title of Prince of Liang. Liu Huanle, the Prefect of the Masters of Writing, was named Grand Minister over the Masses and titled Prince of Chenliu. The Imperial Censor-in-chief, Huyan Yi, was raised to Grand Minister of Works, receiving the title of Commandery Duke of Yan Province. Kin of the royal blood were named princes of counties and commanderies, their titles reflecting the degree of their kinship, while those of different surnames were honored as dukes and marquises, their titles a testament to their valor and wisdom. The Prefect of the Grand Historian, Xuan Yuxiu, approached Yuanhai, stating:

"Though Your Majesty has ascended with the grandeur of a dragon taking flight and the grace of a phoenix soaring, having swiftly embraced the great mandate, the remnants of Jin yet linger, and the imperial abode remains constrained and modest. The echoes of the transformation within the Purple Palace still resonate with the lineage of Jin. Within the span of three years, Luoyang shall undoubtedly fall. Puzi, with its rugged terrain, is no haven for enduring peace. Pingyang, blessed with a purple aura, also encompasses the ancient seat of the Taotang. It is my fervent hope that Your Majesty would align with the celestial patterns above and harmonize with the earthly fortunes below."

Thus, he moved the capital to Pingyang. In the Fen River, a jade seal was found. It was inscribed with "A new treasure to be guarded" - a relic from the time of Wang Mang. The finder inscribed it further with "[by] the brilliance of the abyss and sea."² Yuanhai, seeing this as a sign most favorable, proclaimed a general amnesty throughout the land, and ushered in the era named Herui (auspicious river). To his son Yu, he granted the title of Prince of Qi, and to Long, he bestowed the title of Prince of Lu.

Then Yuanhai, commanding his son Cong alongside Wang Mi, set forth to seize Luoyang. Liu Yao and Zhao Gu followed. Prince Yue of Donghai sent General who Pacifies the North, Cao Wu, along with Generals Song Chou and Peng Mo, to stand against them. Yet, the royal forces met defeat. Cong and his cohort pressed on to Yiyang. Duke Mo of Pingchang sent Generals Chunyu Ding and Lü Yi from Chang'an to confront them. They clashed at Yiyang, where Ding and his men met defeat. Cong, buoyed by his string of victories, neglected his defenses. The Administrator of Hongnong, Yuan Yan, feigned surrender. Under cover of night, he struck a sudden blow, routing Cong's forces. Yuanhai, donned in plain attire, received his army upon their return.

That winter, Yuanhai once again deployed a large host. He sent Cong and Mi along with Liu Yao and Liu Jing, among others, to lead fifty thousand elite cavalry to invade Luoyang, with Huyan Yi leading the infantry to follow. They overcame the royal troops in Henan. Cong made camp at the Ximing Gate. The Protector of the Army, Jia Yin, waged a night assault at the Daxia Gate, where he slew Cong's general, Huyan Hao, scattering his forces. Cong

² The original inscription on the jade seal was "有新保之" (Yǒu xīn bǎo zhī). The subsequent addition, as recorded in the *Book of Wei*, was "渊海光" (Yuān hǎi guāng). The Tang dynasty compilers of the *Book of Jin* altered the character "渊" (Yuān) to "泉" (Quán) due to the naming taboo associated with Tang Taizu, whose personal name contained the character "渊." The character "渊" in Liu Yuan's name means "abyss," while "海" (Hǎi), a character in his courtesy name Yuanhai "元海", means "sea."

withdrew south to fortify his position by the Luo River, and soon moved to hold the Xuanyang Gate, with Yao at the Upper East Gate, Mi at the Guangyang Gate, and Jing assaulting the Daxia Gate. Cong sought divine favor at Mount Song and entrusted his generals, Liu Li and Huyan Lang, among others, to command the remnants.

Prince Yue of Donghai dispatched his staff officer Sun Xun, General Qiu Guang, Lou Pou, and others with three thousand of his finest troops to strike from the Xuanyang Gate, where they beheaded Lang. Upon receiving word, Cong hastened back. Fearing retribution, Li cast himself into the waters, meeting his end.

Wang Mi said to Cong, "Now, having forfeited our advantage, and with Luoyang yet standing unyielding, it behooves Your Highness to consider a withdrawal, that we might deliberate on future endeavours. I shall muster forces and amass provisions between Yan and Yu, there to await your august command." Xuanyu Xiuzhi likewise said to Yuanhai, "In the year of Xinwei (311), we will capture Luoyang. Yet now, with the Jin's spirit still high, should our grand host tarry, defeat is certain."

With haste, Yuanhai dispatched the Gentleman of the Yellow Gate, Fu Xun, to summon Cong and others for a retreat. Wang Mi made his egress through Huanyuan, and Yue, in pursuit, dispatched Bo Sheng among others to assail Mi. They clashed at Xinji, where Mi's forces met with defeat. Thereupon, he took command of the garrison at Puban and made his return to Pingyang.

Yuanhai appointed Liu Huanle as the Grand Tutor, Liu Cong as the Grand Minister over the Masses, Liu Yannian as the Grand Minister of Works, and Liu Yang as the Grand Marshal. An amnesty was declared throughout their lands. He elevated his wife, Lady Shan, to the status of Empress, his son He to Crown Prince, and his son Yi to Prince of Beihai.

As Yuanhai's health gravely declined, he made provisions for a regency. He designated Huanle as the Grand Chancellor, Yang as the Grand Tutor, Yannian as the Grand Protector, and Cong as both the Grand Marshal and the Great Chanyu, also overseeing the imperial secretariat. He established the Chanyu Platform in the west of Pingyang and appointed his son Yu as the Grand Minister over the Masses. As his illness intensified, Yuanhai summoned Huanle, Yang, and others to the palace to impart his final edict on state governance. He passed away in the fourth year of Yongjia (308), after a reign of six years. Posthumously, he was falsely named Emperor Guangwen, with the temple name Gaozu and his tomb christened Yongguang Tomb. His son He succeeded him.

Liu He

He, courtesy name Xuantai, stood eight *chi* tall. His stature was both majestic and graceful. From his youth, he was drawn to learning, immersing himself in "Mao's Poetry", "Zuo's Spring and Autumn", and "Zheng's Changes". As the heir apparent, he harbored deep suspicions and showed little grace towards his subordinates.

Upon Yuanhai's passing, He ascended to the false throne. His Commandant of the Guards, Prince Liu Rui of Xichang, and the Minister of Clan Affairs, Huyan You, both aggrieved for their exclusion from the deliberations of succession. They offered their counsel

to He, saying, "The late emperor, in his oversight of the scales of power, permitted three princes to marshal formidable forces within the realm. The Grand Marshal wields command over a hundred thousand valiant soldiers in the suburb. Your Majesty, as it stands, occupies but a seat lent. The calamity that looms is beyond reckoning, and it behooves Your Majesty to take heed and prepare forthwith."

He, being You's nephew, concurred with profound agreement and convened his generals, Liu Sheng, Liu Qin, and Ma Jing, to relay this counsel. Sheng said, "The late emperor's remains yet reside in the mourning hall, and the four princes have not shown a hint of disloyalty. To now turn upon each other, I fear the populace will not lend their support to Your Majesty. The Four Seas are yet to be pacified, and the great cause is but in its infancy. My wish is for Your Majesty to harbor the ambition to perpetuate the late emperor's magnificent legacy and to disregard these rash counsels. As the 'Poetry' articulates: 'Are there no other men, none like my own brothers?' If Your Majesty distrusts your own brothers, in whom then can trust be placed?"

Rui and You, incensed, declared, "There shall be no dissent in today's discourse." They then commanded their retainers to slay Sheng.

Jing, stricken with fear, avowed, "Upon Your Majesty's decree, we shall obey to death, without fail."

They then made a pact in the eastern hall, with Rui and Jing attacking Cong, and You leading Liu Anguo in an assault on Yu. The Palace Attendant Liu Cheng and the Guard Liu Qin targeted Prince Long of Lu, while the Secretary Tian Mi and the Guard Liu Xuan launched an attack on Prince Ai of Beihai. Mi and Xuan dispatched men to breach the gates and subsequently fled to Cong, who donned full armor in preparation for battle. Aware that Cong was ready, Rui regrouped with You, Cheng, and others to mount an attack on Long and Yu. You and Cheng, suspecting that Anguo and Qin might harbor divergent intentions, executed them. That day, both Yu and Long were decapitated. Cong stormed the Ximing Gate and seized control of it. Rui and his cohorts retreated into the Southern Palace, pursued by the vanguard, which ultimately slew He in the western chamber of the Guangji Hall. The heads of Rui and You were later displayed in the public square.

Liu Xuan

Liu Xuan, courtesy name Shize, was a man of simplicity and reticence, devoted to learning and self-discipline. He studied under Sun Yan of Le'an, immersing himself tirelessly in his studies day and night. He held a particular affection for "Mao's Poetry" and "Zuo's Commentary". Yan often lamented, "Had Xuan met Wu of Han, he would have eclipsed Jin Midi."

After his studies, Xuan returned home and secluded himself for several years. He was particularly drawn to the *Book of Han*, especially the biographies of Xiao He and Deng Yu, which he would recite often. He remarked, "Should a true man serve under such emperors, he would not let these two gentlemen alone claim all the glory."

The Inspector of Bingzhou, Wang Guang, spoke highly of him to Emperor Wu, who

summoned Xuan and was impressed by his responses. "Before I met Xuan, I believed Guang's praises were overstated. Now, seeing his demeanor and conduct, he truly resembles admirable jade; observing his character, he indeed has the capacity to lead his division." Consequently, Xuan was appointed Commander of the Right Division, granted a red banner and a curved cover as special honors.

In his office, Xuan was diligent and respectful, earning the affection of his division. Yuanhai's rise to kingship was Xuan's counsel. Thus, he was held in high esteem, unmatched among nobles and relatives, and he wielded exclusive authority over both military and state affairs.

102. Chapter 2 Liu Cong

Liu Cong, courtesy name Xuanming, also known as Zai, was the fourth son of Yuanhai. His mother was Lady Zhang. While pregnant with Cong, Lady Zhang dreamt of the sun entering her bosom. Upon waking, she recounted this to Yuanhai, who declared, "This is a propitious omen. Speak of it to no one."

Fifteen months later, Cong was born under a strange white light in the night. He looked extraordinary, with a shiny white hair over two *chi* long on his left ear. From a young age, he was intelligent and loved learning. The Erudite Zhu Ji held him in great esteem. By fourteen, he had mastered the classics and histories and was well-versed in the philosophies of the Hundred Schools. He had committed to memory the military strategies of Sun Tzu and Wu Qi. Proficient in both cursive and clerical script, he wrote with great skill and had composed over a hundred poems and more than fifty odes and eulogies.

At fifteen, he took up martial arts. His arms were like those of an ape, and he was an excellent archer, capable of drawing a 300-jin bow. His strength and agility were unparalleled. Wang Hun of Taiyuan, upon seeing him, was greatly pleased and remarked to Yuanhai, "This child is beyond my understanding."

When Cong reached the age of twenty, he journeyed to the capital, where he established friendships with many esteemed scholars. Among them, Yue Guang and Zhang Hua held him in particularly high regard. Guo Yi, the Administrator of Xinxing, appointed him as a registrar and recommended him as a competent general. Subsequently, he served as a Commander of Cavalry and was gradually promoted to Commandant of the Right Division. In this role, he skillfully managed relations and garnered the loyalty of the influential families within the five divisions. The Prince of Hejian, Yong, recommended him as the General of the Palace Gentlemen of the Central of Chisha.

Fearing harm from Prince Ying of Chengdu due to Yuanhai's presence in Ye, Cong fled to the Prince of Chengdu, who appointed him General of the Accumulated Crossbows of the Right and involved him in vanguard battles. Yuanhai ascended to the position of Northern Chanyu and established Cong as the Right Wise Prince, taking him back to the right division. Upon becoming the Great Chanyu, he further appointed Cong as King of Luli. After killing his brother, He, the ministers urged Cong to ascend to the august position. Initially, he deferred to his younger brother, the Prince of Beihai, Ai. However, Ai and the officials tearfully insisted, and after some time, Cong consented, saying, "Ai and the officials, observing that the four seas remain unsettled and calamities still abound, urge me to take this position merely due to my seniority. As this concerns the state, how could I not comply? Now, I wish to emulate Duke Yin of Lu, and when Ai comes of age, I shall return the position to him."

In the fourth year of Yongjia (310), Cong usurped the imperial throne, granting amnesty across the realm and changing the era name to Guangxing. He honored Yuanhai's wife, Lady Shan, as Empress Dowager and his own mother, Lady Zhang, as Empress Mother. He appointed his younger brother, Ai, as Crown Prince, granting him the titles of Great Chanyu and Grand Minister over the Masses. He established his wife, Lady Huyan, as Empress and titled his son, Can, as Prince of Henei, assigning him as Envoy Bearing the Imperial Insignia,

Grand General Who Pacifies the Army, and Commander-in-Chief of all military affairs. He named Yi1 the Prince of Hejian, Yi2 the Prince of Pengcheng, and Li the Prince of Gaoping.

Cong dispatched Can along with the General Who Conquers the East, Wang Mi, and General Liu Yao among others, leading an army of 40,000 to advance into the Luochuan region. They proceeded through the Huanyuan Pass, maneuvering around Liang, Chen, Ru, and Ying, capturing over a hundred fortresses. He appointed Liu Jing, the Minister of Works, as Grand Marshal; Liu Yin, the Left Grand Master of Splendid Happiness, as Grand Minister over the Masses, and Wang Yu, the Right Grand Master of Splendid Happiness, as Grand Minister of Works.

The false Empress Dowager, Lady Shan, famed for her unparalleled beauty, was violated by Cong. Lady Shan was the mother of Ai, who voiced his objections repeatedly. Consumed by shame and fury, Lady Shan passed away, plunging Cong into profound sorrow. Upon discovering the truth, Cong's favor towards Ai gradually waned. Yet, still reminiscing over Lady Shan, he did not immediately depose Ai. Thereafter, he elevated his own mother to the rank of Empress Dowager.

Cong appointed his Palace Guard Commander Huyan Yan as Envoy Bearing Imperial Credentials, Grand Commander of the Vanguard, and Great General of the Front Army. Yan was allocated 27,000 elite troops and ordered to advance from Yiyang into Luochuan. Cong also commanded Wang Mi, Liu Yao, and the garrison commander Shi Le to advance their forces and rendezvous with Yan. By the time Yan reached Henan, the imperial forces had suffered twelve consecutive defeats, with casualties exceeding 30,000 men. Before Wang Mi and others could arrive, Yan left his supplies at Zhang Fang's old encampment and proceeded to raid Luoyang. He breached the Pingchang Gate and set fire to the Dongyang and Xuanyang Gates, along with numerous government offices and temples. Emperor Huai dispatched Liu Mo, the Governor of Henan, to resist the invasion, but the imperial forces were defeated at the She Gate. Finding himself without expected reinforcements, Yan withdrew through the Dongyang Gate, taking with him over 200 captives from noble families, including their children.

At this time, the Emperor was preparing to flee east across the [Yellow] River and had assembled boats on the Luo River. Yan burned all the vessels before returning to Zhang Fang's former encampment. Upon the arrival of Wang Mi and Liu Yao, they joined forces with Yan to lay siege to Luoyang again. Within the city, famine was so severe that people resorted to cannibalism. Government officials scattered, and none maintained their resolve. After the Xuanyang Gate fell, Mi and Yan entered the Southern Palace, ascended the Taiji Front Hall, and allowed their troops to plunder freely, seizing palace women and treasures. Liu Yao then executed over 30,000 people, including nobles and officials, and constructed a warning mound with their bodies north of the Luo River. The Emperor, along with Empress Yang of Emperor Hui and the Six Seals of State Transmission, was relocated to Pingyang. Liu Cong declared a general amnesty, changed the era name to Jiaping, and conferred upon the deposed emperor the titles of Special Advanced, Left Grand Master for Splendid Happiness, and Duke of Ping'a.

[Cong] dispatched Zhao Ran, his Commander for Conquering the West, and Liu Ya, Commander for Pacifying the West, with 20,000 cavalry to attack Prince Mo of Nanyang in Chang'an. Ran defeated the imperial forces at Tong Pass, where General Lü Yi fell in battle.

When the army reached Xiaogui, Mo surrendered to Ran. Ran sent Mo to Can, who then executed both Mo and his son, the Prince of Fanyang, Li. Can sent Wei General Liang Fen, Mo's Chief Secretary Lu Yao, Palace Attendants Du Ao and Xin Mi, along with Beigong Chun and others to Pingyang.

Cong was greatly angered by Can's execution of Mo. Can defended his actions, saying: "I killed Mo not merely because he failed to recognize Heaven's Mandate early enough, but because, as a core member of the Jin royal family, he failed to die honorably during the crisis at Luoyang. His conduct was universally despised, thus I executed him." Liu Cong replied: "Even so, I fear you will not escape the karmic retribution for executing those who surrendered. The ways of Heaven are profound, and every action finds its consequence."

Liu Cong appointed Liu Yao as Grand General of Chariots and Cavalry, Palace Attendant with Equal Standing as the Three Excellencies, and Shepherd of Yong Province, elevating his title to Prince of Zhongshan and stationing him in Chang'an. Wang Mi was made Grand General and enfeoffed as Duke of Qi. Shortly thereafter, Shi Le and others killed Mi at Jiwu and absorbed his troops, reporting Mi's alleged treason. Cong was greatly enraged and sent envoys to rebuke Le for arbitrarily killing a chief minister, showing supreme insubordination. Fearing Le's possible disloyalty, he assigned Mi's former troops to Le's command.

After Liu Yao occupied Chang'an, Jia Pi, Administrator of Anding, and various Di and Qiang peoples all sent hostages and submitted. Only Qu Te, Inspector of Yong Province, and Zhu Hui, Administrator of Xiping, stood firm and refused to surrender. The Army Protector Qu Yun and Pingyang Prefect Liang Su attempted to flee to Anding via the southern mountains of Jingzhao. They encountered Jia Pi's hostage sons at Yinmi and returned to Linjing, promoting Pi as General Who Pacifies the South. Leading 50,000 troops, they attacked Yao at Chang'an. Fufeng Administrator Liang Zong, along with Qu Te, Zhu Hui and others, also led 100,000 troops to join them. Yao dispatched Liu Ya and Zhao Ran to resist but they were defeated and retreated. Yao then led Chang'an's elite troops to battle at Huangqiu, where his forces suffered a major defeat. Hit by an arrow, he withdrew to defend Ganqu. The local Du people's leaders Wang Tu, Ji Te and others attacked Liu Can at Xinfeng, forcing Can to return to Pingyang. Yao captured Chiyang and took over 10,000 captives back to Chang'an. At this time, Yan Ding and others supported the Prince of Qin as Crown Prince and entered Yongcheng, gaining widespread support from both Chinese and non-Chinese peoples across Guanzhong.

After Cong's empress Lady Huyan died, he planned to take the daughter of Grand Guardian Liu Yin as his consort. His younger brother Ai strongly remonstrated against this. Cong then consulted Grand Minister Liu Yannian and Grand Tutor Liu Jing. They all replied: "We have heard the Grand Guardian claim descent from Duke Kang of Zhou's Liu lineage. Since his origins differ from Your Sacred Majesty's line, taking his daughter would be appropriate."

Cong was greatly pleased and ordered Li Hong, who also served as Grand Master of Ceremonies, to appoint Yin's two daughters as Noble Consorts of the Left and Right, ranking above the *zhaoyi*. He further took four granddaughters of Yin as Ladies of Honor (*guiren*), ranking below the Noble Consorts. He asked Hong: "These ladies possess beauty beyond compare and feminine virtues unmatched in our time. Moreover, the Grand Guardian's relationship to me is truly unique. What is your opinion?"

Hong replied: "The Grand Guardian's lineage traces back to the Zhou Dynasty, truly distinct from Your Majesty's sacred line. Your Majesty merely shares the same surname. Moreover, Minister of Works Wang Ji of Wei, the Prince of Donglai and a great scholar of our time, surely understood propriety when he arranged for his son to marry the daughter of Minister of Works Wang Shen of Taiyuan, as they shared the same surname but had different origins."

Cong was greatly delighted and rewarded Hong with sixty *jīn* of gold, saying: "You should explain this reasoning to my sons and brothers." Thereafter, the six Liu ladies' favor dominated the inner palace. Cong rarely ventured out, with all matters being submitted through the palace eunuchs and decided by the Noble Consort of the Left.

Cong granted Emperor Huai the status of Palace Attendant with Equal Standing as the Three Excellencies and enfeoffed him as Duke of Kuaiji Commandery, while the Yu clan and others received promotions according to rank. Cong invited the Emperor to a banquet and said to him: "When you were Prince of Yuzhang, I once visited with Wang Wuzi. Wuzi introduced me to you, and you said you had long heard of my name. You showed me the lyrics you had composed for the Music Bureau and told me: 'I hear you are skilled at writing rhapsodies; please examine these.' At that time, Wuzi and I both composed 'Odes to Great Virtue,' which you praised at length. You also invited me to shoot arrows in the Imperial Hall, where I scored twelve points while you and Wuzi each scored nine. You presented me with a mulberry bow and silver inkstone. Do you recall this?"

The Emperor replied: "How dare I forget? I only regret not recognizing your dragon countenance earlier." Cong asked: "Why did your family engage in such extreme internecine slaughter?" The Emperor responded: "This was hardly a human affair, but rather Heaven's will. The great Han was destined to receive Heaven's mandate, thus we eliminated ourselves for Your Majesty. Moreover, had my family been capable of upholding Emperor Wu's legacy and maintaining harmony among the nine branches of relatives, how could Your Majesty have obtained the throne!" As evening fell, the Emperor departed, and Cong bestowed upon him Lady Liu of lesser rank, saying: "She is the granddaughter of a noble family. I specially give her to you as wife; you should treat her well." Liu was appointed as the Lady of State of Kuaiji.

Cong dispatched his Northern Defender Jin Chong to raid Taiyuan, with Northern Pacifier Bu Xu leading troops to follow. When Chong failed to capture Taiyuan, he blamed Xu and summarily executed him. Upon hearing this, Cong was greatly enraged and said: "This man was not mine to execute - who does Chong think he is!" He sent Imperial Censor Hao Yan with credentials to execute Chong. The Left Director of Waterways, Wang Shu of Xiangling, was executed in the eastern market for failing to supply fish and crabs. The Master of Construction, Duke of Wangdu Jin Ling, was executed there as well for failing to complete the Wenming and Huiguang Palaces.

Cong hunted without restraint, regularly departing at dawn and returning at dusk, watching fishing on the Fen River with torches lighting the night as day. Central Army Commander Wang Zhang remonstrated: "The great crisis remains unresolved while the remnant Jin forces gather strength. Yet Your Majesty fears not the peril of traveling incognito, forgetting to return even in darkness. Your Majesty should contemplate how difficult it was for the Late Emperor to establish this enterprise and how precarious succession can be. With

such great achievements and the world's hopes attached, how can you risk letting it fall when success is near! Observing Your Majesty's recent conduct has long pained my heart. Moreover, the common people's loyalty to Han remains uncertain while their thoughts of Jin run deep. Liu Kun is but a short distance away, and assassins could strike at any moment. When an emperor ventures out carelessly, he becomes vulnerable to a single man's attack. If Your Majesty would correct past errors, it would be an immense fortune."

Cong was furious and ordered Zhang's execution. The Principal Consort Lady Wang knocked her head on the ground begging for mercy, so Zhang was instead imprisoned. When Cong's mother protested his excessive anger and punishments by refusing food for three days, his younger brother Ai and son Can both strongly remonstrated. Cong angrily said: "Am I Jie, Zhou, You, or Li, that you all come crying about people!"

His Grand Minister Liu Yannian and over a hundred other officials and nobles removed their caps, weeping as they firmly remonstrated: "The Emperor Guangwen achieved his sacred martial virtue and established this great enterprise, but passed away before unifying all under heaven. Your Majesty's divine wisdom comes from Heaven itself. You succeeded the legacy, pacified Luoyang in the east and secured Chang'an in the south - truly your achievements surpass King Cheng of Zhou and your virtue exceeds Qi of Xia. From ancient times of Yu of Tang to now under Your Majesty, the historical records show no equal. Yet recently you have executed nobles for minor failures, imprisoned generals for frank speech against your wishes, hunted without restraint, and neglected state affairs. We cannot understand this, and thus we agonize day and night, forgetting sleep and food." Cong then pardoned Zhang.

When Qu Te and others besieged Chang'an, Liu Yao suffered consecutive defeats and retreated to Pingyang, taking with him over 80,000 captured civilians. He then attacked Minister of Education Fu Zhi at Sanzu, and ordered his Right General Liu Can to attack Guo Mo at Huai city. Fu Zhi died of illness and the city fell. Fu Zhi's grandsons Chun and Sui, along with over 20,000 households, were relocated to Pingyang County.

Cong posthumously appointed Fu Zhi as Grand Protector, and made both Chun and Sui Palace Attendants. He said to Fu Zhi's son Chang: "Although your honored father did not understand Heaven's Mandate, he was loyal to his ruler, and I understand this well. However, the Jin emperor has already surrendered - Heaven's Mandate cannot be maintained by man. Yet he resisted Liu in the southern regions and disturbed the border people - these were his crimes. That I would honor one who committed grave crimes as if he were an old meritorious official, and allow the grandsons of a rebellious minister to serve in the palace - do you understand how vast and generous the virtue of Imperial Han is?"

Chang replied: "Your Majesty always praises former officials and does not diminish their loyalty because of us minor officials. This grace follows the righteous principle of a wise ruler who conquers a state yet mourns its people. I am but one among all beings, and dare not thank nature for my life."

Cong sent Liu Can and Liu Yao to attack Liu Kun at Jinyang. Kun dispatched Zhang Qiao to resist them, but Qiao was defeated and killed in battle at Wuguan, causing great fear in Jinyang. The Governor of Taiyuan Gao Qiao and Kun's Assistant Administrator Hao Yu surrendered Jinyang to Can. Kun fled with several dozen horsemen of his personal guard, taking his wife and children to Tingtou in Zhao Commandery, and then to Changshan. Can

and Yao entered Jinyang.

Earlier, Kun had formed a brotherhood alliance with the King of Dai, Yilu. He now reported his defeat to Yilu and requested military aid. Yilu sent his sons Rilisun and Binliuxu, along with generals Wei Xiong and Ji Dan, leading tens of thousands of troops to attack Jinyang. Kun gathered over a thousand scattered soldiers to guide them, while Yilu himself led 60,000 troops to Langmeng.

Yao fought against Binliuxu east of the Fen River. Yao fell from his horse, was struck by an arrow, and suffered seven wounds. The Bandit-Suppressing General Fu Wu offered his horse to Yao, who said: "In this moment of extreme peril, each man thinks of saving himself. My wounds are severe - I expect to die here." Wu wept and said: "I am but a minor man who was recognized and promoted by you, reaching my current position. I have always wished to give my life for you - now is the time. Moreover, the imperial house is newly established and great difficulties remain unresolved. How can the realm go even one day without you?" He then helped Yao mount the horse and urged him to cross the Fen River, while turning back to fight to his death. Yao entered Jinyang and at night, along with Liu Can and others, plundered the common people before fleeing across Mount Meng.

Yilu led cavalry to pursue them and battled at Langu Valley. Can was defeated, his Commander Xing Yan was beheaded, and his Northern Defender Liu Feng was captured. Kun regrouped the scattered forces and held position at Yangqu. Yilu stationed troops there before returning.

On New Year's Day, Cong held a banquet at the Guangji Front Hall and forced the Emperor to serve wine. Grand Masters of the Palace Yu Shi and Wang Jun stood up and wept loudly, which angered Cong. When someone reported that Shi and others were plotting to support Liu Kun from Pingyang, Cong poisoned the Emperor and executed Shi and Jun. He then promoted Emperor's consort Liu to Noble Lady and declared a general amnesty for all crimes below capital punishment. He installed Left Noble Consort Liu as Empress.

When Cong planned to build the Yanyi Palace in the rear court for Lady Liu, Minister of Justice Chen Yuanda remonstrated: "I have heard that ancient sage kings loved their country as family, so Heaven blessed them as sons. Heaven created the common people and established rulers to be their parents through rewards and punishments, not to exhaust the people for one person's pleasure. The Jin were cruel and treated people like worthless grass, so Heaven cut off their mandate. Heaven now favors Imperial Han, and the people have long hoped for renewal. Our founder, the Guangwen Emperor, was deeply pained by this and wore simple cloth, without luxurious furnishings. The late Empress wore no elaborate silk. The South and North Palaces were built only after repeated requests from ministers.

Now the Guangji Front Hall suffices for court ceremonies and receiving foreign envoys, while the Zhaode and Wenming Palaces are enough to house the imperial consorts. Since Your Majesty's rise, you have defeated powerful enemies in the two capitals and built over forty palaces, while people suffer from famine and plague, dying in succession. Troops are exhausted abroad and people resentful at home - is this how parents treat their children? I hear you plan to build the Yanyi Palace for the newly established Empress - though we rejoice in this, the realm still faces great difficulties and current palaces are adequate. This construction is truly inappropriate.

I have heard that Emperor Taizong, inheriting the Gaozu's legacy after the peaceful

times of Lu, with all the world's wealth still stopped building the Lutai Platform for its cost of hundred gold - this virtue was passed down through ages. He could then judge 400 cases fairly like the times of Cheng and Kang. Your territory is no more than Taizong's two commanderies, and your military concerns are not just the Xiongnu and Southern Yue! Emperor Wen was frugal despite his wealth; Your Majesty seeks extravagance despite limited means. This is why I risk death to speak frankly."

Cong was furious and said: "I am ruler of all affairs - how dare you, little rat, question my building a palace! If I don't kill this slave who disturbs my mind, how will my palace be built? Execute him and display his head with his family's at the eastern market, let all rats share one hole!"

This occurred in the Xiaoyao Garden's Li Central Hall. Yuanda hugged a tree and shouted: "What I spoke was for the realm's sake, yet Your Majesty kills me. If the dead have consciousness, I shall report Your Majesty to Heaven above and the late Emperor below. Zhu Yun said: 'To join Longfeng and Bigan underground is enough.' I wonder what kind of ruler Your Majesty will be!" Yuanda had entered wearing chains, which he wrapped around the tree - attendants could not move him. Cong was extremely angry. Lady Liu, who was in the rear hall, secretly ordered the attendants through a eunuch to stop the execution. She then wrote a strong remonstrance. Cong relented and apologized to Yuanda, renaming the Xiangyou Garden to "Garden of Accepting the Worthy" and the Li Hall to "Hall of Shame and Worth."

At this time, Emperor Min had ascended the throne in Chang'an. Cong sent Liu Yao, along with Metropolitan Commandant Qiao Zhiming and Li Jingnian of Wuya, to raid Chang'an, and ordered Zhao Ran to lead troops to join them. The Grand Commander Qu Yun was holding Huangbai city and had been repeatedly defeated by Yao and Ran. Ran said to Yao: "With Qu Yun and his large force outside, Chang'an can be taken by surprise. Once we have Chang'an, Huangbai city will submit on its own. I request that Your Highness guard here with the main force while I raid with light cavalry."

Yao then, by imperial authority, appointed Ran as Front Vanguard Grand Commander and General of Pacifying the South, and assigned him five thousand elite cavalry to advance. The imperial army was defeated at Weiyang, and General Wang Guang died. Ran entered Chang'an's outer city at night. The Emperor fled to Sheyan Tower. Ran burned Longwei and various military camps, killed and plundered over a thousand people, and by dawn withdrew to camp at Xiaoyao Garden. Qu Yun led his forces to attack Yao and defeated him in successive battles. Yao entered Suyi and then returned to Pingyang.

At that time, a meteor appeared from the Ox constellation, entered the Purple Forbidden Enclosure, moving in a serpentine dragon-like pattern. Its light illuminated the ground and fell ten li north of Pingyang. Upon inspection, there was flesh measuring thirty paces long and twenty-seven paces wide. Its stench reached Pingyang, and beside the flesh there were constant sounds of weeping, continuing day and night without cease. Cong greatly despised this and summoned his ministers and officials to ask: "My lack of virtue has caused this anomaly. Each of you should speak freely without reservation." Chen Yuanda and Scholar Zhang Shi responded: "The meteor's anomaly portends coming disaster. We fear there will be trouble with three empresses in the rear palace, leading to the loss of state and family. All stems from this. We urge Your Majesty to be cautious." Cong replied: "This is

merely a matter of yin and yang - what has it to do with human affairs!" Soon after, Liu's household produced a snake and a fierce beast, each of which harmed people before fleeing. They could not be found, but shortly after were seen near the fallen flesh. Soon after, Lady Liu died, and the flesh disappeared, with the weeping sounds also ceasing. From then on, disorder arose in the rear palace, and imperial favors were bestowed without proper order.

Cong appointed Liu Yi as Grand Commander. Initially establishing the position of Chancellor of State as a rank of Supreme Duke, it was only bestowed posthumously on those with exceptional merit and virtue. He then established the hundred offices, creating positions of Grand Preceptor and Chancellor. From Grand Marshal upward there were seven dukes, all ranked as Supreme Dukes, wearing green ribbons and far-traveling caps. He established the positions of Support Han, Protector, Central Army, Upper Army, Support Army, Garrison Defense, Front, Rear, Left, Right, Upper, and Lower Army, Support State, Army Champion, Dragon Soaring, and Martial Defense Grand Generals, each commanding 2,000 troops, all filled by his sons. He created Left and Right Censors-in-Chief, each overseeing more than 200,000 households, with one Interior Administrator per 10,000 households, totaling forty-three Interior Administrators. The Left and Right Assistants to the Chanyu each governed 100,000 settlements of six barbarian tribes, with one Commander per 10,000 settlements. He abolished the Ministry of Personnel and established Left and Right Selection Ministers. From Censor-in-Chief downward, six offices were all ranked below Vice Director. He established the position of Grand Censor and Provincial Governor, all ranked as Secondary Dukes. He appointed his son Can as Chancellor, Commander-in-Chief, and Supervisor of the Imperial Secretariat, promoting him to Prince of Jin with control over five capitals. Liu Niannian supervised six departments of the Imperial Secretariat. Liu Jing became Grand Preceptor, Wang Yu became Grand Tutor, Ren Yi became Grand Guardian, Ma Jing became Grand Minister of Education, Zhu Ji became Grand Minister of Works, and Liu Yao became Grand Marshal.

Yao stationed troops at Wei Ford, while Zhao Ran stationed at Xinfeng. Suo Chen came from Chang'an to attack Ran from the east. Ran, emboldened by previous victories, showed contempt for Chen. Chief Clerk Lu Hui said: "Sima Ye and his ministers think they are being cornered to the royal capital. Since we differ greatly in strength, they will surely fight us to the death. General, you should arrange your troops in proper formation to attack them. Do not take them lightly. Even cornered beasts will fight - how much more so a state!" Ran replied: "Given Sima Mo's strength, I can defeat him as easily as pulling down rotten wood. As for Suo Chen, that nobody, how could he even soil my horse's hooves or blade! I shall capture him before I eat."

At dawn, he led several hundred elite cavalry to meet the enemy, engaging in battle west of the city. He was defeated and returned, lamenting: "I did not heed Lu Hui's words, leading to this outcome. How can I face him!" Thereupon he executed Hui. Before his execution, Hui said to Ran: "General, you reject counsel and defy strategy, bringing defeat through stupidity. Yet you harbor suspicion of previous successes and execute loyal advisors to vent your foolish anger. How can you show your face in this world? Yuan Shao did this before, and you follow his path. Destruction and defeat will surely follow. My only regret is not seeing the Grand Marshal before death. If the dead know nothing, so be it; but if they

have awareness, I shall meet Tian Feng below and accuse you in the Yellow Springs, ensuring you will not die peacefully in your bed." He commanded the executioner: "Let me face east." When Grand Marshal Yao heard of this, he said: "A hoof-print puddle cannot contain a foot-long carp - this describes Ran perfectly."

Yao withdrew his forces to attack Guo Mo at Huai city, seizing 800,000 hu of grain, and established three garrisons to guard it. Cong sent a messenger to tell Yao: "Now Chang'an is temporarily at rest, and Liu Kun wanders like a ghost - these are what the state should eliminate first. Guo Mo is but a minor fool, not worth troubling your divine strategy. You may leave General Who Conquers the Barbarians, Wang Yiguang of Beiqiu, to guard against him, while you return." Thus Yao returned to Boban. Soon after, he was summoned to assist in government affairs.

Zhao Ran invaded Beidi. He dreamed of Lu Hui in great anger, drawing a bow and shooting him. Ran awoke in terror. The next morning, as he was about to attack the city, he was struck by a crossbow bolt and died.

Cong appointed Can as Chancellor of State to oversee all affairs, abolishing the position of Chancellor to merge it with Chancellor of State. In Pingyang, there was an earthquake, and fierce winds uprooted trees and tore off roofs. In Guangyi, the wife of Yang Chong gave birth to a two-headed child; her elder brother secretly ate it and died three days later. When Cong's ancestral temple was newly completed, he issued a general amnesty throughout his domain and changed the era name to Jianyuan. Blood rained on the Yanming Hall in his Eastern Palace, accumulating to a depth of five cun after removing the tiles. Liu Yi was troubled by this and consulted his Grand Preceptor Lu Zhi, Grand Tutor Cui Wei, and Grand Guardian Xu Xia. They said: "Your Highness was previously made Crown Prince to appease public expectations, but the Emperor's heart has long been with the Prince of Jin. All officials from princes and dukes down hope to curry favor with him. The position of Chancellor of State, since the time of Wei Wu, has not been an office for subjects. The Emperor originally issued an edict making it a posthumous title, but now suddenly gives it to the Prince of Jin. His ceremonial dignity exceeds that of the Eastern Palace, all affairs of state pass through him, and he has established the positions of Grand Administrator, Grand General, and various princely garrisons as his support. Given this situation, Your Highness will not be able to succeed to the throne. Moreover, not only will you not succeed, but unpredictable danger threatens you day and night. Action should be taken soon. The four guard units have no less than 5,000 elite troops, and the other princely garrisons are led by young princes whose forces can be seized. The Chancellor of State is frivolous - a single assassin would suffice. The Grand General goes out daily, and his garrison can be taken by surprise. If Your Highness is willing, 20,000 elite troops can be obtained immediately. Marching to Yunlong Gate, which of the palace guards would not turn their weapons to welcome you? The Grand Marshal would surely not oppose this." Yi did not follow their advice, and thus the matter was dropped.

Cong visited the residence of Central Protector of the Army Jin Zhun and took his two daughters as Left and Right Noble Consorts. The elder was named Yueguang (Moonlight) and the younger Yuehua (Moon Splendor) - both were of exceptional beauty. After several months, he elevated Yueguang to the position of Empress.

An attendant of the Eastern Palace, Xun Yu, reported that Lu Zhi and others had urged Yi to rebel, but Yi had not complied. Consequently, Cong arrested Zhi, Wei, and Xia in the imperial prison and executed them on other pretexts. He sent Guan Weibu to supervise the Eastern Palace and forbade Yi from attending court ceremonies. Yi, anxious and fearful, not knowing what to do, submitted a memorial explaining himself, requesting to become a commoner and asking that his sons' titles be revoked. He praised Prince of Jin Can as worthy of becoming Crown Prince. However, Bu suppressed this memorial and did not forward it.

The Regional Inspector of Qingzhou, Cao Yi, attacked Wenyang Pass and Gongqiu, capturing them. He killed Xu Fu, the Governor of Qi Commandery, and captured Liu Xuan of Jianwei. More than forty walled cities and counties in the Qi and Lu regions surrendered to him. Yi then expanded his territory, moving west to take Zhu'a and Pingyin, amassing a force of over 100,000. He established garrisons along the river and returned to Linzi. At this point, Yi harbored ambitions to dominate all of Qi. Shi Le, suspecting Yi's duplicity, requested permission to attack him. However, Cong, wary of Le potentially taking over Qi, shelved the request and did not approve it.

Liu Yao crossed at Mengjin, intending to attack Henan. General Wei Gai fled to Yiquan fortress. Yao then advanced to attack Li Ju at Xingyang. Ju sent General Li Ping to Chengao, but Yao completely destroyed his forces. Ju became frightened and sent hostages to request surrender.

At that time, Cong made his Empress Jin the Supreme Empress, elevated Noble Consort Liu to Left Empress, and Right Noble Consort Jin to Right Empress. Left Commandant of Justice Chen Yuanda strongly remonstrated against the establishment of three empresses, but Cong rejected his counsel. Instead, he appointed Yuanda as Right Grand Master of the Palace - outwardly showing favor to a worthy man while actually stripping him of power. Thereupon, Grand Commander Fan Long, Grand Marshal Liu Dan, Grand Minister of Works Huyan Yan, and Director of the Imperial Secretariat Wang Jian all submitted memorials to resign their positions in favor of Yuanda. Cong then appointed Yuanda as Grand Minister of Justice and Ceremonial Equal of the Three Excellencies.

Liu Yao raided Chang'an but was repeatedly defeated by the royal army. Yao said, "They are still too powerful; we cannot succeed against them." He then withdrew his forces and returned.

Ghosts were heard wailing at night in Cong's palace for three days, until the sounds moved toward the Office of the Right Commandant of Justice and ceased. The Supreme Empress Jin engaged in licentious conduct, which Chen Yuanda reported. Cong deposed Jin, and Jin, in shame and anger, committed suicide. Jin had been especially favored, but Cong was compelled by Yuanda's influence to depose her. Later, remembering her beauty, he developed a deep hatred for Yuanda.

Liu Yao advanced his forces to Shangdang, intending to attack Yangqu. Cong sent a messenger to Yao saying: "Chang'an's defiance is a deep shame to our state. You should prioritize Chang'an; leave Yangqu to the Cavalry Commander. The time and circumstances are right; you should return quickly." Yao turned back, defeated Guo Mai, paid homage to Cong, and then proceeded to Puban.

There was an earthquake in Pingyang, and blood rained down on the Eastern Palace, covering an area of more than one qing.

Liu Yao advanced his army again and camped at Suyi. Qu Yun, facing severe food shortages, abandoned Huangbai and moved his forces to Lingwu. Yao advanced to attack Shangjun. The Governor Zhang Yu and the Governor of Pingyi, Liang Su, fled to Yunwu. Subsequently, the entire region west of the passes responded to Yao's authority. Yao then advanced and occupied Huangfu.

Cong's armory sank into the ground by one zhang and five chi. At that time, his favored attendants included Palace Attendants Wang Shen, Xuan Huai, and Yu Rong, Palace Supervisor Guo Yi, and Inner Palace Guard Ling Xiu, who all wielded great influence. Cong would feast and revel in the inner palace, sometimes not emerging for a hundred days. Officials would only communicate through Shen and others, often not reaching Cong directly. Decisions were made based on their personal likes and dislikes, resulting in meritorious veterans being overlooked while corrupt flatterers could rise to 2000-shi-[salary] (high positions) within days. Though military campaigns were launched every year, soldiers received no rewards of money or silk, while gifts to inner palace households, even to their servants, would amount to tens of millions. Shen and his associates' carriages, clothing, and residences exceeded those of princes. Over thirty of their relatives and connections, though commoners, were appointed as Interior Ministers and Chiefs. They were all extravagant, corrupt, and harmful to good people. Jin Zhun and his entire clan ingratiated themselves through flattery.

Guo Yi, harboring resentment against Liu Yi, said to Liu Can: "The Crown Prince still harbors treasonous ambitions during His Majesty's reign. This is a deep grievance for both you and your father, and a great injustice to all under heaven. Yet His Majesty shows excessive mercy, not removing them from their positions. Should upheaval occur, I fear for Your Highness's safety. You are the grandson of Gaozu and His Majesty's legitimate heir - who under heaven does not look to you? How can such important matters of state be shared with others! I recently heard the Crown Prince met with the Grand General, speaking at length. If their plan succeeds, they promise to make His Majesty the Emperor Emeritus and the Grand General the Crown Prince. Yi also promised Weijun the position of Grand Chanyu, and both princes have agreed. The two princes occupy secure positions and command strong forces - how could their plot not succeed! I say these princes' actions are worse than beasts. Those who betray their father - who would support them? They merely covet power now, but after succeeding, how could His Majesty survive! Your Highness's brothers are beyond words, and the Eastern Palace, Prime Minister, and Chanyu positions belong to the Wuling brothers - how could they give these to others! They plan to strike during the Shangsi Festival feast in the third month. As events may change, action should be taken early.

The Spring and Autumn Annals say: 'If even weeds cannot be eliminated, how much more so the ruler's favored younger brother!' I have reported to His Majesty multiple times, but his nature values brotherly affection and believes my words false. Though I have suffered punishment, I have received grace from His Majesty and Your Highness, so I dare speak what I know, hoping you will heed it. I shall report this inside. I beg Your Highness to keep this

secret and privately document these matters. If you doubt my words, you may summon the Grand General's Attendant Wang Pi and Weijun's Commander Liu Dun, show them favor, open a path for their loyalty, and question them - then you will know the truth." Can deeply believed this.

Yi secretly told Pi and Dun: "The two princes' treasonous acts are already known to His Majesty and the Chancellor. Were you part of this?" The two men exclaimed in shock: "No!" Yi said: "This matter is certain. I only pity that your old associates will be implicated." At this, he sobbed with flowing tears. Pi and Dun became greatly frightened and kowtowed, begging for mercy. Yi said: "I will make a plan for you - will you follow it?" Both men said: "We will respectfully follow your instructions." Yi said: "When the Chancellor of State questions you, just say it is true. If he asks why you did not report earlier, answer: 'Though I deserve death for this crime, I considered His Majesty's merciful nature and Your Highness's devotion to family ties, and feared my words would be seen as slander.'" Pi and Dun agreed. Soon after, Can summoned and questioned the two men separately, and though they arrived at different times, their testimonies matched perfectly. Can believed it to be true.

Initially, Jin Zhun's cousin, who was Yi's concubine, had an affair with an attendant. Yi angrily killed her and repeatedly mocked Zhun about it. Zhun, deeply humiliated and angry, advised Can: "The Eastern Palace holds joint authority in state affairs. Your Highness should assume this position yourself and lead as Chancellor of State, so the realm knows where to place their hopes."

Zhun further advised Can: "In the past, Emperor Xiaocheng rejected Zizheng's words, allowing the Wang clan to ultimately usurp power. Should this be allowed?" Can replied: "How could it be!" Zhun said: "Indeed, your wisdom is correct. I have long wished to speak, but being neither reborn in virtue nor of imperial blood, I feared that my loyal words would bring swift frost-like punishment, so I dared not speak." Can said: "Please speak freely." Zhun continued: "I hear rumors that the Grand General, the Guard General, and their advisors all plot to support the Crown Prince, planning to act in late spring. Your Highness should prepare, lest you suffer Shangchen's fate." Can asked: "What should be done?" Zhun replied: "His Majesty trusts and loves the Crown Prince deeply, and may not believe immediate reports. In my humble opinion, we should relax the Eastern Palace's restrictions and not prevent the Crown Prince from meeting guests, allowing him to associate with frivolous characters. The Crown Prince, being naturally generous to scholars, will not guard against this suspicion. These petty men will inevitably encourage treasonous thoughts in the Crown Prince's mind. Such small-minded people lack persistence and cannot match the loyalty of men like Guan Gao. Then I will help Your Highness expose his crimes. Your Highness and the Grand Minister can arrest and interrogate his associates, investigating the matter thoroughly. His Majesty will surely punish him for these unforgivable crimes. Otherwise, with court support currently favoring the Crown Prince, should His Majesty pass away suddenly, Your Highness may not succeed to the throne." Thereupon, Can ordered Bu Chou to withdraw troops from the Eastern Palace.

From winter solstice until this time, Cong no longer received court audiences, and all military and state affairs were decided by Can, with only imperial edicts for executions and appointments being issued, while Wang Shen, Guo Yi, and others had their wishes granted.

He also established a market in the rear court, feasting and playing with palace women, sometimes remaining intoxicated for three days. Cong, from the Autumn Pavilion, executed Special Advanced Official Qiwu Da, Grand Master of the Palace Gongshi Yu, Ministers Wang Yan and Tian Xin, Minor Treasury Official Chen Xiu, Left Guard Bu Chong, and Grand Minister of Agriculture Zhu Dan - all were those whom the eunuchs despised. Palace Attendant Bu Gan wept and remonstrated with Cong: "Your Majesty is promoting martial and enlightened rule, wishing to eliminate injustice even in remote valleys. How can you suddenly execute loyal and worthy officials? What legacy will this leave? In the past, Qin loved the Three Good Men yet killed them, and wise men knew they would not achieve hegemony. Even the tyrannical Duke Li of Jin, who killed three ministers, showed some reluctance. How can Your Majesty suddenly trust the prejudices of your attendants and execute seven ministers in one day! The edict is still among officials and not yet announced. I beg you to show heaven's mercy and withdraw this thunderous wrath. Moreover, if Your Majesty simply wishes to execute them without stating their crimes, how will this be explained to all under heaven? Is this the imperial way of three investigations?" He kowtowed until his head bled. Wang Shen berated Gan: "Does Palace Attendant Bu wish to oppose the imperial edict?" Cong angrily departed, demoting Gan to commoner status.

Grand Minister Liu Yi, Grand General Liu Fu, Chief Censor Chen Yuanda, Golden Purple Grand Master Wang Yan and others went to the palace gate to remonstrate: "We have heard that good people are the foundation of Heaven and Earth and the basis of government and education. Evil flatterers are the pests of the universe and the thieves of royal transformation. King Wen established Zhou with many talents, while Emperors Huan and Ling lost Han due to eunuchs - no dynasty's rise or fall has not followed this pattern. Since ancient times, wise rulers never allowed eunuchs to participate in government - how can the precedents of Emperors Wu, Yuan, An, and Shun be followed! Now Wang Shen and others occupy high positions, controlling life and death from within, their influence overwhelming the realm, acting on personal likes and dislikes, manipulating edicts, deceiving heaven and earth, flattering Your Majesty within and the Prime Minister without, their power rivaling that of the sovereign. Officials are shocked at their sight, ministers dismount at their dust. Under their pressure, appointments are no longer based on merit, positions are gained through connections, and policies are achieved through bribes. They gather many villains and harm loyal servants. Knowing Wang Yan and other loyal ministers would serve Your Majesty faithfully, they feared their treachery would be exposed and condemned them to death. Your Majesty did not conduct the three investigations before executing them, causing resentment to reach heaven and pain to penetrate the nine springs, with all under heaven grieving and both worthy and common people frightened. Shen and others are survivors of punishment who have forgotten grace and righteousness - how can they compare to gentlemen scholars who respond to imperial grace with loyal service? Why does Your Majesty keep them close? Why entrust them with power? In the past, Duke Huan of Qi trusted Yi Ya and faced chaos, Emperor Huai relied on Huang Hao and was destroyed - these overturned chariots are recent warnings. Recent earthquakes, solar eclipses, blood rain, and fires are all due to Shen and his kind. We beg Your Majesty to cut off these evil ones from government, bring in Ministers and Censors to handle daily affairs, have the Prime Minister and officials enter court every five days to discuss matters of state, allowing high officials to speak freely and

loyal ministers to fulfill their intentions. Then numerous disasters will cease and auspicious qi will appear."

"Now, the remnants of Jin are not yet eliminated, Ba and Shu have not submitted, Shi Le secretly harbors ambitions to rule Zhao and Wei, and Cao Yi privately holds designs on the whole of Qi. Yet you allow Shen and others to further disrupt governance - where in Your Majesty's body, from core to limbs, is there not danger! If you continue to execute wise advisors like Wu Xian and Bian Que, we fear it will become like Duke Huan's incurable illness - even if you wish to treat it later, what can be done about the disease! We request that Shen and others be stripped of office and handed to the proper authorities for judgment." Cong showed the memorial to Shen and others, laughing: "These children were led by Yuanda and have become foolish." He dismissed it. Shen and others kowtowed and wept: "We are humble men who fortunately received Your Majesty's recognition and were allowed to serve in the palace, yet the officials hate us like enemies and deeply resent Your Majesty. We wish to return Your Majesty's great favor by offering ourselves to the cauldron, so the court may naturally find harmony." Cong said: "Such mad words are common - why should you be troubled by them!" He consulted Can, who highly praised Shen and others' loyalty and devotion to the royal house. Cong was greatly pleased and enfeoffed Shen as a marquis. Grand Minister Liu Yi went to the palace gate and submitted another firm remonstrance. Cong was furious and tore up his memorial with his own hands. Yi died from anger and frustration. Yuanda wept bitterly for him, saying: "When such men perish, the state withers. Since I can no longer speak out, what use is there in living in silence!" He returned home and killed himself.

The Northern regions suffered severe famine, with people resorting to cannibalism. When a Qiang chieftain, Da Junxu, was transporting grain to supply Qu Chang, Liu Ya defeated him. Qu Yun fought against Liu Yao at Panshi Valley, where the royal army was defeated and Yun fled to Lingwu. Pingyang suffered a great famine, with five or six out of ten people either fleeing, rebelling, or dying. Shi Le sent Shi Yue to lead twenty thousand cavalry to station in Bingzhou, to pacify and comfort the rebels. Cong sent Palace Attendant Qiao Shi to reprimand Le, but Le did not obey the order and secretly allied with Cao Yi, planning to establish a three-way power balance.

Cong installed Fan as Supreme Empress - she had been a servant of Empress Zhang. At this time, besides the four empresses, there were seven others wearing empress seals and ribbons. The court, both inside and out, had lost all discipline. Flattery increased daily, bribery became open practice, armies were deployed abroad, famine and plague followed one after another, while rewards to the imperial harem reached tens of millions. Liu Fu repeatedly wept while speaking about these matters, but Cong refused to listen and angrily said: "Do you want your father to die? Day and night you come crying about people!" Fu became ill from worry and anger, and died.

In Hedong there was a great locust plague, but strangely they did not eat millet or beans. Jin Zhun led his people to collect and bury them, with crying heard for over ten li. Later, the locusts burrowed out of the soil and began eating millet and beans. Pingyang suffered severe famine, causing 200,000 households from the Metropolitan Region to flee to Jizhou, drawn there by Shi Yue's recruitment. Dogs and pigs mated at the Prime Minister's

gate, then at the palace gate, and also at the gates of the Metropolitan Commandant and Censorate. A pig wearing a Jinxian official's cap climbed onto Cong's throne. A dog wearing a military cap and official ribbon climbed up together with the pig. Shortly after, they fought and died in the palace hall. None of the palace guards had seen them enter. Yet Cong became even more tyrannical and cruel, showing no signs of fear or caution. When feasting officials in the Front Hall of Guangji Palace, he summoned his younger brother Yi, whose appearance was haggard and whose hair had turned gray. Yi wept and apologized. Cong also wept bitterly at seeing him, then drank to extreme pleasure and treated him as before.

When Liu Yao breached the outer walls of Chang'an, Emperor Min sent Song Chang, the Palace Attendant, to deliver a letter to Yao. The Emperor then stripped to his waist, led a sheep, and carried a coffin and jade tablet to surrender. Upon arriving in Pingyang, Liu Cong appointed the Emperor as Grand Master of the Imperial Feast and Marquis of Huai'an. Cong had this announced at the Imperial Ancestral Temple, declared a general amnesty within his territories, and changed the era name to Linjia. Qu Yun committed suicide.

The four gates of Cong's Eastern Palace collapsed without cause, and later a female palace historian transformed into a man. At that time, Cong's son Yue died, but one of his fingers remained warm, so they did not proceed with the burial. When he revived, he spoke of meeting Yuan Hai at Mount Buzhou. After five days, they traveled together to the Kunlun Mountains, and three days later returned to Mount Buzhou, where he saw all the deceased princes, ministers, and generals. The palaces there were magnificent, and the place was called the Kingdom of Mengzhuli. Yuan Hai told Yue: "In the northeast lies the Kingdom of Zhexuyi, which has long been without a ruler. It awaits your father. Your father will come in three years, but after his arrival there will be great chaos and killing in the realm. Our family will be nearly extinct, with only about ten people like Yongming surviving. You should return now, but come back next year. We shall meet again briefly." Yue bowed farewell and departed. On his way, he encountered a kingdom called Yiniqu Yu, where he was led into the palace and given a leather pouch with the message: "Please give this to the Han Emperor." As Yue took his leave, they told him: "Liu Lang will surely visit next year, and we shall give him our young daughter in marriage." Upon returning, Yue placed the leather pouch on a table. Shortly after reviving, he asked attendants to retrieve and open the pouch from the table. Inside was a white jade tablet inscribed: "The Heavenly King of Yiniqu Yu Kingdom respectfully trusts in the Heavenly King of Zhexuyi Kingdom. When the year reaches Sheti, we shall meet." When this was presented to Cong, he said: "If this is true, I do not fear death." When Cong died, he was buried with this jade tablet.

At that time, ghostly cries were heard in the Eastern Palace; a red rainbow stretched across the sky with a branch to the south; three suns appeared simultaneously, each with two rings, brilliant in five colors; and a guest star passed through the Purple Palace and disappeared into the Celestial Prison. The Grand Astrologer Kang Xiang said to Cong: "The snake-like rainbow fills the sky with a southern branch; three suns shine together; a guest star enters the Purple Palace. These are all major anomalies, and their omens are not far off. The rainbow stretching east to west indicates that the regions south of Xu and Luo cannot be conquered. The southern branch suggests that the Li clan will continue to straddle Ba and Shu, while Sima Rui will ultimately control all of Wu - the realm may split into three! The

moon represents the Hu king. Though the Han holds both capitals and claims imperial authority, power will flourish in Yan and Dai, establishing foundations in the northern regions. The lunar changes must relate to Han territory! With Han occupying the Central Plains, the Purple Palace anomaly concerns this domain - its gravity cannot be fully expressed. Shi Le eyes Zhao and Wei like an owl, Cao Yi watches eastern Qi like a wolf, and the Xianbei's multitude of stars spread across Yan and Dai. Qi, Dai, Yan, and Zhao all show signs of growing power. I urge Your Majesty to focus on the eastern regions and not be concerned with the southwest. Wu and Shu's inability to invade northward is like the Great Han's inability to advance southward. Now the capital is weak, while Le's forces are strong. If he deploys Zhao and Wei's elite troops, and Yan's cavalry comes from Shangdang, with Cao Yi leading the forces of the Three Qi to follow, how will Your Majesty resist? Could this not be what the Purple Palace anomaly portends? I urge Your Majesty to take early action and prevent the people from becoming restless. If Your Majesty issues an edict, externally following the coastal expeditions of Qin Shi Huang and Han Wu Di, while internally adopting Gao Di's strategy against Chu, all will be successful." Cong read this with displeasure.

Liu Can had Wang Ping tell Liu Yi: "I have received an imperial edict stating that there will be upheaval in the capital, ordering us to don armor in preparation." Yi believed this and ordered palace officials to wear armor. Can quickly informed Jin Zhun and Wang Shen, saying: "Wang Ping has reported that the Eastern Palace is making unusual secret preparations. What should be done?" They reported this to Cong, who exclaimed in shock: "How could this be?" Wang Shen and others said in unison: "We have known of this for some time but feared Your Majesty would not believe us." Thereupon, Can was ordered to surround the Eastern Palace. Can had Shen and Zhun arrest over ten Di and Qiang chieftains. Under torture - suspended from high frames with burning iron applied to their eyes - they falsely confessed to plotting rebellion with Yi. Cong told Shen and others: "From this day forward, I know of your loyalty to me. Remember to speak of all you know, and do not resent that your previous words went unheeded." Subsequently, dozens of Yi's close ministers and Eastern Palace officials were executed - all were those whom Jin Zhun and the eunuchs resented. Yi was demoted to Prince of the Northern Region, and Can had Zhun assassinate him. Over 15,000 soldiers were buried alive, leaving the streets of Pingyang empty. More than 100,000 Di and Qiang households rebelled, and Jin Zhun was appointed General of Cavalry to suppress them. At this time, Cong's territories suffered a great locust plague, especially severe in Pingyang, Ji, and Yong. While suppressing the rebellion, Jin Zhun's two sons died from lightning strikes. The He and Fen Rivers flooded severely, submerging over 1,000 households. The Eastern Palace experienced disasters and anomalies, with its gates and halls completely destroyed. Can was installed as Crown Prince, and a general amnesty was granted to all except those condemned to death. Can was appointed as Prime Minister and Grand Chanyu, maintaining complete control over state affairs as before.

During a hunt in the Shanglin Park, Cong had the Emperor serve as General of Cavalry and Chariots, wearing military attire and carrying a halberd as the lead escort, performing the three-drive hunting ceremony. Can said to Cong: "Now that the Sima clan controls the east of the Yangtze, and Zhao Gu and Li Ju support each other in rebellion, all who raise armies and gather forces do so in the name of the Emperor. It would be better to eliminate him and end their hopes." Cong agreed to this.

Zhao Gu and Guo Mo attacked Hedong, reaching Jiang Yi. Over 30,000 horsemen from the Right Commandant's jurisdiction stole horses and fled with their wives and children to join them. Cavalry General Liu Xun pursued and attacked them, killing over 10,000 people, causing Gu and Mo to retreat. Liu Xie attempted to intercept and attack them but was defeated by Gu. Cong sent Can and Liu Ya to attack Zhao Gu, and when they reached Xiaoping Ferry, Gu boasted: "I will certainly capture Liu Can alive to ransom the Emperor." When Cong heard this, he was displeased.

Li Ju sent Guo Mo and Guo Song to aid Zhao Gu, camping at Luo Wei. They secretly dispatched Geng Zhi and Zhang Pi across the river to ambush Can. Bei Qiu Wang Yiguang observed this from Li City and reported it to Can. Can said: "When we campaign northward and cross the river, Zhao Gu will flee at the mere news of our approach. They are worried about defending themselves, how would they have time to come here! Moreover, having heard that the Emperor is here, they surely wouldn't dare to look north, let alone cross the river! There's no need to alarm the troops." That night, Zhi and his forces successfully ambushed and defeated Can's army. Can fled to Yang Xiang, and Zhi occupied Can's camp. When Ya heard this, he rushed back and built fortifications outside the camp, engaging in a standoff with Zhi. Upon hearing of Can's defeat, Cong sent Grand Commander Fan Long to lead cavalry to his aid. Zhi and his forces, frightened, led 5,000 troops in breaking through the siege, heading toward North Mountain and then south. Liu Xun pursued them and fought at Heyang, where Zhi's forces suffered a major defeat, with 3,500 killed and over 1,000 drowning in the river.

At Cong's residence in Zhongsi, the Hundred Halls caught fire, burning to death twenty-one people including his son, the Prince of Kuaiji, Chong. When Cong heard this, he collapsed onto his bed in grief, becoming so distraught that he lost consciousness and only revived after a long while. At Pingyang, the bolt of the Western Bright Gate disappeared on its own, and Mount Huo collapsed.

He appointed Liu Ji, who was Cavalry General and Prince of Jinan, to the positions of Grand General, Commander-in-Chief of All Military Affairs Both Inside and Outside, and Supervisor of the Imperial Secretariat. Liu Mai, who was Guard General and Prince of Qi, was appointed as Grand Minister of Education.

Wang Shen, a Palace Attendant, had a fourteen-year-old adopted daughter of exceptional beauty whom Cong made his Left Empress. Director of the Imperial Secretariat Wang Jian, Supervisor of the Imperial Secretariat Cui Yizhi, and Director of the Imperial Secretariat Cao Xun and others remonstrated, saying:

"We have heard that when rulers establish an empress, it is to complement Heaven and Earth's nature, symbolize the nurturing principles of the two forces, continue the ancestral line, and mother the realm. She should be worthy to pair with Earth, serve the imperial ancestors, and must come from a family of generational virtue and fame, be dignified and virtuous, meeting the expectations of all under heaven and pleasing the spirits. Thus when King Wen of Zhou built his boat, the Si clan prospered, and when the influence of 'Guan Ju' spread, blessings lasted for hundreds of generations. Emperor Cheng of Han followed his desires and made a servant girl empress, causing the imperial line to end and the state to decline. The prosperity of Zhou was like that, and the disaster of Han was like this. Since the

Qilin era, there has been disorder from indulgence in beauty. Even Shen's sister, a criminal's daughter, should not sully the imperial chambers and sacred temples, let alone a household servant! The imperial consorts are all daughters of dukes and princes, how can a servant suddenly be put in charge of them? How is this different from placing rotting wood next to decorated beams and jade mats? We fear this will bring no fortune to the state."

When Cong read this, he became furious and had Xuan Huai tell Can: "Jian and the others are mere youths who insult the state, speaking wildly without respect for the relationship between ruler and subject. Execute them quickly." Thus Jian and the others were arrested and sent to the marketplace. Wang Yan, the Golden Purple Grandee, rushed to remonstrate but was denied entry by the gatekeepers.

As Jian and the others faced execution, Wang Shen struck them with a staff saying, "Base servants, can you still do evil? What business was this of yours!" Jian glared and shouted at him: "You slave! The destruction of the Han dynasty was caused by rats like you and Jin Zhun. I will report you to the former emperor and deal with you in the underworld." Yizhi said: "Jin Zhun, with his owl's voice and mirror's appearance, will surely bring disaster to the state. You who feed on others will also be fed upon." They were all executed.

Cong then also made the adopted daughter of his Palace Attendant Xuan Huai his Middle Empress.

Ghostly cries were heard in the Guangji Palace and again in the Jianshi Palace. Blood rained in Pingyang, covering an area of ten li. At this time, Cong's deceased son Yue appeared in broad daylight. Cong was greatly disturbed by this and said to Can: "I am ill and weakened, and strange occurrences are especially frequent. Previously I thought Yue's words were supernatural, but having seen him these past few days, this child must be coming to welcome me. Who would have thought that after death there truly are spirits? If so, I do not fear death. However, the troubles of the world are not yet settled, and this is not a time for mourning. I should be buried within ten days of my death, with the funeral held between morning and evening."

He summoned Liu Yao to be Chancellor and Supervisor of the Imperial Secretariat to assist in governance, but stopped when Liu firmly declined. He then appointed Liu Jing as Grand Administrator, Liu Ji as Grand Marshal, Liu Wei as Grand Preceptor, Zhu Ji as Grand Tutor, Huyan Yan as Grand Guardian, all supervising affairs of the Imperial Secretariat; Fan Long remained as Director of the Imperial Secretariat and Honorary Equal of the Three Excellencies; Jin Zhun became Grand Minister of Works and Commander of the Capital Police, with all of them taking turns in deciding on memorials to the throne.

In the first year of Taixing (318), Cong died, having ruled for nine years. He was posthumously given the false title of "Emperor Zhaowu" and the temple name "Liezong".

Liu Can

Can's courtesy name was Shiguang. From a young age he was exceptional, possessing both literary and military talents. After becoming Chancellor, he wielded power according to his whims, distanced himself from loyal and worthy officials while keeping company with

villains and flatterers. He was harsh and severe in nature, showing no kindness, and rejected remonstrance while covering up wrongdoing. He was fond of building palaces, with his Chancellor's residence modeled after the Purple Palace. Though in power for only a short time, he had construction work continuing day and night, causing people to suffer from hunger and exhaustion, leading to deaths and rebellion, but Can showed no concern for this.

After succeeding to the illegitimate throne, he honored Cong's consort Lady Jin as Empress Dowager, gave Lady Fan the title of Empress Hongdao, Lady Xuan the title of Empress Hongde, and Lady Wang the title of Empress Hongxiao. The Jin family women were all under twenty years old and were great beauties. Can engaged in debauchery with them day and night, showing no sign of mourning. He made his wife Lady Jin the Empress and his son Yuangong the Crown Prince. He issued a general amnesty throughout his domain and changed the era name to Hanchang. Blood rain fell in Pingyang.

Jin Zhun, plotting something unusual, privately told Can: "I hear that the nobles are planning to act like Yi Yin and Huo Guang, plotting to first execute the Grand Guardian and myself, and then have the Grand Marshal take control of state affairs. If Your Majesty doesn't act first, I fear disaster will come either morning or night." Can did not accept this advice.

Afraid his words weren't heeded, Jin Zhun told Cong's two Jin consorts: "The nobles now want to depose the emperor and install the Prince of Jinan. I fear our family will be completely wiped out. You should tell this to the emperor." The two Jin women took the opportunity to relay this message.

Can then executed his Grand Administrator and Prince of Shangluo Liu Jing, Grand Preceptor and Duke of Changguo Liu Wei, Grand Marshal and Prince of Jinan Liu Ji, Grand Minister of Education and Prince of Qi Liu Mai, and others. Grand Tutor Zhu Ji and Grand Defender Fan Long fled to Chang'an. He also executed his General of Cavalry and Prince of Wu Liu Cheng, who was Ji's maternal brother.

Can held a grand review at Shanglin, planning to attack Shi Le. He appointed Jin Zhun as Grand General and Supervisor of the Imperial Secretariat. Can indulged heavily in wine and women, spending his time feasting in the rear palace, leaving all military and state affairs to Jin Zhun. Jin Zhun forged Can's orders to appoint his cousin Ming as General of Cavalry and Kang as Guard General.

Jin Zhun plotted rebellion and consulted with Wang Yan, who held the position of Golden Purple Grandee and was respected at the time. When Wang Yan refused to cooperate and tried to rush off to report it, he encountered Jin Kang who forcibly brought him back.

Jin Zhun led armed troops into the palace and ascended to the front hall of the Guangji Palace. He ordered armored soldiers to seize Can, denounced him, and then killed him. All members of the Liu clan, regardless of age or gender, were executed in the eastern marketplace. He had the tombs of Yuan Hai and Cong dug up and burned their ancestral temples. Ghost wails were heard, with the sound reaching a hundred li.

Jin Zhun declared himself Grand General and Heavenly King of Han, established government offices, and sent envoys to declare himself a vassal of Jin. Left Grandee Liu Ya

fled to Xiping. Palace Secretaries Beigong Chun, Hu Song, and others gathered Jin loyalists and fortified themselves in the Eastern Palace, but Jin Kang attacked and destroyed them.

Jin Zhun intended to appoint Wang Yan as Left Grandee, but Wang Yan cursed him, saying: "You rebellious Tuque slave! Why don't you just kill me quickly? Put my left eye at the Xiyang Gate to watch the Chancellor enter, and my right eye at the Jianchun Gate to watch the Grand General enter!" Jin Zhun was enraged and had him killed.

Chen Yuanda

Chen Yuanda, courtesy name Changhong, was from the Rear Division. His original surname was Gao, but it was changed to Chen because his birth month conflicted with his father's. In his youth, he was poor and alone, but he would farm while reciting books, finding joy in studying and reciting, always appearing content. Until the age of forty, he kept to himself and didn't socialize with others.

When Yuanhai was Left Wise Prince, he heard of Yuanda and tried to recruit him, but Chen didn't respond. When Yuanhai later claimed the throne, people said to Yuanda: "When Excellency Liu tried to recruit you before, you ignored him. Now that he has claimed the throne, are you afraid?" Yuanda laughed and said: "What kind of talk is this? I've long known that man has extraordinary qualities and ambitions to rule the world. The reason I didn't go before was that the time wasn't right, and I didn't want to create unnecessary commotion. He will understand my intentions. Just wait and see - I expect within two or three days, an official summons will arrive." That evening, Yuanhai indeed summoned Yuanda to be a Gentleman of the Yellow Gate. People exclaimed: "You must be a sage!"

Upon meeting Yuanhai, he said: "If you had come earlier, you wouldn't have merely been appointed as a Gentleman." Yuanda replied: "I believe in knowing one's proper place; those who exceed their position will fall. If I had come to your court earlier, Your Majesty might have placed me among the Nine Ministers or Advisors, which would have exceeded my proper station - how could I have handled that? Thus I restrained myself and waited for the right time, so Your Majesty wouldn't face criticism for appointing me, and I wouldn't invite disaster upon myself. Isn't this for the best?" Yuanhai was greatly pleased.

In his position, Yuanda served loyally and spoke frankly, often offering honest advice. In private, he would draft memorials, but not even his children knew about them. Cong once said to Yuanda: "You should fear me, yet you make me fear you instead?" Chen kowtowed and replied: "I have heard that one who treats ministers as teachers becomes a true king, while one who treats ministers as friends becomes a hegemon. Though I am ignorant and have little to offer, I am fortunate that Your Majesty shows the virtue of Duke Huan of Qi in accepting honest counsel, allowing this humble servant to express loyal advice. In the past, Emperor Shizong accepted Ji An's memorials from afar, thus able to promote the Han way; Jie and Zhou executed those who remonstrated, King You and King Li suppressed criticism, and thus the Three Dynasties fell suddenly. Your Majesty has emerged as a great sage for this era, possessing extraordinary capacity. If you can avoid the failings that led to the fall of

the Shang and Zhou dynasties, and instead emulate the glory of Emperor Wu of Han, it would be a great fortune for the world, and your ministers would be spared from danger."

When he died, everyone mourned him as having suffered an unjust fate.

103. Chapter 3 Liu Yao

Liu Yao, courtesy name Yongming, was a clan nephew of Yuanhai. Orphaned at a young age, he was raised by Yuanhai. In his youth, he was intelligent and possessed extraordinary character. At age eight, while hunting with Yuanhai in the western mountains, they encountered rain and took shelter under a tree. When lightning struck the tree, while others fell down, Yao remained composed. Yuanhai, impressed by this, said: "This is my family's rare talent; with such a cousin, our lineage shall not perish!"

He grew to be nine chi and three cun tall, with arms so long his hands reached below his knees. He was born with white eyebrows, his eyes emitted a red glow, and though he had only about a hundred beard hairs, they were each five chi long. His nature was unrestrained and noble, setting him apart from others. In his studies, he focused on broad learning rather than detailed analysis of texts. He was skilled in composition and proficient in both cursive and clerical scripts. His martial prowess exceeded others; he could shoot through inch-thick iron, earning him the title of divine archer. He particularly enjoyed military treatises, which he could recite from memory. He often dismissed Wu and Deng while comparing himself to Yue Yi, Xiao, and Cao. While contemporaries did not acknowledge these claims, only Cong would say: "Yongming is of the caliber of Shizu and Wei Wu; why even mention those others?"

At the age of twenty, Liu Yao traveled to Luoyang, where he faced execution for an offense but fled to Joseon. He returned after receiving amnesty. Believing his unusual physical features would make him unwelcome in society, he secluded himself in Mount Guancen, occupying himself with the zither and books. One night while alone, two young boys entered and knelt, saying: "The King of Guancen sends his servants to pay respects to Emperor Zhao and present this sword." They placed it before him, bowed twice, and departed. Examining it by candlelight, the sword was two chi long with extraordinary luster, had a red jade handle, and bore an inscription on its back reading: "Divine Imperial Sword, Dispeller of All Poisons." Yao then kept it. The sword would change into five different colors according to the four seasons.

Under Yuanhai, Yao held prominent positions, later becoming Chancellor of State and Commander-in-Chief of Military Affairs, stationed in Chang'an. During Jin Zhun's rebellion, he marched from Chang'an to respond. At Chibi, Grand Protector Huyan Yan and others fled from Pingyang to join him, and along with Grand Tutor Zhu Ji and Grand Commander Fan Long, they presented him with imperial titles. In the first year of Taixing (318), Yao usurped the imperial throne, declared a general amnesty throughout his domain, with only Jin Zhun's clan excluded, and changed the era name to Guangchu. He appointed Zhu Ji as Minister of Education, Huyan Yan as Minister of Works, and Fan Long and others retained their original positions. He dispatched Liu Ya, Commander of the Northern Conquest, and Liu Ce, Protector of the North, to station at Fenyin, forming a pincer position against Shi Le.

Jin Zhun sent Attendant Bu Tai to surrender to Shi Le, but Le imprisoned Tai and sent him to Yao. Yao told Tai: "In the late emperor's final years, great principles were violated, eunuchs interfered with governance, and loyal officials were executed. It was indeed time for righteous men to seek rectification. The Minister of Works showed loyalty and valor, wielding

power like Yi Yin and Huo Guang, saving people from catastrophe, enabling me to reach this position - his merit surpasses the ancients, his virtue matches heaven and earth. As I am managing great difficulties, I shall not harm worthy men unjustly. If the Minister of Works maintains loyalty and welcomes the imperial presence early, governance shall remain with the Jin clan, while I shall only conduct sacrifices. Convey this message to the Minister of Works and announce it to the court officials."

Tai returned to Pingyang and conveyed Yao's message. Zhun, having killed Yao's mother and brother, hesitated to comply. Soon after, Qiao Tai, Wang Teng, Jin Kang, Ma Zhong and others killed Zhun and promoted Director of the Imperial Secretariat Jin Ming as their leader. They sent Bu Tai to surrender to Yao with the Six Imperial Seals. Yao was greatly pleased and told Tai: "You have enabled me to obtain these divine seals and become emperor." When Shi Le heard this, he was furious and increased his forces to attack. After several defeats, Ming sent envoys requesting aid from Yao, who dispatched Liu Ya and Liu Ce to receive him. Ming led 15,000 civilians from Pingyang to Yao, who then ordered Ming's execution and killed all members of the Jin clan regardless of age or gender.

He sent Liu Ya to retrieve his mother Lady Hu's remains from Pingyang and reburied them in Suyi, designating the tomb as Yangling and posthumously honoring her as Empress Dowager Xuanming. He posthumously honored his great-grandfather Liang as Emperor Jing, his great-great-grandfather Guang as Emperor Xian, his grandfather Fang as Emperor Yi, and his father as Emperor Xuancheng. He moved the capital to Chang'an, building the Guangshi Palace in front and the Ziguang Palace behind. He installed his wife Lady Yang as Empress and his son Xi as Crown Prince. He enfeoffed his sons: Yi as Prince of Changle, Chan as Prince of Taiyuan, Chong as Prince of Huainan, Chang as Prince of Qi, Gao as Prince of Lu, and Hui as Prince of Chu. All royal clansmen were promoted to commandery princes. He restored the ancestral temple, altars of soil and grain, and southern and northern suburban altars. Following the succession of elements, with water succeeding Jin's metal, he named his state Zhao. Black was favored for sacrificial animals and banners. Modu was paired with Heaven, and Yuanhai with the Supreme Deity. He declared a general amnesty throughout his domain for all crimes short of capital offenses.

In Huangshi, Lu Songduo of the Tuge raised an army in Xinping and Fufeng, gathering several thousand followers and allied with Prince of Nanyang Bao. Bao appointed his general Yang Man as Inspector of Yong Province, Wang Lian as Governor of Fufeng, stationed at Chencang; Zhang Yi as Governor of Xinping, and Zhou Yong as Governor of Anding, stationed at Yinmi. Songduo descended from Caobi, and many Di and Qiang people from Qin and Long regions submitted to him. Yao sent his cavalry commander Liu Ya and Pacifier of the West Liu Hou to attack Yang Man at Chencang, but they failed to capture it after twenty days. Yao led his elite forces to respond, and when reaching Yong City, the Grand Astrologer Bian Guangming advised Yao: "Last night, an ill-omened star crossed the moon; the army should not advance." Thus he halted. He ordered Liu Ya and others to maintain the siege and fortifications while awaiting the main army.

There was an earthquake, particularly severe in Chang'an. At that time, Yao's wife Lady Yang was especially favored and participated in political affairs, which was a sign of excessive yin influence.

In the third year, Yao set out from Yong to attack Chencang. Man and Lian discussed:

"Our spies have just returned reporting that their Five Ox Banner is raised, suggesting the barbarian leader has come himself. We may not be able to withstand their assault. Our provisions are low and cannot last long. If they besiege us for a hundred days, we will perish without even fighting. Better to lead our forces into battle now. If we win, the entire Guanzhong region will submit without need for proclamations; if we lose, death is death, sooner or later makes no difference." They then deployed all their forces with their backs to the city walls, but were defeated by Yao. Wang Lian died in battle, and Yang Man fled to the southern Di people. Yao then attacked Caobi and captured it. Songduo fled to Long city, and Yao proceeded to capture Anding. Bao became fearful and relocated to Sang city. The Di and Qiang people all followed him. Yao returned victoriously to Chang'an and appointed Liu Ya as Grand Minister of Education.

Jin general Li Ju raided Jinyong and captured it. Yao's Left Palace Attendant Song Shi and Zhenwei General Song Shu surrendered to Shi Le. Yao had appointed his Grand General and Prince of Guangping Yue as Grand General of the Eastern Conquest, stationed at Luoyang. At that time, a severe epidemic broke out among the three armies, so Yue withdrew to camp at Mianchi. Shi Le sent Shi Sheng to support Song Shi and others, and their military force became very powerful. Yao's generals Yin An, Zhao Shen and others surrendered Luoyang to Sheng, whereupon Yue withdrew his forces and stationed at Shaan city.

Inside the Ximing Gate, a large tree was broken by wind. After one night, the broken tree transformed into a human shape, with hair one chi long and eyebrows and beard three cun long, all yellowish-white in color. It appeared to have clasped hands and legs wearing a skirt, but lacked eyes and nose. Every night it made sounds, and after ten days, branches and twigs grew from it, eventually becoming a large tree again with luxuriant branches and leaves.

The Colonel of Changshui, Yin Che, plotted rebellion and secretly allied with Ba chieftain Xu Kupeng. Yao executed Che and imprisoned Kupeng and over fifty others at Epang, intending to execute them. Grand Master of Splendid Happiness You Ziyuan strongly remonstrated, but Yao refused to listen. Ziyuan kowtowed until his head bled, which greatly angered Yao. He imprisoned Ziyuan and executed Kupeng and the others, leaving their bodies in the streets for ten days before throwing them in the river.

As a result, all the Ba and Di people rebelled, supporting the Ba-King of Guishan, Juqu Zhi, as their leader. Over 300,000 Qiang, Di, Ba, and Jie people from the four mountains joined the rebellion. The Guanzhong region fell into chaos, with city gates closed even during daytime.

Ziyuan sent another memorial from prison to remonstrate. Yao became furious, destroyed the memorial and said: "This slave from Dali doesn't worry about his imminent death, yet still dares to act like this. Is he eager to die?" He ordered his attendants to kill Ziyuan quickly.

Liu Ya, Zhu Ji, Huyan Yan and others remonstrated: "Ziyuan still offers advice while imprisoned - this shows his loyalty to the state, regardless of death. Even if Your Majesty won't heed his advice, why kill him? If Ziyuan dies in the morning, we shall die in the evening to expose Your Majesty's error. All people under heaven will abandon Your Majesty and flee to the Western Sea to die. With whom will Your Majesty then rule?"

Yao's anger subsided and he pardoned Ziyuan. He then ordered strict security measures inside and outside the palace, preparing to personally campaign against Zhi. Ziyuan stepped forward and said: "If Your Majesty truly accepts this humble servant's plan, you need not personally go to battle. The situation can be resolved within a month."

Yao said: "Tell me your plan."

Ziyuan replied: "The rebels have no great ambitions or unrealistic hopes; they were merely driven to revolt by Your Majesty's harsh policies. While the dead cannot be brought back, we can pardon the elderly and weak family members of the rebels who were enslaved, let them care for each other, allow them to resume their livelihoods, and grant a general amnesty for a fresh start. Once a path to survival is opened, why wouldn't they surrender? If Zhi doesn't submit immediately because his crimes are too grave, grant me 5,000 weak troops and I will capture him for Your Majesty without troubling your generals. Otherwise, with the rebels now numerous and spread across valleys and rivers, even with imperial might, I fear it cannot be resolved within years."

Yao was greatly pleased and appointed Ziyuan as General of Chariots and Cavalry, Commander with Equal Authority to the Three Excellencies, and Supreme Commander of Military Affairs for the Yong and Qin regions' punitive expeditions. He declared a general amnesty throughout his territory. When Ziyuan arrived at Yong city, over 100,000 people surrendered. He then advanced to Anding, where all the Di and Qiang people submitted. Only the Ju clan and their followers, numbering over 5,000 households, remained fortified at Yinmi. He attacked and pacified them, then led his troops along the western Longshan region, where Chen'an came out to welcome him.

Previously, over 100,000 Di and Qiang people in Shangjun had held out in defensive positions and refused to surrender. Their chieftain Daxuchu Quanqu had declared himself King of Qin. When Ziyuan advanced his troops to their fortifications, Quanqu led his forces to resist but was defeated in five battles. As Quanqu was about to surrender, his son Yiyu boldly declared to the crowd: "Even when Liu Yao came himself before, he couldn't defeat us. Why should we surrender to this small force?" He led 50,000 elite troops to press against the camp gates at dawn.

When advisors urged him to fight, Ziyuan said: "I've heard that Yiyu's bravery is unmatched today, and his troops and horses are superior to ours. Moreover, his father was recently defeated, so their anger is intense. The Western Rong are swift and fierce, their sharp attacks cannot be matched. Better to wait them out until their energy is exhausted before attacking." So he fortified his position and refused to engage. Yiyu showed signs of arrogance.

Ziyuan waited until they let their guard down, then at night, he had his troops eat their morning meal. At dawn, there was strong wind and fog. Ziyuan said: "Heaven aids us!" Leading his troops personally, he swept out from the fortifications. By daybreak, they had overwhelmed the enemy, capturing Yiyu alive and taking all his forces prisoner. Quanqu was terrified and surrendered with disheveled hair and self-inflicted facial wounds.

Ziyuan recommended to Yao that Quanqu be appointed General Who Conquers the West and Duke of Western Rong. He relocated Yiyu's brothers and their tribal groups, over 200,000 people in total, to Chang'an. Among the Western Rong, Quanqu's tribe was the strongest, and all others followed his lead in raiding and plundering. Once Quanqu

surrendered, none failed to submit.

Yao was greatly pleased and held a banquet for his officials in the East Hall. When discussing past events, he became tearful and issued an edict saying:

"Honoring virtue and remembering old relationships is what sage rulers prioritize; showing kindness to orphans is a constant principle of wise kings. Thus, when the Founding Emperor established his base north of the Yellow River, he bestowed titles on Yan You's grandson; when Wei Wu led troops to Liang and Song, he mourned at Lord Qiao's tomb. Previously, the late Grand Minister of Education and Duke of Liemin Cui Yue, Palace Secretary Cao Xun, Governor of Jinyang Wang Zhong, and Imperial Prince's Tutor Liu Sui - some knew me in my childhood, others helped me in times of extreme hardship. Thinking of these gentlemen truly pains my heart. Does the Book of Poetry not say: 'I keep it in my heart, how could I ever forget!'

Although Yue received honors at the beginning of Hanchang, during those difficult times proper ceremonies were lacking. Now Yue shall be posthumously appointed as Envoy of the Imperial Insignia, Palace Attendant, Grand Minister of Education, and Duke of Liaodong. Xun shall be Grand Minister of Works and Duke of Nanjun. Sui shall be Grand Master of Ceremonies and Duke of Pingchang. Zhong shall be General Who Guards the Army and Marquis of Anping. All shall additionally receive titles as Imperial Guard Cavalry Officers. Since their graves are in ruins and there is no way to express condolences, officials should quickly locate their descendants and grant them lands to fulfill my intentions."

Earlier, when Yao had fled, he escaped with Cao Xun to Liu Sui, who hid him in an old chest and transported him to Zhong, who then sent him to Joseon. After a year of hunger and hardship, he changed his name and worked as a county soldier. Cui Yue, who was the Magistrate of Joseon, saw him and found him unusual, investigating his background. Yao kowtowed, confessed his identity, and tearfully begged for mercy.

Yue said: "Do you think Cui Yuansong is inferior to Sun Binshuo? Why are you so afraid? Although the search for you is intense, you cannot be safe among common people. This county is remote and I can help you. Even in dire circumstances, I would at most resign my position and leave with you. My family line is declining with no brothers to worry about, and I am unfortunate to have no sons. You are like my younger brother, so don't worry too much. When a great man lives in this world, even when birds and beasts seek refuge with people, one should help them - how much more so for a gentleman!" He provided Yao with clothes and study materials. Yao then followed Yue, discussing and resolving his doubts, receiving great care and consideration.

Yue calmly said to Yao: "Young Liu, your bearing and spirit are extraordinary - you have the talent of a generation! If there should be even a slight wind stirring across the four seas, among the heroes of the age, you would be the leader." Although they were in difficult circumstances, Cao Xun had maintained proper etiquette between ruler and minister in serving Yao, and thus Yao was grateful to them all.

Yao established the Imperial Academy (Taixue) east of the Changle Palace and a lower school (Xiaoxue) west of the Weiyang Palace. He selected 1,500 commoners between the ages of thirteen and twenty-five who showed potential for learning. He chose respected court scholars and learned Confucian scholars to teach them. He appointed Liu Jun, the Supervisor of the Imperial Secretariat, as Chancellor of the National University. He also

created the position of Libationer of Literary Studies (Chongwen Jijiu), which ranked below the National University. Dong Jingdao, who was a Gentleman Attendant at Court, was promoted to Libationer of Literary Studies due to his profound understanding of the classics. You Ziyuan was appointed as Grand Minister of Education.

Yao ordered the construction of the Fengming Observatory, a Western Palace, and the Lingxiao Tower at Huo Pool, and planned to build his mausoleum southwest of Baling. Palace Attendants Qiao Yu and He Bao submitted a memorial advising against this:

"We have heard that when rulers undertake construction, they must follow heaven's patterns above and accommodate human circumstances below. When Duke Wen of Wei inherited his state after chaos and destruction, with ancestral temples and state altars scattered, he still first planned the construction of the Chu Palace. Even in such urgent times he was like this, thus he was able to follow in the footsteps of Kang Shu and Duke Wu, extending blessings for 900 years.

We received the edict to build the Fengming Observatory, but people in the marketplaces all criticize it, saying its cost could pacify Liangzhou. Now we receive another order to build a Western Palace modeled after Epang Palace and a Lingxiao Tower modeled after the Jade Tower - this would cost ten times more than Fengming, with labor costs a hundred times more than previous projects. With such expenses, we could conquer Wu and Shu, or defeat Qi and Wei. Why does Your Majesty follow the path of fallen states during this time of restoration?

Among ancient sage kings, who was without fault? But this project is truly excessive. While it is admirable to correct mistakes, completing this would be truly difficult.

We also heard of plans to build a mausoleum four li in circumference, twenty-five zhang deep, with copper coffins adorned with gold - we fear the empire cannot afford such expenses. We have heard that Yao was buried in Gulin without disrupting the markets, and Zhuangxiu was buried in Guangyang without reaching the water table - this was how sage kings handled their final affairs. The First Emperor of Qin sealed three springs and built a tomb seven li in circumference, but after his death it was destroyed almost immediately - this is how unenlightened rulers end.

There has never been a state that did not fall or a tomb that was not looted. Sage kings knew that lavish burials invite harm, so they avoided them. Though ministers and sons might wish their rulers' and fathers' tombs to be as grand as mountains, preserving them for all time is more important. The lessons of rise and fall, extravagance and frugality are clear before us. We hope Your Majesty will consider this."

Yao was greatly pleased and issued an edict saying: "These two Palace Attendants show the noble character of ancient worthies - they are truly ministers who care for the state. If not for these two gentlemen, how would I have heard such words! Even Emperor Xiaoming, during peaceful times when all under heaven was secure, accepted Zhongli's single suggestion and halted construction of the Northern Palace. How much more should I, in my limited wisdom and during these difficult times, respectfully follow such wise counsel! I hereby order all work on the mausoleum to stop and to follow the standards of the Baling tomb instead. Does the Book of Poetry not say: 'No word goes unrewarded, no virtue goes uncompensated'? Therefore, let Yu be enfeoffed as Duke of Anchang, and Bao as Duke of Pingyu, both serving as Grand Masters of Remonstrance. Let this be announced throughout

the realm so all may know that this court earnestly seeks to hear of its faults. From now on, regarding policies and laws that are unsuitable for the times or harmful to the state, come forward and speak freely without reservation."

He then reduced the size of the Fengshui Garden and distributed the land to poor households.

When Mount Zhongnan collapsed, a Chang'an resident named Liu Zhong found a piece of white jade one chi square at the collapse site, bearing an inscription: "The Emperor falls, the Emperor falls, defeated by the prospering Zhao. When the well water dries up, five beams are built; in the year of Geyou, decline and death amid chaos. Alas! Alas! When the red ox strains at its bridle, all shall end!"

At the time, all court officials offered congratulations, seeing it as an omen of Shi Le's destruction. Yao was greatly pleased and, after fasting for seven days, presented it at the Imperial Ancestral Temple. He declared a general amnesty and appointed Zhong as Grand Master of Auspicious Omens.

However, Liu Jun, the Supervisor of the Imperial Secretariat, stepped forward and said: "I have heard that mountains and rivers belong to the state, and when mountains collapse and rivers dry up, it bodes ill for the ruler. Mount Zhongnan is the guardian mountain of the capital, watched over by the whole nation. Its unexpected collapse is an extremely ill omen! Such disasters occurred during the decline of the Three Dynasties. While other court officials speak of good fortune, I alone disagree. Though this may offend Your Majesty and go against popular opinion, I cannot agree with their interpretation.

Why? Jade within mountain rock is like the relationship between ruler and subject. A mountain's collapse and rocks' destruction symbolize state upheaval and civil disorder. 'The Emperor falls, defeated by the prospering Zhao' suggests the imperial house will be defeated by Zhao, leading to Zhao's prosperity. Now, Great Zhao rules in Qin and Yong, while Shi Le controls all of Zhao's territory - this prophecy of Zhao's prosperity applies to Shi Le, not us.

'When the well water dries up, five beams are built' - the well refers to the Eastern Well, Qin's territory; 'five' refers to Wuche, and 'beam' refers to Daliang, both in Zhao's territory. This suggests Qin will be exhausted and destroyed to build up Zhao.

'Ge' refers to the year designation Geyou, predicting military defeat and deaths of generals. 'Kun' refers to Kundun, the designation for the year of Zi, while Xuanxiao is also a celestial position, suggesting state destruction in the year of Zi.

'Red ox straining at bridle' refers to Chifenruo, the designation for the year of Chou. 'Ox' refers to Qianniu constellation in the northeast, associated with Chou, suggesting complete annihilation in the year of Chou.

These warnings are urgent, hoping Your Majesty will diligently cultivate virtue to avert them. Even if this were an auspicious omen, I still wish Your Majesty would remain vigilant in response. The Book of Documents says: 'Even in times of peace, do not rest easy.' I hope Your Majesty will follow the virtuous example of the Duke of Zhou at Mengjin, and reject the ill fortune of Duke Guo's temple dream. I humbly submit myself to punishment for speaking of ill omens."

Yao's expression became troubled and changed. The Censors then accused Liu Jun of mad ravings and false interpretations that defamed the auspicious omen, requesting he be charged with great disrespect.

Yao responded: "The true meaning of this omen cannot be known for certain. It deeply warns me of my lack of virtue, and I have received much loyal counsel from him - what crime has he committed?"

Yao personally led a campaign against the Di and Qiang peoples. Yang Nandi of Qiuchi led his forces to resist, but was defeated by Yao's vanguard and retreated to defend Qiuchi. Many Di and Qiang people from Qiuchi then surrendered to Yao.

Later, Yao launched another western campaign against Yang Tao in Nan'an. Tao, frightened, surrendered to Yao along with Liang Xun, the Governor of Longxi, and others. They were all enfeoffed as marquises. Yao sent Palace Attendant Qiao Yu with 5,000 soldiers to relocate Tao and over 10,000 households from Longright to Chang'an.

Yao then advanced to attack Qiuchi. At this time, Yao was ill, and an epidemic was severe among his troops. There was discussion of withdrawing the army, but fearing Nandi would pursue them, Yao sent his Secretariat Officer Wang Guang, appointed as General of Enlightening the State, to negotiate with Nandi. As a result, Nandi sent envoys to declare himself a vassal.

Yao was greatly pleased and appointed Nandi as Envoy with Imperial Insignia, Palace Attendant, Acting Bearer of the Battle-axe, Commander-in-Chief of Military Affairs of Yining, South Qin, Liang, Liangzhou, Ba (six provinces in total), Longshang and Western Regions, Grand General, Shepherd of Yining and South Qin (three provinces), Protector of Southern Di, General of Pacifying the Qiang, and King of Wudu. Fifteen of Nandi's sons and brothers were made dukes, marquises, generals, and officials with salaries of 2,000 shi.

Chen An requested an audience, but Yao declined due to severe illness. Angry and believing Yao to be dead, An plundered the area and returned home. As Yao's illness worsened, he returned by carriage, leaving General Huyan Shi to oversee the supply train. Chen An led elite cavalry to ambush them on the road. Shi had no escape route and was captured along with Chief Clerk Lu Ping.

An imprisoned Shi and said to him, "Liu Yao is already dead. Whom will you serve now? I shall carry you along to establish a great enterprise." Shi berated An: "You dog! You've enjoyed honors and trust, yet you first betrayed Sima Bao and now do this again. How do you compare yourself to our lord? I worry you'll soon have your head displayed on Shanggui's main road - what great enterprise? Kill me quickly and hang my head on Shanggui's east gate to watch the main army enter the city."

Enraged, An killed him. He made Lu Ping his Army Advisor and sent his brother Ji and General Zhang Ming with 20,000 cavalry to pursue Yao. However, Yao's guard commander Huyan Yu counterattacked, killing them and capturing their forces. Frightened, An fled back to Shanggui. After Yao returned from Nan'an, Chen An sent his generals Liu Lie and Zhao Han to raid Qian city, capturing it. The Di and Qiang peoples of the Western Provinces all joined An.

With powerful forces numbering over 100,000, An declared himself Envoy with Imperial Insignia, Grand Commander-in-Chief, Acting Bearer of the Battle-axe, Grand General, Governor of Yong, Liang, Qin and Liang Provinces, and King of Liang. He appointed Zhao Mu as Chancellor and Left Chief Clerk.

Lu Ping wept before An, saying "I cannot bear to see Chen An's death!" Angered, An ordered his execution. Ping said, "Death is my fate. Hang my head in Qinzhou's main street

to watch Zhao behead Chen An." He was then killed.

When Yao heard of Ping's death, he grieved: "Worthy men are the hope of the world. To harm them is to block the world's sentiment. Even rulers in peaceful times dare not alienate their servants' hearts, let alone in troubled times! Chen An, at a time when he should be recruiting the worthy and wise, instead harms good men and cuts off contemporary hope. I know he cannot succeed."

The Xiutu King Shi Wu surrendered Sangcheng to Yao, who was greatly pleased. Yao appointed Wu as Envoy with Imperial Insignia, Commander-in-Chief of Military Affairs for Qinzhou, Longshang and Various Barbarian Tribes, Grand General of Pacifying the West, and Inspector of Qinzhou, and enfeoffed him as King of Jiuquan.

Yao's empress Lady Yang died and was posthumously titled Empress Xianwen. Lady Yang had enjoyed special favor within the palace and participated in court politics from behind the scenes. She bore Yao three sons: Xi, Xi, and Chan.

Yao instituted several new regulations:

- Those without official positions were forbidden from riding horses
- Only wives of officials with salaries of 800 shi or above were allowed to wear brocade and embroidery
- Drinking alcohol was only permitted after the autumn harvest was complete
- Cattle could only be slaughtered for sacrifices to ancestral temples and the gods of land and grain
- All violators of these laws were to be put to death

Yao also visited the Imperial Academy and appointed the top-performing students as Palace Gentlemen.

Su Fu, a man from Wugong, and Wu Changping, a man from Shaan, both transformed into women. In Shaan, stones were said to have spoken, warning people not to go east.

Yao went to Suyi to plan the burial of his father and wife. The planned tomb mound had a circumference of two li. Workers had to labor by torchlight, and their cries of complaint filled the roads.

You Ziyuan submitted a remonstrance saying: "I have heard that for sage rulers, loyal ministers and filial sons, burials need only have: a coffin large enough for the body, an outer coffin large enough to contain the inner coffin, and a tomb chamber large enough for the outer coffin - nothing more. They didn't build mounds or plant trees, planning for perpetuity. Your Majesty is known for frugality and caring for the people, with state resources as the foundation. Yet these two tombs will cost millions, requiring 60,000 workers for 100 days, totaling 6 million work days. Both tombs extend three springs deep and rise hundred chi high, piling stones into mountains and earth into hills. Thousands of ancient tombs were excavated, workers cry in anguish, bones are scattered across fields, and wailing fills the streets. This brings no benefit to the late emperor and empress while wasting state resources. If Your Majesty were to follow the ways of Yao and Shun, the work would not exceed a million labor days and costs would be in the thousands. There would be no resentment below or above, your parents would rest peacefully, and Your Majesty would enjoy the virtuous reputation of Shun, Yu and the Duke of Zhou. Please consider this."

Yao rejected this advice and sent General Liu Yue with 10,000 cavalry to receive his father's and brother Hui's remains from Taiyuan. A plague broke out, killing 30-40% of

people. In Shangluo, a man named Zhang Lu who had been dead for 27 days came back to life when grave robbers opened his tomb.

Yao buried his father in the Yongyuan Tomb and his wife Lady Yang in the Xianping Tomb. He issued a general amnesty for all crimes below capital offenses, granted people two ranks of nobility, and distributed silk to the poor, elderly and sick according to their circumstances.

In the first year of Taining, Chen An attacked Liu Gong (Yao's General of the Western Expedition) at Nan'an. The Xiutu King Shi Wu left Sangcheng to attack Shanggui in order to relieve the siege at Nan'an. When An heard of this, he fearfully rushed back to Shanggui and encountered Wu at Guatian. Wu, being outnumbered, retreated to Zhang Chun's old fortress.

An pursued Wu, shouting: "Rebellious barbarian slave! I must capture this slave alive before executing Liu Gong!" Wu closed the fortress and resisted. Meanwhile, Gong defeated An's rear forces, killing and capturing over 10,000 men. When An hurried back to help, Gong met and defeated him. Soon after, Wu's cavalry arrived in force, causing An's forces to completely collapse. An gathered 8,000 cavalry and fled to Longcheng. Gong then left Wu to command the rear forces while personally leading troops at the front. They repeatedly defeated An's forces and ultimately besieged him at Longcheng.

A prolonged heavy rain caused thunder that damaged the gate building of Yao's father's tomb, and a great wind blew his father's memorial hall more than 50 steps beyond the wall. Yao avoided the main hall, wore plain white clothes and mourned in the east hall for five days. He ordered Liu Xi, the Garrison Commander, and Liang Xu, the Grand Master of Ceremonies, and others to repair the damage. The pine and cypress trees that had grown into a forest had all withered by this time.

He appointed his Grand Marshal Liu Ya as Grand Chancellor, granting him special privileges:

- Permission to wear a sword and shoes in the palace
- Exemption from having to hurry when entering court
- No need to announce his name during ceremonies
- Command of 1,000 soldiers and 100 cavalry
- 100 armed guards allowed to enter the palace
- An additional 60 sword-bearing attendants
- Two bands of musicians both in front and behind

Yao personally led a campaign against Chen An, besieging him at Longcheng. An repeatedly came out to challenge them but was defeated multiple times, with over 8,000 of his men killed or captured. The Right Army commander Liu Qian attacked and captured Pingxiang, and all counties in the Longshang area surrendered. Yao issued a special amnesty for all crimes below capital offenses in Longyou, except for Chen An and Zhao Mu.

An left Yang Bozhi, Jiang Chong'er and others to defend Longcheng, while he broke through the siege with several hundred cavalry, intending to gather forces from Shanggui and Pingxiang to relieve Longcheng. After breaking out, he learned that Shanggui was under siege and Pingxiang had fallen, so he fled south to Shaanzhong.

Yao sent his generals Ping Xian and Qiu Zhongbo to pursue An with elite cavalry. They repeatedly defeated him, killing or capturing over 400 men. An fought back with about ten

strong warriors in Shaanzhong. He wielded a seven-chi great sword in his left hand and an one-zhang-eight snake spear in his right hand. In close combat, he would strike with both weapons, killing five or six men at a time. At range, he would shoot arrows while riding. Ping Xian, who was also exceptionally strong and swift, fought with An three times and managed to seize his snake spear before retreating.

As night fell and heavy rain came, An abandoned his horse and fled on foot with five or six followers into the mountains, hiding in a valley. The next day they couldn't find him. When the rain finally stopped, Fu Wei Huan Qing tracked his trail and killed An in a valley bend. Yao was greatly pleased.

Chen An was skilled at managing people, sharing both good and bad times with his troops. After his death, people in the Long region sang a song about him:

"On the Long hills there was a brave man named Chen An,
Though small in stature, he had a big heart,
He loved and nurtured his soldiers like his own flesh and blood.
With his black steed and iron-trimmed saddle,
He wielded a seven-chi great sword swift as a torrent,
And an one-zhang-eight snake spear that coiled left and right,
Ten strikes, ten victories, none could stand before him.
In the third clash of battle, he lost his snake spear,
Abandoning his black steed, he fled into the mountains,
He became our external support, but now his head is hung.
The western waters flow east to the river,
Once gone, never to return, what can we do for you!"

When Yao heard this song, he was moved and ordered the Music Bureau to set it to music.

Yang Bozhi executed Jiang Chong'er and surrendered Longcheng. Song Ting executed Zhao Mu and surrendered Shanggui. The major clans of Qinzhou, including the Yang and Jiang families, totaling more than 2,000 households, were relocated to Chang'an. All the Di and Qiang peoples submitted and sent hostages as a pledge of loyalty.

At that time, Liu Yue and Zhang Mao, the Inspector of Liang Province, were in a standoff along the Yellow River. Yao marched from Long to Western River with 285,000 troops, setting up camps along the river for over a hundred li. The sound of bells and drums was so loud it shook the earth and river - such a magnificent military display had never been seen before. Zhang Mao's riverside garrisons all fled at the sight.

When word spread that they would cross the river at multiple points straight to Guzang, Liang Province was terrified and people lost their resolve. While all the generals wanted to cross quickly, Yao said: "Although our army is strong, it doesn't surpass Wei Wu's eastern campaign. Two-thirds of those who came did so out of fear. The central army's veteran guards are already tired and unusable. Since we just defeated Chen An, Zhang's forces will be intimidated by our strength and numbers. Their five commanderies cannot resist us. They will surely submit and become our vassals - what more do we need? Test what I say - if Zhang Mao's submission doesn't arrive within half a month, I'll admit I was wrong."

As expected, Zhang Mao, frightened, sent envoys to submit as a vassal, offering:
- 1,500 horses

- 3,000 cattle
- 100,000 sheep
- 380 jin of gold
- 700 jin of silver
- 20 female performers
- Countless precious jewels and local goods

Yao was greatly pleased and through his Grand Herald Tian Song, appointed Zhang Mao to multiple titles including:

- Envoy with Imperial Insignia
- Bearer of the Yellow Battle-axe
- Palace Attendant
- Commander of Various Military Affairs
- Grand Preceptor
- Grand Marshal
- Governor of Liang Province
- Protector-General of the Western Regions
- Commander of Di and Qiang Affairs
- King of Liang

After returning from the western river, Yao ordered Hu Yuan to increase his father's and wife's tomb heights to 90 chi.

Yang Nandi, feeling threatened and fearful after Chen An's defeat, fled to Hanzhong. Liu Hou, the Defender of the West, pursued and attacked him, capturing over a thousand of his carts and more than 6,000 of his soldiers and civilians, then returned to Qiuchi.

Yao appointed Tian Song, the Grand Herald, as the Grand General Who Guards the South and Inspector of Yi Province, stationing him at Qiuchi. Liu Yue was made Palace Attendant and Commander of All Military Affairs Within and Without, and was promoted to Prince of Zhongshan.

Initially, during Jin Zhun's rebellion, Yao's heir apparent Yin was lost to the Black Ni Yuju tribe. When Yin identified himself, the Yuju were greatly surprised and provided him with clothes and horses, sending their own son to escort him back. Yao wept upon seeing Yin and, appreciating Yuju's loyalty, appointed them as Envoy with Imperial Insignia, Cavalry Attendant, General of Loyalty and Righteousness, and Left Wise Prince.

Yin, whose courtesy name was Yisun, was handsome and quick-witted. At age ten, he was already seven chi and five cun tall, with eyebrows like paintings. Liu Cong was impressed and said to Yao: "This child's spirit is surely different from Yizhen! He should be your heir apparent. You should consider King Wen's precedent of replacing Boyi Kao with King Wu."

Yao replied: "My vassal state only needs to maintain ancestral sacrifices; we cannot disrupt the order of seniority."

Cong responded: "Your merits reach heaven and earth, your domain spans hundreds of cities. As Grand Preceptor of this age with authority to campaign independently - among the Five Marquises and Nine Earls with such authority - how can you compare yourself to ordinary vassal states! Since Yizhen cannot emulate Taibo's noble yielding, I will simply grant him a state."

Yizhen was the courtesy name of Yao's son Jian. Thus, Jian was made Prince of Linhai,

and Yin was established as heir apparent. Although Yin had experienced hardship and exile in his youth, he grew to be distinguished and brilliant. He was eight chi and three cun tall, with hair reaching to his feet, possessed great strength, was skilled in archery, and was as swift as wind and clouds. Yao valued him highly, and his court officials also favored him.

Yao then addressed his officials: "Yisun can be said to be one who remains unchanged in winter's cold and unstained by mud. Although Yiguang was established first, he is young and overly cautious - I fear he may not be suitable as heir in these times. This would neither secure the state above nor benefit Yiguang below. Yisun is older, virtuous, and was the original heir. I wish to follow the examples of King Wen of Zhou and Emperor Guangwu of Han, to ensure the ancestral temples' security and Yiguang's endless fortune. What do you all think?"

His Grand Tutor Huyan Yan and others all replied: "Your Majesty's emulation of Zhou and Han dynasties plans for the state's eternal future. Not only will we benefit from it, but it will bring fortune to the ancestral temples and all under heaven."

Left Director of the Imperial Clan Bu Tai and Grand Guardian of the Crown Prince Han Guang stepped forward and said: "If Your Majesty believes this change is right, there would be no need to seek counsel from your subjects. If you have doubts and wish to hear our differing opinions, we believe deposing the Crown Prince would be wrong. Why? King Wen of Zhou chose his successor before establishing his rule, so selecting a sage was appropriate. Emperor Guangwu's decision to change heirs based on maternal favor should not be a model for a sage court! Though Guangwu seized power from Donghai, how could he compare to Emperor Ming?"

Prince Yin has military talent and broad vision, uniquely outstanding in this age, worthy of comparison to Zhou Fa (King Wu). However, the Crown Prince is filial, friendly, benevolent, and refined - also capable of supporting the imperial foundation and being a worthy ruler in peaceful times. Moreover, the position of heir apparent is the focus of attention for both humans and spirits throughout the realm and cannot be changed lightly. If Your Majesty truly intends this, we can only die rather than accept such an order."

Yao remained silent. Yin came forward weeping: "A father's love for his children should follow the benevolence of the Shijiou (Classic of Poetry). How could you replace Xi (Crown Prince) with me! If Your Majesty shows such misplaced favor, I would rather die here to show my true heart. If Your Majesty overlooks my unworthiness and thinks I am capable, I should help guide Yiguang and follow your sacred path." He sobbed deeply, moving the court officials.

Yao, considering that the Crown Prince was born to Lady Yang who was favored, could not bear to depose him and thus stopped the proceedings. He posthumously honored his former wife Lady Bu (Yin's mother) as Empress Yuan Dao. Bu Tai, Yin's uncle, was appreciated by Yao and appointed as Senior Grand Master of the Palace with Equal Authority as the Three Excellencies and Grand Tutor of the Crown Prince.

Yin was made Prince of Yong'an and appointed as Palace Attendant, Great General of the Guards, Commander of Palace Guard Forces, Official with Equal Authority as the Three Excellencies, Recorder of the Imperial Secretariat, and Grand Tutor of the Crown Prince, with the title of Imperial Son. Xi was ordered to treat Yin with familial respect.

At that time, a phoenix with five offspring appeared and flew around the former

Weiyang Palace for five days. They cried sorrowfully, did not eat, and all died. Yao then established Lady Liu as his empress.

Shi Le's general Shi Ta set out from Yanmen and entered Shangjun, launching a surprise attack on Pen Juchu, the General Who Pacifies the State and King of the Northern Qiang. Shi Ta captured over 3,000 households and seized more than a million cattle, horses, and sheep before returning.

Yao was furious upon hearing this news, throwing his sleeves in anger as he rose. That day, he was stationed at Weicheng and sent Liu Yue to pursue the enemy. Yao himself moved to Fuping to provide support for Liu Yue.

Liu Yue engaged Shi Ta in battle along the banks of the Yellow River. He defeated Shi Ta, beheading him along with 1,500 of his armored soldiers. Over 5,000 of Shi Ta's men drowned in the river while trying to escape. Liu Yue recovered all the captives and livestock, then returned triumphantly with his troops.

Yang Nandi returned from Hanzhong and attacked Qiuchi, capturing it and seizing Tian Song, bringing him before himself. Yang Nandi's attendants ordered Tian Song to bow, but Song glared at them and shouted: "Di dogs! How could a minister of the Son of Heaven bow to rebels!"

Yang Nandi said: "Zidai (Tian Song's courtesy name), I want to accomplish great things with you. You think one can only be loyal to the Liu family - why not to me?"

Tian Song, with a fierce expression, declared loudly: "You rebellious Di slave, how dare you aspire to such undeserved ambitions! I would rather be a ghost for the state than become your subject. Why don't you just kill me quickly!"

He then pushed aside one person, grabbed their sword, and lunged forward to stab Yang Nandi. He missed, and Nandi killed him.

Yao sent Liu Yue to attack Shi Sheng in Luoyang, providing him with 5,000 armored soldiers from nearby commanderies and 10,000 elite palace guards. They crossed the river at Mengjin. The Defender of the East, Huyan Mo, led troops from Jing and Si eastward through Xiao and Mian.

Liu Yue attacked and captured Shi Le's two fortresses at Mengjin and Shiliang, beheading over 5,000 enemies. He then advanced to besiege Shi Sheng at Jinyong. Shi Jilongs led 40,000 infantry and cavalry through Chenggao Pass. Liu Yue arranged his troops to face them.

They battled west of Luo, where Yue's army was defeated. Yue was hit by an arrow and retreated to defend Shiliang. Jilong then surrounded them with trenches and palisades, cutting off all communication.

Yue's troops were starving and had to eat their horses. Jilong also defeated Huyan Mo and beheaded him. Yao personally led an army to rescue Yue, but Jilong came with 30,000 cavalry to oppose him.

Yao's vanguard under Liu Hei greatly defeated Jilong's general Shi Cong at Bate Slope. Yao camped at Jingu, but that night his army was inexplicably thrown into panic and scattered. He retreated to Mianchi. Another panic occurred at night, causing soldiers to flee, so he returned to Chang'an.

Jilong captured Liu Yue, Wang Teng, and over 80 other officers, along with more than 3,000 Di and Qiang people, sending them to Xiangguo. He buried alive 16,000 soldiers.

When Yao returned from Mianchi, he wore plain clothes and wailed at the outskirts for seven days before entering the city.

In Wugong, a pig gave birth to a dog; in Shanggui, a horse gave birth to a cow; and there were countless other strange omens and abnormal occurrences. Yao ordered each of his ministers to recommend one knowledgeable and outspoken scholar. Minister of Works Liu Jun recommended his military advisor Tai Chan. Yao personally went to the East Hall and sent palace attendants to question him. Chan spoke frankly about the causes of these occurrences. Yao read his response and was pleased, summoning him to the East Hall to consult him about state affairs.

Chan wept and sobbed as he thoroughly explained the disasters portended by these omens and the deficiencies in governance. His words were honest and direct. Yao's expression changed and he treated Chan with respect, immediately appointing him as Erudite and Libationer, Grand Master of Remonstrance, and Director of the Imperial Astronomical Bureau.

His subsequent predictions all proved accurate, and Yao valued him even more. Within a year, he was promoted three times, serving successively as Imperial Secretary, Grand Master of Splendid Happiness, Junior Tutor to the Crown Prince, and was given the rank of Special Advanced.

Yao appointed Liu Yin as Grand Marshal and promoted him to Prince of Nanyang, granting him thirteen commanderies of Hanyang as his domain. He established the Chanyu Platform at Weicheng and appointed himself as Grand Chanyu, setting up positions of Left and Right Wise Princes and other titles below them, filling these positions with prominent leaders from the Hu, Jie, Xianbei, Di, and Qiang peoples.

After returning to Chang'an, Yao had fallen ill due to anger and frustration. When he recovered from his illness, he granted amnesty in Chang'an to all criminals except those sentenced to death. He appointed his Prince of Runan, Liu Xian, as Grand Commander and Supervisor of the Imperial Secretariat, appointed Liu Sui, the Grand Master of Splendid Happiness, as Grand Minister of Education, and Bu Tai as Grand Minister of Works.

Yao's wife, Lady Liu, became gravely ill. Yao personally visited her and asked if she had any final words. Lady Liu wept and said: "My uncle Chang has no son. I was raised by him in my youth, and he showed me great kindness. I have no way to repay his kindness, so I wish Your Majesty would honor him. My uncle Ai's daughter Fang possesses virtue and beauty; I wish she could serve in the imperial harem." Yao agreed to these requests.

After speaking these words, she died. She was posthumously honored as Empress Xianlie. Liu Chang was appointed as Envoy with Imperial Insignia, Palace Attendant, Grand Minister of Education, and Supervisor of the Imperial Secretariat. He was promoted to Duke of Henan Commandery, and his wife Lady Zhang was made Lady of Cixiang. Liu Ai's daughter Fang was installed as Empress, fulfilling Lady Liu's final wish.

Shortly after, he appointed Cavalry General Liu Shu as Grand Minister of Education and made Liu Chang Grand Guardian. He summoned the brave and capable sons of his ministers and officials to serve as Personal Guard Officers, who wore armor and rode armored horses, accompanying him everywhere to serve as his personal protection force.

Imperial Secretary Hao Shu and Water Conservation Director Zhi Dang and others strongly remonstrated against these appointments, but Yao became furious and had them

poisoned to death.

In the third year of Xianhe (329), Yao had a night dream where three figures with golden faces and red lips faced east, bowed respectfully, and retreated without speaking. Yao bowed and followed their footsteps. At dawn, he summoned his ministers to discuss this dream. The court officials all congratulated him, considering it an auspicious sign.

However, the Director of the Imperial Astronomical Bureau, Ren Yi, said: "Three represents the ultimate limit of historical cycles. East is the position of Thunder, the beginning position for rulers. Gold represents the position of Lake, indicating decline. Red lips without speech signifies the end of matters. Their respectful bowing represents the way of withdrawal. Your bowing to them suggests submission to others. Following their footsteps indicates staying within boundaries. The Eastern Well is Qin's constellation, and the Five Chariots is Zhao's constellation. Qin's forces will surely rise suddenly, the ruler will be lost and armies defeated, leaving destruction in Zhao's territory. This will happen within three years, or as soon as seven hundred days. The response is not far off. I hope Your Majesty will consider this and take precautions."

Yao was greatly frightened. He personally performed sacrifices at the suburban altars, renovated temples, made offerings to mountains and rivers, leaving nothing undone. He granted amnesty to all except those condemned to death and reduced the people's taxes and levies by half. From spring until the fifth month, Chang'an experienced no rainfall.

Yao sent his military guard Liu Lang to lead 30,000 cavalry in an attack against Yang Nandi at Qiuchi. The attack failed, but they captured and brought back over 3,000 households.

When Zhang Jun heard that Yao's army had been defeated by the Shi clan, he abandoned Yao's official titles and resumed using the Jin dynasty titles of Grand General and Shepherd of Liang Province. He then sent Zhang Lang, the Administrator of Jincheng, along with Xin Yan, the Military Protector of Fuhang, General Han Pu, and others to lead several tens of thousands of troops from Daxia to attack and plunder various commanderies in Qin Province.

Yao dispatched Liu Yin to lead 40,000 infantry and cavalry to counter them. The armies faced each other along the Tao River for over 70 days. The Champion General Huan Naji led 2,000 Personal Guard cavalry to cut off their supply routes. When Yin's forces crossed the river to press the attack, Pu's army completely collapsed and fled back to Liang Province. Yin pursued them to Lingju, where he beheaded 20,000 soldiers. Zhang Lang and Xin Yan, leading tens of thousands of troops, surrendered to Yao. They were all appointed as generals and enfeoffed as marquises.

Shi Le sent Shi Jilong to lead 40,000 troops westward through Zhi Pass. More than 50 counties in Hedong responded by supporting them, and they advanced to attack Puban. When Yao planned to go east to rescue Puban, he feared that Zhang Jun and Yang Nandi might take advantage of his absence to attack Chang'an, so he sent his Prince of Hejian, Shu, to station Di and Qiang troops in Qin Province.

Yao led all his elite forces by land and water to respond, crossing north of Wei Pass. Jilong became fearful and withdrew his forces. Yao pursued them to Gaohou, where a major battle took place. He defeated them, killing their general Shi Zhan, with corpses stretching over 200 li, and captured enormous amounts of military supplies. Jilong fled to Zhao.

Yao then crossed at Dayang and attacked Shi Sheng at Jinyong, using the Thousand-Gold Dam to flood them. However, Yao neglected his troops and spent time drinking and gambling with his favored officials. When his advisers remonstrated, he became angry, condemned it as treasonous talk, and executed them. There were strong winds that uprooted trees, and fog blocked all directions.

When he heard that Jilong had advanced to occupy Shimen, and later learned that Le had personally led a large force across the river, he finally discussed reinforcing the Xingyang garrison and blocking Huangma Pass. Soon after, his scouts engaged Le's vanguard and captured a Jie soldier. Yao questioned him: "Did the Great Barbarian come himself? How large is his army?" The Jie replied: "The Great Barbarian came himself, and his army is too mighty to resist." Yao's expression changed. He ordered the siege of Jinyong to be lifted and arranged his forces west of the Luo River, stretching north-south for over ten li.

Yao had been fond of drinking since youth, and it had gotten worse in his later years. When Le arrived and Yao prepared for battle, he drank several dou of wine. His usual red horse suddenly stumbled for no reason, so he switched to a smaller horse. Before setting out, he drank another dou of wine.

When he reached the Xiyang Gate and arranged his battle formation, Le's general Shi Kan took advantage of the situation, and Yao's army completely collapsed. Yao fled in his drunken state, his horse got stuck in a stone ditch, and he fell onto ice. He suffered more than ten wounds, three of which were severe, and was captured by Kan who sent him to Le.

Yao said: "King Shi! Do you remember the covenant at Chongmen?" Le had Xu Guang tell Yao: "Today's events are Heaven's will, what more can be said!" Yao was imprisoned in the Henan Assistant's office, where the wound doctor Li Yong was sent to treat him, before being taken to Xiangguo.

Yao's wounds were severe, and Le had him transported in a horse-drawn carriage with Li Yong accompanying him. Sun Ji, an elder from the North Garden market, requested to see Yao, which Le permitted. Ji offered wine to Yao and recited: "Pugu King, who proclaimed himself emperor west of the passes. Should have maintained stability and protected his territory. Rashly used military force, lost at Luoyang. His destiny exhausted, Heaven abandoned him. Now let us share this final cup."

Yao replied, "How vigorous you are! I should drink to you, old man." When Le heard this, his expression changed to one of sadness and said, "A man who has lost his kingdom, yet makes an old man reproach him."

Yao was confined in the small city of Yongfeng in Xiangguo, provided with his concubines but strictly guarded by soldiers. Le sent Liu Yue, Liu Zhen, and others, mounted on horses and accompanied by their attendants, dressed in mourning clothes to see Yao. Yao said to them, "I long thought you had all turned to dust. King Shi has shown great mercy in sparing you until now. I killed Shi Ta and gravely broke our covenant. Today's misfortune is only what I deserve." They stayed and feasted for the entire day before leaving.

Le instructed Yao to write to his crown prince Xi, urging him to surrender. However, Yao only commanded Xi: "Work with the ministers to maintain the state, and do not change your resolve because of me." Le read this and was displeased. Later, Yao was killed on Le's orders.

Xi, Liu Yin, Liu Xian and others discussed retreating west to defend Qin Province. The Minister of Documents Hu Xun said, "Although we have lost our ruler, the state remains

intact, and the military's morale is unified with no signs of rebellion. We can join forces to defend strategic positions - it's not too late to escape." Yin disagreed and, angry that Hu Xun was discouraging the troops, executed him. Yin then led the officials to flee to Shanggui. Liu Hou and Liu Ce abandoned their posts to join them. Guanzhong fell into chaos, and Generals Jiang Ying and Xin Shu, commanding several hundred thousand troops, occupied Chang'an and sent envoys to submit to Le. Le dispatched Shi Sheng to lead troops from Luoyang to respond.

Yin and Liu Zun led several tens of thousands of troops from Shanggui to attack Shi Sheng in Chang'an. The Chinese and barbarian populations from various commanderies - Longdong, Wudu, Anding, Xiping, Beidi, Fufeng, and Shiping - all raised armies to support Yin. Yin stationed at Zhongqiao while Shi Sheng firmly defended Chang'an.

Le sent Shi Jilong with 20,000 cavalry to oppose Yin. They fought at Yiqu, where Jilong defeated them, killing over 5,000 men. Yin fled to Shanggui, but Jilong pursued and continued fighting, leaving corpses for a thousand li until Shanggui fell. Jilong captured the false Crown Prince Xi, Prince of Nanyang Liu Yin, various princes, ministers, and over 3,000 officials and nobles, all of whom were executed.

He relocated over 9,000 people to Xiangguo, including civil and military officials, refugees from the east, and prominent families from Qin and Yong. He also executed over 5,000 nobles and people from five commanderies in Luoyang. Yao had reigned for ten years before his defeat.

The dynasty had begun when Yuanhai usurped power in the fourth year of Emperor Huai's Yongjia reign (303). It lasted through three generations over 27 years, until its destruction in the fourth year of Emperor Cheng's Xianhe reign (330).

Comment

The historian notes:

Those barbarians have human faces but bestial hearts. They abandon their lords and kin when they see profit, and forget benevolence and righteousness when faced with wealth. Even when kept at a distance, we fear their invasions; when allowed within our borders, they look for our internal weaknesses. In the past, when King You lost control, barbarian dust darkened the Xi waters; when King Xiang failed in governance, barbarian horses bred in Guan and Luo. In calculating strength and weakness, mastering military strategy, understanding rise and decline, and knowing advantage and disadvantage, their capabilities against our China cannot be underestimated.

Moreover, Yuanhai was an exceptional talent who was destined for greatness; given his extraordinary abilities, he could not remain in a lowly position. Thus, he rode forth with grand ambitions, seized opportunities like a leopard, and with the five tribes cheering, he suddenly rose to power. With imperial relatives harming each other, none could compete with him.

Yi Zhi initiated the strategy of kingship, Gudu discussed the time of establishment, the Chanyus had no thoughts of looking north, and the Xianyun performed sacrifices in the southern suburbs - how vast are Heaven and Earth, yet how lacking in benevolence this was!

Although they adopted Chinese customs and learned refined manners, when combined

with their old traditions, they rarely achieved proper form. Even though Shi Le claimed vassalage and Wang Mi showed loyalty, they remained barbarian states that did not properly understand the positions of ruler and subject. When they claimed to embrace Confucian ways and maintain uprightness, they were what the ancient worthies called "those who steal benevolence and righteousness while practicing them."

The false ruler perished, and Xuanming usurped the succession. Though he cultivated favor with the military and held total power, with territory stretching across the Yellow River region and forces surpassing his predecessors, his loyalty did not come from within. Diverging from grand aspirations, his superficial beauty made it difficult to complete endeavors.

He exhausted military force, destroyed the loyal and upright, while sycophants drove his chariots alongside. Eunuchs wielded power like they could turn the heavens, and harsh laws exceeded the severity of burning punishments. He sent wolf-like generals and hawk-dog armies, their banners hanging over the Wei River and dividing at Luoyang. Iron horses crossed mountains, and barbarian flutes played along riverbanks. The loyal were destroyed by barbarian hands, and officials' heads were displayed at the corpse mounds. The ancient kings' well-field system became merely mulberry fields, and the old palace halls turned to overgrown grass. Travelers shed tears as dew dampened their clothes.

In ancient times, leaders were honest and did not favor their own sons, achieving merit then yielding to the virtuous. Only after three campaigns did they resort to weapons, to save those in chaos and respectfully receive Heaven's Mandate. How noble was King Wu of Zhou - when the Yin ruler fell, there was nothing more to be said. Yet this light military action and three shots from the red bow - how could it compare to the imperial procession through proper gates, or golden chariots at Shanyang Lodge!

Thus we know the common people yearn for the past while living in the present; the white banners displayed in markets show the present cannot match the past. The barbaric invaders were inhuman, like wolves and boars, making the Son of Heaven serve wine and hold parasols. Yu Shi's tears were exhausted, and Xin Bin added blood to them.

While life is precious and death is difficult, they expanded the meaning of the Three Bonds but forgot the importance of human dignity. The grief of serving a ruler led to sharing the same fate. Of all usurpations throughout history, this was the most severe. Thus disaster signs appeared, treacherous ministers caused chaos, government declined and people scattered - leading to inevitable downfall. That Liu Cong died naturally was not fortunate.

Yao possessed a naturally fierce and brave disposition, but encountered difficult times. In military affairs, he was comparable to Wang Jian, and in his penchant for killing, he was second only to Duke Dong. Though he inherited a base from an unsavory lineage, there were some praiseworthy aspects. When Ziyuan offered loyal advice, his banner was temporarily lowered; when He Bao spoke frankly, the Fengming Observatory was closed.

However, wherever his armies went, thorns and thistles grew. He cut off powerful allies, creating formidable enemies for himself. What Heaven detests, human affairs reflect. He frightened his soldiers into fleeing at night and drank from barbarian cups without sobering up. It was as if he handed over his power, making it as easy as picking up a mustard seed. How could the Shi clan rise in such circumstances? How could he be so unsupported!

Eulogy

When the Emperor failed to set standards,
Nearby lands became the center of power.

Like Danzhu who rarely succeeded,
And Modu who competed for supremacy.
Barbarian banners raised against the moon,
Northern horses galloped with the wind.

Dust covered the Huai River banks,
Fierce cries filled the River Palace.

Weiyang Palace fell silent at court,
The palace gates emptied by dawn.

Guo Qin's worries proved true,
Xin You understood the barbarians well.

104. Chapter 4 Shi Le Part One



Shi Le, courtesy name Shilong, originally named Bei, was a Jie from Wuxiang in Shangdang. His lineage traced back to the Qiangqu branch of the Xiongnu. His grandfather, Yeyiyu, and his father, Zhouhezhu, also known as Qijijia, were both minor chieftains within their tribe. Upon Le's birth, the room was bathed in red light. A white mist descended from the sky into the courtyard. It was a marvel to all witnesses. By fourteen, he ventured to Luoyang with townsfolk for trade. There, he stood leaning and whistling at the Upper East Gate. Wang Yan [JS43] saw something remarkable in him. He told his companions, "The barbarian whelp we but now beheld, through his voice and mien, reveals a zeal most uncommon. I fear he might become a scourge upon all under Heaven." He sent his men to seize Le with haste, but he had already left.

As he grew, Le became strong, courageous, and excelled in riding and archery. Hezhu, known for his fierce and uncouth demeanor, found little favor among the Hu (barbarians). Yet, when he delegated oversight and management to Le, the Hu under his command held Le in high regard, bestowing upon him their love and trust.

Near their abode in Wuxiang, beneath the Beiyuan mountains, all vegetation bore the semblance of iron cavalry. In their garden, ginseng flourished, its leaves and flowers remarkably assuming the form of humans. Elders and seers alike proclaimed, "This barbarian's aspect is singular, his spirit and ambition extraordinary. His ultimate fate lies beyond measure." They exhorted the townsfolk to heed him well. While many dismissed this, only Guo Jing of Wu and Ning Qu of Yangqu showed faith and bestowed upon him their generous patronage. Moved by their kindness, Le diligently toiled in their fields. Whenever he perceived the sounds of bells and drums, he would mention it to his mother, who reassured him, "It's merely the echo of your hard labor, nothing ominous."

During the Taian era (302-303), Bingzhou was plagued by famine and chaos. Le and other young barbarians scattered. Upon his return from Yanmen, he sought refuge with Ning

Qu. The Commandant of Beize,ⁱ Liu Jian, aimed to capture and sell him into slavery, but Qu concealed him, thwarting his capture. Le then covertly approached Li Chuan, the Commandant Who Accepts Surrenders. On the way, he encountered Guo Jing, tearfully lamenting his hunger and cold. Jing, in tears, sold his belt to procure food for Le and clothed him.

"The famine is harsh. We cannot abide in destitution," Le proposed. "The barbarians are starving. It would be wise to lure them to Jizhou with the promise of grain, and upon their arrival, capture and sell them, thus alleviating our plight." Jing concurred deeply.

Meanwhile, General who Establishes Might, Yan Cui, advised the Inspector of Bingzhou and Duke of Dongying, Teng, to apprehend the barbarians and trade them in Shandong for military provisions. Teng sent Generals Guo Yang and Zhang Long to capture a band of barbarians for transport to Jizhou, each barbarian shackled in pairs.

Le, then in his twenties, was among them. He was frequently subjected to Long's humiliations. Jing had entrusted Le to his cousin Guo Yang and Yang's nephew Shi. Yang and Shi often interceded on his behalf. On the way, Le was plagued by hunger and illness. His survival was owed to Yang and Shi.

Eventually, Le was sold to Shi Huan of Chiping as a slave.

"Upon your brow, the marks of fish and dragon cross fourfold," said an elder. "They signify you are destined for sovereign rule. In the year of *Jiaxu* (314), you should aspire to the eminence of Wang Pengzu."

"Should your words manifest," replied Le. "Your benevolence shall not be forgotten."

With that, the elder vanished.

While toiling in the fields, Le often perceived the sounds of drums and horns. He recounted this to his fellow bondsmen, who also heard them. "Such sounds have been familiar to me since my youth." Le said. When the slaves relayed this to Huan, who, noting Le's extraordinary demeanor, emancipated him.

Huan's residence was near a horse ranch, where he frequently interacted with the horse manager, Ji Sang of Weijun. Le showcased his talent in horse appraisal to Sang. Once, while working in Linshui of Wu'an, he was captured by a roaming army. A herd of deer distracted the soldiers, enabling Le's escape. Soon after, an elder approached Le.

"It was I who led yonder herd of deer," said the elder. "You are destined to rule the Central Provinces, so I came to your aid."

Le bowed and accepted his fate.

He rallied Wang Yang, Kui An, Zhi Xiong,ⁱⁱ Ji Bao, Wu Yu, Liu Ying, Tao Bao,ⁱⁱⁱ and Lu Ming, forming an eight-rider bandit group. Subsequently, Guo Ao, Liu Zheng, Liu Bao, Zhang Yepu, Huan Mo, Guo Heilüe, Zhang Yue, Kong Tun, Zhao Lu, and Zhi Quliu joined, becoming the Eighteen Riders. They ventured east to Chilong and Ji's hunting grounds, commandeering the hunting horses for widespread raids, using the spoils to bribe Ji Sang.

When Prince Ying of Chengdu defeated the Carriage (imperial army) at Dangyin and forced the Emperor to the Ye Palace, Wang Jun condemned Ying for humiliating the Emperor and sent the Xianbei against him. Ying, fearing for his life, escaped south to Luoyang with Emperor Hui. Subsequently, Zhang Fang coerced the Emperor into relocating to Chang'an. Uprisings emerged east of the Pass, under the guise of punishing Ying. Prince Yong of Hejian, apprehensive of the eastern rebels' might, suggested ousting Ying to

appease the east.

That year (304), Liu Yuanhai declared himself King of Han at Liting. Gongshi Fan of Yangping, a former general under Ying, amassed forces in Zhao and Wei, rallying tens of thousands. Le and Ji Sang led hundreds of horsemen from the pasture to join Fan. Sang bestowed upon Le the surname Shi and the name Le. Appointed as vanguard commander by Fan, Le attacked Duke Mo of Pingchang at Ye, where Mo's general, Feng Song, died in battle. Fan, crossing the river south from Baima, was pursued and slain by Administrator of Puyang, Gou Xi. [JS61]^{iv}

Le and Sang took refuge in the hunting grounds. Sang named Le night raid commander, orchestrating county raids and capturing numerous prisoners. They recruited outlaws, drawing many to their cause. Sang proclaimed himself Grand General, avowing vengeance for Prince Ying of Chengdu against Prince Yue of Donghai and Duke Teng of Dongying. Le, as vanguard, secured multiple victories, earning him the titles of General Who Sweeps Away Bandits and Marquis of Zhongming.

Sang's forces assaulted Ye, with Le leading the charge. They routed Teng's general Feng Song, marched into Ye, slew Teng, massacred over 10,000 people, and seized women and treasures before withdrawal. They crossed at Yan Ford, striking south into Yanzhou, instilling dread in Yue, who sent Gou Xi and Wang Zan to confront them.

Sang and Le launched an assault on the Inspector of Youzhou, Shi Xian, at Leling, who died in battle. Tian Yin of the Qihuo (Begging-for-Live) marshaled an host of 50,000 to Xian's aid, yet Le counterattacked and routed Yin. Subsequently, Le engaged Xi in a standoff, spanning months between Pingyuan and Yangping. Over thirty skirmishes ensued, each with varied outcomes. Yue, in fear, marshaled his forces at Guandu to bolster Xi. Ultimately, Sang and Le faced defeat at Xi's hands, sustaining over 10,000 casualties. They regrouped and aimed to submit to Liu Yuanhai. But the Inspector of Jizhou, Ding Shao, routed them at Chiqiao. Sang escaped to the horse pasture, while Le fled to Leping. The royal forces later executed Sang in Pingyuan.

During this period, barbarian chieftains Dazhang Beidu, Feng Motu, among others, commanding thousands, were entrenched in Shangdang. Le joined them and quickly gained their favor. He urged Beidu, saying, "Liu Chanyu has raised his armies to punish Jin. Should our tribe stand aloof and not join, can we truly stand alone?"

"We cannot," Beidu admitted.

"If standing alone proves untenable," Le elaborated, "then our loyalty must be pledged elsewhere. Our tribe, lured by the Chanyu's promises of reward, wavers on the brink of defection. We must devise a plan without delay."

Beidu, devoid of tactical acumen and apprehensive of dwindling loyalty, clandestinely followed Le to align with Yuanhai. Yuanhai honored Beidu as Prince who Favors the Han, and Motu as a commanding officer. Le was named General who Assists the Han and Prince who Pacifies the Jin, leading their forces. Le acknowledged Beidu as his brother, bestowing upon him the Shi surname and the name Hui, marking their meetings.

Zhang Fulidu, a Wuhuan leader with 2,000 followers fortified in Leping, had eluded Yuanhai's recruitment efforts. Le feigned a fallout with Yuanhai and sought refuge with Fulidu. Overjoyed, Fulidu embraced Le as a brother, entrusting him with raid leadership. They proved unbeatable, instilling fear and respect among other tribes. Aware of the people's

growing favor towards him, Le detained Fulidu during a gathering. He posed to the tribes, "In the undertaking of our great cause, who is more fit to lead, I or Fulidu?" The tribes, without dissent, chose Le. Le freed Fulidu, returning with his followers to Yuanhai. Yuanhai tasked Le with military oversight in Shandong, assimilating Fulidu's followers into his ranks.

Yuanhai sent Liu Cong to attack Hu Pass, with Le helming 7,000 troops as the vanguard. Liu Kun [JS62] deployed the Protector of the Army, Huang Xiu, to fortify Hu Pass, yet Le triumphed over Xiu at Baitian, where Xiu perished. Le captured Hu Pass. Yuanhai then commanded Le, alongside Liu Ling, Yan Pi, and five other generals, to lead 30,000 troops in raiding Weijun and Dunqiu's defenses, capturing many. Le enlisted their generals and commanders, selecting 50,000 strong men as soldiers, sparing the elderly and frail. His forces abstained from private plunder, garnering the populace's appreciation.

When Yuanhai usurped the Title, he sent envoys to bestow upon Le the imperial insignia, elevating him to the Grand General of Eastern Pacification, while retaining his previous titles of Colonel, Commander, and Prince. Le marshaled his forces against Ye, precipitating its fall, and He Yu sought refuge in Weiguó. He apprehended the Administrator of Weijun, Wang Cui, at Santai. Pressing onwards, he assaulted Zhaojun, where he eliminated the Western Commandant of Jizhou, Feng Chong. His campaign against Qihuo's She Ting and Tian Yin at Zhongqiu was lethal, leading to their demise. Yuanhai formally recognized Le as the Grand General of Eastern Pacification, sanctioning the establishment of his office and instituting roles such as Chief Secretaries, Marshals, and Attendants.

Le's forces proceeded to conquer Julu and Changshan, killing both regions' commanders. He secured over a hundred strongholds in Jizhou, amassing a host exceeding 100,000, with the gentry establishing the Gentlemen's Camp among his ranks. Le integrated Zhang Bin as his chief strategist, designating him as the Military Merit Registrar. He named Diao Ying and Zhang Jing as Arms and Legs, Kui An and Kong Chang as Claws and Teeth, and Zhi Xiong, Huyan Mo, Wang Yang, Tao Bao, Lu Ming, Wu Yu, among others, as Generals. He sent General Zhang Si with cavalry to Bingzhou's northern counties to rally the Hu and Jie peoples, highlighting the perils and assurances of safety. Le's formidable reputation spurred many tribes to align with him. Advancing to Changshan, he deployed his generals to besiege Zhongshan, Boling, and Gaoyang counties, culminating in the capitulation of tens of thousands.

Wang Jun sent his general Qi Hong with over 100,000 Xianbei cavalry under Duan Wuchen to confront Le. Le was routed at Mount Feilong, losing over 10,000 men. He withdrew to Liyang, directing his generals to quell any unyielded or rebellious factions, securing over thirty strongholds and installing administrators to stabilize them. Subsequently, Le stormed Xindu and slew the Inspector of Jizhou, Wang Bin. In response, General of Chariots and Cavalry, Wang Kan, and General of the Palace Gentlemen of the North, Pei Xian, mobilized from Luoyang against Le. Le torched his encampments and supplies, retreated, and fortified at Huangniu Fort. The Administrator of Weijun, Liu Ju, pledged loyalty to Le, who then designated him as the left-wing leader of the central army. Upon Le's arrival at Liyang, Pei Xian deserted his troops and fled to Huainan, while Wang Kan withdrew to reinforce Cangyuan.

Yuanhai elevated Le to Grand General of the Eastern Garrison, bestowing upon him the title Duke of Jijun, along with the imperial insignia, military command, and his prior princely

status. Le steadfastly declined the dukedom. Alongside Yan Pi, he overran the defenses of Duquan and Yuanshi, but Pi succumbed to an arrow injury. Le assumed control of Pi's forces, covertly forded the river from Shiqiao, seized Baima, and buried alive over 3,000 men and women. He struck Juan City in the east, where he killed the Inspector of Yanzhou, Yuan Fu. Following this, he captured Cangyuan, eliminating Kan. Le advanced to attack Guangzong, Qinghe, Pingyuan, and Yangping counties, leading to the surrender of over 90,000 individuals to his forces. He then crossed the river southward again, compelling the Administrator of Xingyang, Pei Chun, to escape to Jianye.

During Liu Cong's siege on Henei, Le mobilized his cavalry to support the offensive. He set upon the Champion General Liang Ju at Wude. Emperor Huai sent troops to reinforce him. Le left his generals to secure Wude while he, alongside Wang Sang, engaged Ju at Changling. He declined Ju's request for surrender. Ju attempted escape over the city walls but was captured. Le swiftly returned to Wude, executing over 10,000 surrendered troops, listed Liang Ju's crimes, and executed him as well.^v The royal forces withdrew. The fortifications across Hebei were deeply unsettled, with all seeking to surrender and sending hostages to Le.

After Yuanhai's death, Liu Cong bestowed upon Le the titles of Grand General of Eastern Conquest, Inspector of Bingzhou, Duke of Jijun, along with the imperial insignia, military command, Colonel, and his previous princely status. Le steadfastly declined the generalship.

Liu Can led 40,000 men to raid Luoyang. Le, leaving his baggage at Zhongmen, led 20,000 cavalry to join Can at Dayang, where they routed the royal forces at Mianchi, then marched to Luochuan. Can and Le penetrated Huanyuan and Chenggao Passes, respectively, besieging the Administrator of Chenliu, Wang Zan, at Cangyuan. Zan repelled them, forcing a retreat to Wenshi Ford. Planning a northern assault on Wang Jun, Le learned of Jun's general, Wang Jiashi, who defeated Zhao Gu with over 10,000 Liaozi Xianbei cavalry at a northern river ford. Le torched his vessels, abandoned his camp, and led his forces towards Baimen, retrieving his baggage from Zhongmen. They reached Shimen, forded the river, and set at the Administrator of Xiangcheng, Cui Kuang, at Fanchang, ultimately killing him.

Refugees from Yongzhou, including Wang Ru, Hou Tuo, and Yan Yi, raised forces between the Yangtze and Huai rivers. Anticipating Le's approach, they sent 10,000 troops to Xiangcheng for defense. Le defeated them, captured their forces, then encamped in the mountains north of Wan. Ru, anticipating an attack on Xiang, sent treasures, horses, and provisions to Le, forming a brotherhood. Le agreed.

Amidst a conflict with Hou Tuo, Ru convinced Le to attack Tuo. Le's forces besieged Wan at dawn, capturing it after 12 days. Yan Yi's attempt to aid Tuo was futile, leading to his surrender to Le. Le executed Tuo, detained Yi, sending him to Pingyang, and absorbed their forces, significantly bolstering his military strength.

Le raided Xiangyang in the south, seizing over thirty strongholds in Jiangxi. Leaving Diao Ying to guard Xiangyang, he personally led 30,000 elite cavalry against Wang Ru. Anticipating Ru's formidable defense, Le advanced towards Xiangcheng. Ru sent his brother Li with 25,000 cavalry under the guise of appeasement, planning an ambush. Le counterattacked, decimating them, and encamped in Jiangxi, evidently aiming to control the Yangtze and Han rivers. Zhang Bin counseled against this, recommending a return north, but Le did not listen. He named Bin military advisor and chief secretary, ranking next to the

Marshal, overseeing all affairs.

Emperor Yuan, alarmed by Le's southern raid, sent Wang Dao to confront him. Le's forces, plagued by supply shortages and an epidemic, lost over half their numbers. Heeding Zhang Bin's advice, Le torched his baggage, secured supplies and armor, forded the Mian River, and raided Jiangxia, prompting Administrator Yang Ju to flee. Le raided Xincai in the north and slew Prince Que of Xincai at Nandun. Prominent figures like Duke He Xi of Langling, Duke Chen Zhen of Guangling, Administrator Yang Zong of Shangdang, and Administrator Shao Zhao of Guangping surrendered to Le. Advancing, Le captured Xuchang and slew the General of Eastern Pacification, Wang Kang.

Earlier, Prince Yue of Donghai rallied an army of over 200,000 from Luoyang to challenge Le but met his end during the campaign. The forces chose Grand Commandant Wang Yan as their leader, who directed them eastward. Le, wielding his light cavalry, pursued and engaged them. Yan sent General Qian Duan to counter Le, but Duan was defeated and killed. Yan's army was utterly routed. Le divided his cavalry to encircle and shoot at them. They piled up like a mountain, with not a single survivor.

In this victory, Le captured numerous high-ranking officials, including Yan, Prince Fan of Xiangyang, Prince Ji of Rencheng, Prince Xi of Xihe, Prince Xi of Liang, Prince Chao of Qi, the Minister of Personnel Liu Wang, the Inspector of Yuzhou Liu Qiao, and the Chief Secretary of the Grand Tutor Yu Yi. Seated beneath the tent, they were questioned concerning the affairs of Jin. Yan, Ji, and their companions, fearing the specter of death, proffered much in their own defense. Yet it was Fan alone who remained steadfast, his demeanor grave and his spirit undisturbed. "What purpose do these quarrels serve at this juncture!" He chided them.

Le admired Fan's integrity and composure. He then ordered the captured nobles and officials executed. Many died. Le admired Yan for his eloquence and Fan for his integrity, so he chose not to kill them by the sword. Instead, he had a wall collapsed on them at night.

After Yue fell, He Lun of the Left Guard and Li Sun of the Right Guard evacuated Yue's consort, Lady Pei, and Yue's heir, Pi, from Luoyang. Le intercepted Pi at Weicang, inflicting a devastating defeat. Pi, along with numerous nobles and officials, was captured and executed. The toll was heavy. With 30,000 elite cavalry, Le advanced through Chenggao Pass. When Liu Yao and Wang Mi successfully raided Luoyang, Le attributed the victory to them, then withdrew through Huanyuan Pass to set camp at Xuchang. Liu Cong offered Le the title of Grand General of Eastern Conquest, but Le steadfastly refused the honor.

Earlier, Li Hong of Pingyang had amassed thousands of followers and fortified himself in Wuyang. Gou Xi named Hong Inspector of Yongzhou. Le raided Guyang, where he eliminated the Champion General Wang Zi. He then overcame Wang Zan in Yangxia, captured him, and named him an Attendant Gentleman. Le defeated the Grand General Gou Xi at Mengcheng, took him prisoner and made him Left Marshal. Liu Cong offered Le the title of Grand General of Eastern Conquest and Shepherd of Youzhou. Le steadfastly refused the generalship.

Wang Mi, heeding Liu Tun's counsel, decided to strike at Le before setting his sights on Qingzhou. He sent Tun to summon his general Cao Ni from Qi. Le's cavalry intercepted Tun, seizing the letter from Mi to Ni and executing Tun, all the while plotting against Mi in silence. Concurrently, Xu Miao defected from Mi with his forces, gradually eroding Mi's power.

When Le captured Gou Xi, Mi, masking his discontent with feigned humility, suggested,

"Your decision to capture and pardon Gou Xi is truly divine! With Xi to your left and myself to your right, the world would be ours for the taking."

Le, after discussing with Zhang Bin, noted, "Wang Mi, despite his status, speaks humbly. I fear he harbors ambitions akin to those of the 'preceding dog'."

"Considering Lord Wang's deep connection to Qingzhou, his homeland, it's natural for one to yearn for their roots," Bin replied. "Do you not cherish Bingzhou similarly, my lord? Lord Wang's delay in departure stems from fear of being pursued by you. He plots against you while awaiting his opportunity. Should we delay, Cao Ni might join him, leading to our later regret. With Xu Miao's defection weakening his forces, now presents an opportune moment to ensnare and vanquish him." Le concurred.

While Le was laying siege to Chen Wu at Peng Pass, Mi found himself in a standoff with Liu Rui. Mi turned to Le, who hesitated. "My lord, you've longed for an opportunity against Lord Wang," Zhang Bin counselled. "Now, fate offers us this moment. Chen Wu is but a minor figure; what threat could he pose? Wang Mi, a paragon among men, is the true danger." Heeding this, Le shifted his focus from Wu to Rui, swiftly eliminating him. Mi, elated, saw this as a sign of Le's loyalty. His doubts were eased.

Le marched against Chen Wu at Feize again. Wu's strategist, Li Tou of Shangdang, appealed to Le, "By your innate martial brilliance, you are destined to pacify the realm. The people across the lands look up to you for salvation. Should contenders for supremacy arise, it would be prudent to strategize pre-emptively rather than to turn your might against us, the displaced. We, your kin, will ultimately stand by you. Why rush into battle?" Convinced, Le withdrew his forces the next day.

Le deceitfully invited Wang Mi to a feast at Yiwu. Zhang Song, Mi's Chief Secretary, warned him of possible deceit, citing Zhuan Zhu and Sun Jun's fates. But Mi ignored the caution. At the feast, amidst the revelry, Le slew Mi and absorbed his forces. He framed Mi's actions as rebellion to Liu Cong, who appointed Le as the Grand General of the Eastern Garrison. This position gave Le military command over Bing and You provinces and made him Inspector of Bingzhou, along with the imperial insignia, Commander of Conquest, Colonel, establishing his office, Shepherd of Youzhou, and reaffirmed his dukedom.

Gou Xi and Wang Zan plotted a rebellion against Le, who executed them. Le designated General Zuo Fusui as the vanguard commander, who raided multiple Yuzhou counties, advanced to the Yangtze, then retreated and camped at Gebei. He subdued various Yi and Chu tribes, installed generals and 2,000-*shi* officials, and imposed a grain tax to provision the army.

Shi Le, once sold in Pingyuan, was torn from his mother, Wang. Liu Kun sent Zhang Ru to reunite them with a letter:

"General,

Your rise in Heshuo, your forces sweeping Yan and Yu, your steeds drinking from Jiang and Huai, and your advances through Han and Mian, eclipse famed generals of yore. Yet, capturing cities without winning hearts, and conquering lands without loyalty, breeds but fleeting alliances. Do you grasp this, General? Survival or ruin, success or failure, teeter on the fulcrum of leadership chosen. Those who join the righteous cause become righteous soldiers; those with rebels, bandits. Righteous soldiers, though they may suffer initial setbacks, are bound for victory; whereas bandits, even in victory, doom to destruction. In the

past, the Red Eyebrows and the Yellow Turbans, in their defiance against the cosmic order, plummeted swiftly to their demise. It was precisely their lack of a just cause, rallying merely to sow discord, that sealed their fate.

General, graced with virtues celestial and a might that sends tremors throughout the realm, should you esteem and elevate those of virtue, you will become a beacon for many, drawing them to your side. Your virtues and righteousness shall shine resplendently clear, garnering you honor both enduring and broad. To abandon Cong is to dispel misfortune; to align with our sovereign is to beckon fortune. Heed the lessons of the past, radically change your strategy, and the world shall know peace, with no foe too minor to be swept away.

You now hold the distinguished titles of Palace Attendant, Bearer of the Imperial Insignia, General of Chariots and Cavalry, acting Protector-General of the Xiongnu, Marquis of Xiangcheng County—honors demonstrating your unparalleled martial prowess. Embrace these honors and live up to the expectations of those both near and far. Verily, since ancient times, never has a barbarian risen to the throne of emperor; yet, there have been eminent ministers who wrought great deeds. The present musings, given the widespread chaos under the heavens, dictate the need for a hero of unparalleled valor.

From afar, General's fame in sieges and battles precedes you, in harmony with the celestial stratagems. Though your eyes have not perused the books of war, in spirit, you commune with Sun Wu. Indeed, it is said that those graced with innate knowledge stand supreme, whilst those who acquire wisdom through study are next in esteem. Commanding but five thousand elite horsemen, what fray could possibly defy your conquest? Zhang Ru conveys my profound respect and sincerity."

Le replied:

"Our paths to glory diverge, beyond the ken of a decayed scholar. You're to shine your honor in your court. I, being of barbarian stock, find such paths hard to tread."

He gifted Kun fine horses and treasures, treated his envoys well, and with gratitude, concluded their interactions.

Le mended structures, tilled soil, and crafted vessels at Gebei, eyeing Jianye. Heavy rains lasted for three months. Emperor Yuan rallied generals south of the Yangtze, amassing forces at Shouchun. Hunger and disease halved Le's ranks. With imperial commands urgent, Le convened his generals to discuss their strategy.

Diao Ying, the Chief Clerk of the Right, proposed a petition to the Emperor to pacify Heshuo, and to reconsider their plans after withdrawal. Le sighed and howled in frustration.

Kui An, the Backbone, advised higher ground against floods. "Cowardice, General!" Le scorned.

Kong Chang, Zhi Xiong, and over thirty other generals offered, "Ere the Wu host has assembled, Chang and his fellows beseech to lead each 300 foot soldiers, commandeering 30 boats and more, to scale the city walls under the veil of night. Therein to slay the Wu generals, to seize their stronghold, and to feast upon their granary. This year, verily, we shall shatter Danyang, establish dominion over Jiangnan, and bind all progeny of the Sima lineage alive."

"Such is the stratagem of valiant commanders," Le laughed, rewarding each of them a set of armor and a steed.

"What is your counsel?" He consulted Zhang Bin.

Bin answered, "General, you have laid siege to the imperial capital, captured the Son of Heaven, slain the princes, and taken their consorts. Your crimes are manifold, beyond the count of hairs upon your head. How then can you deign to serve as a subject again! After Wang Mi's execution last year, it was ill-advised to establish camp here. The heavens have poured forth rains over hundreds of *li*, a sign for you to depart. Ye, with its three terraces (Santai)^{vi} and proximity to Pingyang in the west, surrounded by mountains and rivers, possesses the strategic advantage of a chokepoint. Move north, occupy it. In suppressing the insurrection and stabilizing Heshuo, none shall stand to your right. Jin's defense of Shouchun is fear-driven. Hearing of your withdrawal, they will surely rejoice, lacking the leisure to mount a surprise attack. Let the supply train proceed by the northern route, and the main force towards Shouchun. Once the supplies have passed, the main army can leisurely return. What fear then of having no quarter for advance or retreat!"

"Bin's plan prevails!" proclaimed Le, as he rolled up his sleeves and stroked his beard.

"Together we strive for greatness," He chastised Ying. "How can you counsel surrender! Such advice merits death. Yet, considering your timid nature, I shall spare you." Le demoted Ying to general, while elevating Bin to Chief Clerk. He named him General of the Central Rampart and "Marquis of the Right."

Le left Gebei and sent Shi Jilong with 2,000 cavalry towards Shouchun. By chance, ships from south of the Yangtze arrived, laden with rice and cloth. Jilong's men, unguarded, scrambled for the supplies. Jin forces struck unexpectedly at Juling Mouth, routing Jilong. Over 500 drowned, the rest fell back a hundred *li* to Le.

Fear of Jin's advance threw the army into disarray. Le formed battle lines in preparation. Jin, fearing an ambush, pulled back to Shouchun. Le's passage saw fortified defenses, cleared fields, nothing to plunder. Hunger drove his men to cannibalism.

At Dongyan, they learned Jijun's Xiang Bing, with thousands, was entrenched at Fangtou. Le aimed to cross north at Ji Ford, wary of Bing's interception. He convened his generals to discuss their strategy.

"Should it be that Bing's vessels lie entirely within the canal, not yet having ascended to Fangtou, let us select a thousand of the stout-hearted and valiant," Zhang Bin suggested. "By subterfuge, let them stealthily cross, and thence seize his ships to aid in the crossing of our great host. Once our forces have made the passage, the ensnaring of Bing shall be assured."

Le consented. He sent Zhi Xiong, Kong Chang, and others to stealthily cross at Wenshi Ford with rafts, while he advanced towards Ji Ford from Suanzao. Learning of Le's move, Bing marched to secure his ships. Xiong and company had already crossed, commandeered over thirty ships for the crossing. They sent Registrar Xianyu Feng to provoke Bing, setting up three ambushes in preparation. Enraged, Bing engaged, but the ambushes struck as one and overwhelmed him. They seized his supplies, bolstered their forces, and advanced on Ye, besieging Liu Yan at Santai. Yan's officers, Lin Shen, Mou Mu, and others, with tens of thousands, surrendered to Le.

Amidst deliberations on whether to assault and secure Santai, Zhang Bin stepped forward. "Liu Yan's forces yet number in the thousands, and Santai, with its natural fortifications, presents a challenge neither easily assaulted nor defended. To forsake it is to witness its self-destruction. Wang Pengzu and Liu Yueshi pose significant threats. Opportune

is the moment to strike, ere they are fortified; to covertly advance upon Hancheng, to accumulate stores of grain, to extend our reach to Pingyang, and to unify Bing and Ji. In doing so, the undertakings of Huan and Wen may be realized. The empire is a cauldron of chaos, with conflicts just beginning. Nomads and sojourners find no peace, rendering complete safety and dominion elusive. Success is found in the acquisition of land, failure in its loss. Handan and Xiangguo, Zhao's ancient seats, offer strategic advantage with their mountainous and defensible positions. Choose one of these cities for our capital, then dispatch our generals, imparting them with cunning strategies. By undermining the weak and surprising the oblivious, we may eradicate malefactors and envisage a sovereign realm."

"The counsel of the Marquis of Right is sound." Le affirmed. Thus, they set their sights on Xiangguo and took it.

"Now that we have established our capital here, Yueshi and Pengzu deeply dread us," Bin elaborated. "They fear that before our walls are fortified and our stores amply supplied, they might be led to their demise. It is heard that the autumn crops in the counties of Guangping have yielded plentifully. We could dispatch our generals to requisition this bounty. Let envoys be sent to Pingyang, to convey the imperative of securing this stronghold." Le agreed. He petitioned Liu Cong, delegating generals to assail the strongholds of Jizhou's counties and fortresses, which led to numerous surrenders and the transport of grain to Le. In response, Liu Cong named Le Bearer of the Imperial Insignia, Cavalier In Regular Attendance, Commander of the military affairs of various barbarians across Ji, You, and Bing, and Shepherd of Jizhou, ennobling him as Duke of Shangdang Commandery with a fief of 50,000 households, while retaining his titles as Shepherd of Youzhou and Colonel of the Eastern Yi.

In Guangping, under Wang Jun's command, You Lun and Zhang Chai led tens of thousands, holding Yuanxiang. Le sent Kui An, Zhi Xiong, and five other generals against them, breaking through their outer defenses. In turn, Wang Jun sent over 50,000 troops, under Protector Wang Chang and the Xianbei Duan Jiuliujian, Mobei, and Pidi, to face Le. With Xiangguo's defenses thin, a secondary wall and heavy palisades were hastily erected. Jiuliujian made camp at Zhuyang, and Le dispatched his generals in successive challenges, only to be bested by Jiuliujian. Furthermore, Le learned of the enemy's extensive preparations for assault.

"The foe is pressing ever closer," he turned to his commanders. "We are outnumbered. I fear that should the siege persist without prospect of relief or sustenance, we would falter, even were Sun Wu himself to rise again in our defense. I propose to select our warriors and draw up a grand line in the field to determine the outcome. What say you?"

"It is better to hold our ground, to wear down the foe." The commanders responded. "As their strength wanes and they begin their retreat, we shall pursue and strike them down, leaving none undefeated."

"And what are your opinions on this matter?" Le inquired Zhang Bin and Kong Chang.

"It is rumored that Jiuliujian intends by the early days of the next month to deliver to us death at the northern city." Bin and Chang jointly counseled. "Their host, having journeyed from afar and engaged in continuous battle, deems our forces too meager and frail to dare an engagement, and thus, their vigilance shall wane. Among the Duan clan's warriors, those led by Mobei stand paramount in valor. It is not necessary to sally forth again but rather to

exhibit our vulnerability. Let us swiftly excavate more than twenty sally ports through the northern rampart. Awaiting the moment their defenses are yet unsteady, we shall emerge unanticipated, charging directly into Mobei's encampment. The foe, taken aback, shall be thrown into disarray, their plans unformed, akin to the thunderclap that leaves no time for ears to be covered. With Mobei's forces scattered, the remainder shall crumble of their own accord. Upon capturing Mobei, Pengzu's fate shall be easily sealed." Amused and convinced, Le appointed Chang to lead the assault and build the sally ports.

The Xianbei camped at the northern ramparts. Le, seeing their formation unsettled, made noise atop the city walls with his soldiers. Kong Chang commanded the hidden troops to strike, capturing Mobei alive and scattering Jiuliujuan's forces. Chang pursued, leaving a trail of bodies for over thirty *li*, and captured 5,000 sets of armor and horses. Jiuliujuan gathered the remnants of his forces and camped at Zhuyang. He sent envoys seeking peace, offering armor, horses, gold, silver, and Mobei's third brother for Mobei's return.

The generals collectively exhorted Le to dispatch Mobei as a means to demoralize the enemy. "The Liaoxi Xianbei are a formidable nation, with whom we share no prior enmity," Le proclaimed. "They are only drawn into this by Wang Jun's command. To slay one man and engender the ire of an entire nation is folly. To release him will surely win their favor. They shall not be wielded by Wang Jun henceforth." He accepted their hostages and sent Shi Jilong to forge a pact with Jiuliujuan at Zhuyang, binding them as brethren. Jiuliujuan and his host withdrew.

Le sent Yan Zong to announce the victory to Liu Cong. You Lun and Zhang Chai surrendered, becoming vassals. Planning to attack Youzhou and needing to restore his soldiers, Le provisionally agreed and made them generals. He then raided Xindu and slew the Inspector of Jizhou, Wang Xiang. Wang Jun appointed Shao Ju as the acting Inspector of Jizhou, who held Xindu.

In the 1st year of Jianxing (313), Shi Jilong attacked the three terraces of Ye. Ye collapsed. Liu Yan fled to Bingqiu, while generals Xie Xu, Tian Qing, Lang Mu, and others, leading the refugees from the three terraces, surrendered to Le. Le made Tao Bao Administrator of Wei Commandery to calm the unrest. He acknowledged Duan Mobei as his son, bestowing upon him the titles of Envoy with the Inspector's Seal, General Who Maintains Peace in the North, and Duke of Beiping, and sent him back to Liaoxi. Moved by Le's profound kindness, Mobei faced south and bowed three times daily on his way home. From that moment, the Duan clan's loyalty was unwavering, and Wang Jun's influence waned.

Le invaded Yuanxiang, seized You Lun and made him his registrar.

In the aftermath of his engagement at Shangbai, where Li Yun of the Qihuo (Begging-for-Life) met his end beneath Le's sword, Le contemplated the execution of the surrendered troops. At this moment, he caught sight of Guo Jing.

"Are you Guo Jizi?" He queried.

"Indeed, I am." Jing affirmed, bowing deeply.

"Is our meeting this day not the work of the Heaven?" Le dismounted, took Jing by the hand, and, with tears, exclaimed.

He then bestowed upon Jing attire, a chariot, and steeds, appointed him as a senior general, and pardoned all the prisoners, assigning them to Jing's command.

Le's general Kong Chang attacked Dingling, killing the Inspector of Yanzhou, Tian

Zheng. The Wuhuan chieftain Bo Sheng, who had captured the Governor of Bohai, Liu Ji, surrendered to Le with 5,000 households. Liu Cong bestowed upon Le the titles of Palace Attendant, Grand General Who Conquers the East, leaving his previous titles unchanged. He elevated Le's mother, Lady Wang, as the Dowager of the State of Shangdang, and his wife, Lady Liu, as the Lady of the State of Shangdang, granting them queenly attire, sashes, and ornaments.^{vii}

Duan Mobei's brother ran to Liaoxi. Le was enraged and killed every commandery official he met on the way.

The Wuhuan chieftains, Shen Guang, Jian Shang, and Hao Xi, turned their backs on Wang Jun and quietly reached out to Le, surrendering. Le welcomed them, providing generously.

As Si and Ji found peace, taxes and tribute flowed again. Le set up an imperial academy, picking officials who were clear-minded and well-read as literary scholars, and selected 300 sons of military officers for education there.

Le's mother, Lady Wang, passed. She was buried in secret, in an unmarked grave among mountains and valleys, its location a mystery. Later, Le held a funeral for her with the honors of the ninth rank and a symbolic burial south of Xiangguo city.

"Ye, the ancient capital of Wei, I intend to rebuild," Le told Zhang Bin. "Given the diversity of its customs, it requires a person of virtue and renown to soothe it. Whom do you deem suitable for such a task?"

"Zhao Peng of Nanyang, erstwhile Administrator of Donglai under Jin, " replied Bin. "He is loyal, bright, diligent, and wise, possessing the capability to assist in these times. Should the General entrust him, he would surely fulfil the divine vision." Le summoned Peng and appointed him as Administrator of Wei Commandery.

Upon his arrival, Peng declined with tears. "In the past, I pledged my service to the Jin dynasty and partook of its bounty," he said. "Like a loyal hound or steed to its master, I dare not forget. Although I am aware that the temples of Jin are now overgrown with weeds, and its glory has ebbed away like a river flowing eastward, never to return, your lordship is akin to seizing the mandate under auspicious signs, a meeting with a dragon. Yet, to accept honor from another and serve two houses is not in my nature, and I fear it is also beyond what your lordship would permit. Should your lordship grant me my remaining years, fulfilling this humble wish of mine, it would be a grace most profound." Le remained silent.

To this Zhang Bin said, "Wherever the General's divine banners have traveled, scholars have invariably shifted their allegiance, yet none have chosen their path based on righteousness as he has. To regard such a virtuous man as considering the General as Gaozu and himself as one of the Four Dukes, it is said that a ruler and his minister understanding each other is enough to elevate the General's legacy to unparalleled heights. Why insist on his service?"

"The words of the Marquis of Right have captured my heart." Le was greatly pleased. Thereupon, he gifted Peng a comfortable carriage and fine horses, provided for him with a minister's stipend, and appointed his son Ming as an Attendant Officer.

Le placed Shi Jilong as Administrator of Wei Commandery to garrison Ye's three terraces. Thus were the seeds of Jilong's future usurpation sown.

When Wang Jun established his hundred offices, his extravagance, indulgence, and

cruelty knew no bounds. Le, harboring ambitions of conquest, wished to send envoys for observation first. "It would be most prudent to engage in correspondence, as once did Yang Hu and Lu Kang," the counsellors advised in unison.

Le sought Zhang Bin's counsel, who was ill at the time.

Bin said, "Wang Jun, wielding the power of the three divisions, claims dominion over the south, nominally under Jin but in truth harboring the ambition of usurpation. He will surely seek to ally with heroes and strategize for his cause. General, your military renown resounds throughout the land. Your movements dictate survival or extinction, your presence, the balance of power. Jun's desire for your alliance is akin to Chu's recruitment of Han Xin. You should with guile dispatch your envoys, bearing naught but a visage of sincerity. Should doubts unwittingly burgeon and the omens of conspiracy be laid bare, all cunning plans henceforth, no matter their brilliance, shall be rendered futile. He who aspires to great endeavors must first humble himself. Even if you were to claim vassalage and offer tribute, his trust might still be lacking. The affairs of Yang and Lu, I see no merit in them."

"The Marquis of Right's plan is sound," said Le.

He sent his attendants, Wang Zichun, Dong Zhao, and companions with numerous treasures to present a memorial extolling Jun as the Son of Heaven:

"Le, a mere barbarian from the nomadic tribes, found himself amidst the laxity and chaos of Jin, the land rife with famine and turmoil. Fleeing to Jizhou to preserve our lives, we banded together for survival. Now, as the Jin dynasty declines and its influence wanes, with no ruler for the Central Plains and the people without a shepherd, it falls upon Your Excellency, esteemed and revered across the provinces, the sole beacon within the Four Seas. Who, if not you, should ascend as ruler? Le raised his troops in righteousness to quell the chaos, solely to pave the way for Your Excellency. We implore you to heed the will of Heaven and the times, to ascend the throne. Le would support Your Excellency as a son does his parents. May you discern Le's humble intentions and look upon him with kindness." He also sent letters and generous bribes to Zao Song.

"Lord Shi, a hero of our time, controls the ancient capital of Zhao and poses a formidable stance." Jun asked Zichun and his companions. "Why then does he claim vassalage to me? Can he be trusted?"

"General Shi's talent and valor stand unparalleled, his forces formidable, indeed as decreed by Heaven," Zichun replied. "Your Excellency's prestige and lineage illuminate the provinces, your command revered across the mountains and rivers, your fame spreading to all corners. Not merely the local authorities but even the barbarians and border tribes revere your virtue. Did Chen Ying not refuse kingship, and Han Xin the emperorship, not for lack of ambition, but knowing well that the throne cannot be seized by mere wit or force? General Shi's regard for Your Excellency is as the moon's reflection of the sun's brilliance, the rivers' tribute to the ocean's vastness. The falls of Xiang Yu and Zi Yang were not distant; such serves as a clear warning to General Shi, and Your Excellency should take no offense. Moreover, while there have been barbarians who became renowned ministers, none ascended as emperor. General Shi's deference is not out of disdain for the throne but rather an acknowledgment of the Heaven's will. I urge you to harbor no doubts."

Jun was greatly pleased. He ennobled Zichun and his companions as marquises, and sent envoys to Le with regional products. At that time, Jun's marshal, You Tong, stationed in

Fanyang, secretly defected to Le. Le executed Tong's messenger and sent him back to Jun, demonstrating his sincerity. Although Jun did not punish Tong, this event deepened his trust in Le's loyalty, dispelling any further doubts.

Zichun returned with Wang Jun's envoys. Le commanded to conceal his elite troops and fine armor, presenting a facade of a weakened force to the envoys. He faced north to pay his respects and receive the letter from Jun. Jun sent Le a deer tail, which Le, feigning humility, dared not touch with hands. He hung it on the wall and bowed to it morning and evening. "Though my eyes are denied the august presence of the Lord Wang, to behold his gift is as to gaze upon his noble countenance." He spoke. He then sent Dong Zhao with a memorial to Jun, expressing his intention to personally visit Youzhou to offer his allegiance. He also wrote to Zao Song, offering the governorship of Bingzhou and the title of Duke of Guangping, to demonstrate his sincerity.

Le plotted against Jun and consulted Zichun. "Since the great deluge last year in Youzhou, the people have not a grain," said Zichun. "Jun hoards a million bushels, yet does not a whit. His decrees are draconian, the levies and labors burdensome, he persecutes those endowed with virtue and merit, and expels the advisors. The spirit of the people is disheartened, and the warriors are weakened and worn. Yet Jun erects his daises and marshals his officers, vaunting himself above Emperor Gao of Han and Emperor Wu of Wei. Furthermore, the omens and apparitions in Youzhou are exceedingly grim, chilling the hearts of all who hear. Jun remains imperturbable, his countenance devoid of fear. His downfall is imminent."

Le, with a stroke of his beard, chuckled, "Wang Pengzu is verily ripe for the taking!"

As they returned, Jun's envoys laid bare Le's ostensible frailty and earnest pledges. Jun was overjoyed, convinced of Le's allegiance.

Le was marshaling his forces in preparation for the assault on Jun. But he hesitated, fearing Liu Kun, Xianbei and Wuhuan tribes might pose a threat from behind. He pondered without taking action.

"To assail the realm of the foe, one must strike where least expected," said Zhang Bin. "If our legions tarry, arrayed in readiness yet motionless as the days pass, we should entertain greater apprehensions than foes on three fronts!"

"What course then shall we pursue?" Le asked.

"Pengzu's dominion over Youzhou stands but upon the three divisions," replied Bin. "Now all estranged and turned foes. He has no external succor to withstand our might. The denizens of Youzhou, stricken by famine, subsist on naught but greens, with ranks thinned by desertion and loyalty dissolved. His martial throng is sparse and feeble. Hence, internally, there exists no formidable force to repel our advance. Should our mighty host draw nigh, their ramparts shall verily crumble. Though not all three factions are subdued, you can still dispatch a force which spans thousands of *li* to conquer Youzhou. A rapid campaign, forth and back, shall span not beyond 20 days. Even should the other factions stir, our position allows swift retraction. We ought to launch with the alacrity of lightning, tarrying not for the morrow. Furthermore, though Liu Kun and Wang Jun share the title of Jin's vassals, in truth, they harbor enmity. An epistle to Kun, proffering hostages in quest of concord, shall surely gladden him with our alliance and the prospect of Jun's downfall. Never would he aid Jun against us."

"What remained obscured to me, you, Marquis of the Right, have elucidated! Wherefore should doubts linger hence?" exclaimed Le.

With a contingent of light cavalry, Le launched a surprise attack on Youzhou, advancing by night with torches. Arriving at Boren, they slew the registrar You Lun. They feared his brother You Tong, who was in Fanyang, might alert the enemy. Le sent Zhang Lu with a letter to Liu Kun, confessing his erstwhile misdeeds and seeking redemption through the subjugation of Jun. Kun, who had long despised Jun, issued orders to the various provinces and commanderies. He proclaimed that Le had recognized his faults and sought to rectify years of wrongdoing by seizing Youzhou's capital and vowing benevolence henceforth. He heeded Le's request, accepting the mission to facilitate peace.

As Le's host approached the Yi River, Jun's protector Sun Wei swiftly alerted Jun. He purposed to march against Le, yet You Tong stayed his hand. Jun's generals urged to attack Le in unison, but Jun retorted, "Lord Shi approaches with intentions of allegiance to me. Whosoever dares propose assault shall be executed!" He ordered to prepare a feast in welcome.

At dawn, Le arrived at Ji, shouting for the gatekeepers to yield entry. Wary of an ambush, he herded thousands of cattle and sheep ahead, purporting tribute while intending to obstruct the thoroughfares, thereby thwarting the soldiers from mobilizing. Jun was ensnared by fear, alternating between sitting and standing.

Le ascended his dais, ordered his armored soldiers to seize Jun, and placed him before him. Xu Guang admonished Jun, proclaiming, "You, ensconced in supreme dominion and exalted amongst the eminent, did lord over the martial realm of Youzhou and the lands renowned for their cavalry. Commanding formidable hosts, you beheld the capital's downfall, yet proffered no succor to the Son of Heaven, aspiring instead to self-aggrandizement. Further, you placed your trust in the vile and ruthless, slaying the faithful and virtuous, yielding to licentious whims, your venom permeating the land of Yan. This plight is of your own crafting, not decreed by the Heaven." Le sent his general Wang Luosheng^{viii} to execute Jun in the market of Xiangguo.

Following this, Le sent the exiles back to their hometowns, promoted Xun Chuo and Pei Xian, and provided them with carriages and attire. He meted out justice to Zhu Shuo, Zao Song, Tian Jiao, and their likes for sowing discord through bribery, and executed You Tong for his betrayal of Jun. He relocated the Wuhuan leaders Shen Guang, Jian Shang, Hao Xi, Jin Shi, and others to Xiangguo. Jun's palaces were burned down. Jin's Imperial Secretary, Liu Han, was made General of Ningshuo and acting Inspector of Youzhou, garrisoned at Ji. A local administration was established before Le's departure. Fu Gou, the officer of the eastern bureau, was made Chief Clerk of Left and sent to present Jun's head to Liu Cong as a trophy of victory.

Upon Le's return to Xiangguo, Liu Han rebelled against Le and fled to Duan Pidi. A severe famine struck Xiangguo. Grain prices soared to two *jīn* of silver for two *sheng*, and meat to one *liang* of silver per *jīn*. In recognition of Le's achievements in pacifying Youzhou, Liu Cong sent his envoy Liu Chun with full powers to appoint Le as the Grand Commander of all military affairs in the Shaan's east, Grand General of Cavalry, Eastern Chanyu, Palace Attendant, Bearer of the Imperial Insignia, Commander of the Imperial Guard, Colonel, Shepherd of Two Provinces, and Duke as before, with the addition of the Golden Tally and

the Yellow Battle-axe, accompanied by music ensembles both before and after, and increased his fief by twelve counties. Le firmly declined, accepting only two commanderies. Le then ennobled the Chief Clerk of the Left, Zhang Jing, and ten others as barons, viscounts, and marquises, with distinctions awarded to both civil and military officials.

Le's general Zhi Xiong attacked Liu Yan at Linqiu, yet was defeated by him. Yan sent his generals Han Hong and Pan Liang to surprise attack Dunqiu, beheading Le's appointed administrator Shao Pan. Zhi Xiong pursued Hong and others, slaying Pan Liang at Linqiu. Liu Kun sent the Administrator of Leping, Jiao Qiu, to attack Le at Changshan, decapitating his administrator Xing Tai. Kun's marshal Wen Jiao went west to subdue the Shanhu, but Le's general Lu Ming intercepted and defeated him at Lucheng.

As Le gradually pacified You and Ji, he began to survey the province and commandery registers, levying a tax of two bolts of silk and two *hu* of grain per household.

Le's general Chen Wu rebelled against him at Junyi. Lu Ming attacked Ning Hei at Chiping, subduing him, and then, having broken Eastern Yan at Suanzao, returned, relocating over 20,000 households of the subjugated people to Xiangguo. Le sent his general Ge Bo to raid Puyang, capturing it and killing the administrator, Han Hong.

Liu Cong sent his envoy Fan Kan with a mandate to Le, bestowing upon him bows and arrows, elevating him to the rank of Baron of Eastern Shaan, granting him autonomy in military campaigns, and made him inspector, general, administrator, and marquis, with a yearly tribute. His eldest son Xing was made heir apparent of Shangdang, promoted to Winged Army General, serving as the deputy of the Cavalry.

Liu Kun sent Wang Dan to attack Zhongshan, driving out Le's appointed administrator Qin Gu. Le's general Liu Mian confronted Dan, defeating him and capturing him at Wangdu Pass. Le ambushed Shao Xu at Leling. Xu fought back fiercely with all his forces but was ultimately defeated and retreated.

Wang Shen of Zhangwu rose up at Kedou Fort, causing turmoil in Le's Hejian and Bohai commanderies. Le appointed Zhang Yi as the Administrator of Hejian and Lin Shen as the Administrator of Bohai, each leading 3,000 infantry and cavalry to pacify the region, with the Administrator of Changle, Cheng Xia, encamped at Changting to bolster their presence.

Le relocated over 30,000 households of the Wuhuan tribes, including Zhan Guang and Liu Duo, from Pingyuan to Xiangguo.

Le sent Shi Jilong to assail Wang Ping of the Qihuo at Liangcheng, yet he met defeat and withdrew. Thereafter, he laid siege to Liu Yan at Linqiu. Zhi Xiong and Lu Ming attacked Ning Hei at Dongwuyang and overcame it. Hei drowned in the river. His followers, a multitude surpassing 10,000, were relocated to Xiangguo. Shao Xu sent Wenyang to rescue Yan, compelling Jilong to fall back and halt at Luguan Ford to eschew his advance. Wenyang, hindered, encamped at Jingting. The local nobles of Yanzhou and Yuzhou, Zhang Ping amongst them, levied forces to extricate Yan. Under the veil of night, Jilong forsook the encampment, laid an ambush without, and spread rumors, feigning a retreat to Hebei. Ping and his cohort, ensnared by belief, ventured into the deserted camp. Jilong, seizing the moment, launched a counterstrike, routed them, and seized Linqiu. Yan sought refuge with Wenyang's legion, while his brother Qi was captured and sent to Xiangguo. Yan was Liu Kun's nephew. Since Kun had taken care of his mother, Le held Qi in esteem and gifted him land and dwellings, with Confucian scholars imparting the classics to him.

At the time, locusts ravaged the lands, notably Zhongshan and Changshan. In Zhongshan, Zhai Shu of the Dingling rose against Le, striking at both Zhongshan and Changshan. Le, leading cavalry, quelled this rebellion, seizing Shu's mother and wife before his return. Shu sought haven at Xu Pass, then fled to Daijun.

Le assailed Han Ju, the Administrator of Leping, at Diancheng. Liu Kun sent General Ji Dan with forces numbering over 100,000 against Le. Kun marched to Guangmu, bolstering Dan.

Le purposed to engage, yet counsel came: "The host of Dan, in their prime and vigor, present an assault most formidable. It would be prudent to fashion deep moats and towering bulwarks, thereby to blunt their keen edge. In doing so, the nature of attack and defense shall be utterly transformed, securing a victory most complete."

"Dan's host, weary in flesh and spirit from their long march, resembles naught but dogs and sheep," Le countered. "They assembled in disarray, and their commands are discordant. They are ripe for defeat in a single engagement. When the enemy draws near, to abandon our position would be sheer folly. Once the great host is set in motion, to revert to prior disposition is hardly a trifling matter. Should Dan capitalize on our withdrawal, we would not have time for trench and rampart construction. This is but to embrace ruin without the semblance of resistance." The advisor was put to death.

Le named Kong Chang vanguard commander, decreeing death for any who lagged behind. He deployed decoy forces on the mountains, laying two ambushes. With light cavalry, Le engaged Dan, feigning a northward retreat. Dan's forces, in pursuit, fell into Le's trap, ambushed on both flanks. They suffered a crushing defeat, ten thousand sets of armor and horses taken. Dan escaped to Daijun, then to Liu Kun. Kun's Chief Clerk, Li Hong, ceded Bingzhou to Le, with Kun fleeing to Duan Pidi.

Le moved the peoples of Yangqu and Leping to Xiangguo, stationed officials for their protection, and withdrew. Kong Chang chased Ji Dan to Sanggan. Le sent Zhang Fu, the Chief Clerk of Left, to report this victory to Liu Cong.

Amidst Le's assault on Leping, Zhao Ling, the Prefect of Nanhe, rallied several thousand households from Guangchuan, Pingyuan, and Bohai in defiance of Le, fleeing to Shao Xu. Xing Gu of Hejian, despite repeated summons, failed to appear, amassing hundreds in rebellion. Surveying the counties of Jizhou, Le appointed Cheng Xia as the General of Ningshuo, charged with overseeing military operations across seven commanderies of Jizhou.

Le's brother-in-law, Zhang Yue of Guangwei, along with generals including Pu Bo, were caught in the act of gambling by Le himself. Yue, in jest, spoke ill of Le, stirring great wrath within him. In response, Le commanded his strongmen to shatter Yue's shin and kill him.

Kong Chang laid siege to Daijun, culminating in Ji Dan's demise. At this juncture, tens of thousands from Si, Ji, Bing, and Yan, displaced, found themselves in Liaoxi, their numbers swelling through mutual recruitment, sowing seeds of unrest. Kong Chang, among others, waged assaults on Ma Yan and Feng Du, yet victory eluded them for an extended duration.

Le turned to Zhang Bin. "Feng Du and his ilk are not your entrenched foes, and those displaced in Liaoxi yearn for their homesteads," Bin said. "The time is now auspicious to recall the legions, to sheathe the weapons, and to select with care stewards of virtue, unbound by the rigidity of tradition, in the manner of Gong Sui, to extend mercy and to unfurl the

banners of valor. In this manner, peace shall once more grace the lands of You and Ji, and the wanderers of Liaoxi shall in due time return to their hearths."

"The Marquis of Right's strategy is sound," Le concurred. He recalled Chang and his forces, designating Li Hui, Prefect of Wusui, as Protector of Yibei, General of Zhenwu, and Administrator of Gaoyang.

Many within Ma Yan's ranks were once under Li Qian. They defected to Hui, who was esteemed for his integrity and virtue, especially since he had served Qian as his Chief Clerk. Yan, fearing the splintering of his forces, sought refuge in Youzhou, only to be drowned on the way. Feng Du and his cohort capitulated to Le. Hui, now stationed in Yijing, saw thousands of the displaced yearly pledge allegiance to him. Le, in recognition, bestowed upon Hui the title of Viscount of Yiyang, with a fief spanning 300 households. Bin was offered a fief of 1,000 households and the rank of Front General, a proposition he steadfastly refused.

A severe locust outbreak beset Heshuo. Initially, they surfaced from the earth. Within 20 days, they morphed, akin to silkworms, and within seven to eight days thereafter, they spawned. Four days on, they shed their skins and took flight, sparing only three kinds of beans and hemp. Bing and Ji bore the brunt of this calamity.

Shi Jilong, crossing at Changshou Ford, raided Liangguo and slew the Interior Minister Xun He. Liu Kun, in consort with Duan Pidi, Shefuchen, Jiliujyan, and Duan Mobei, convened at Gu'an to strategize an offensive against Le. In a countermove, Le sent his military advisor Wang Xu, laden with gold and treasures, to sway Mobei, disrupting their schemes. Mobei, inclined to reciprocate Le's kindness and lured by the lavish bribe, persuaded Chen, Juan, and others to fall back, leading Kun and Pidi to retreat to Jicheng.

Shao Xu sent his nephew Ji to strike at Le's holdings in Bohai, seizing over 3,000 people before returning. From Luoyang, Liu Cong's general, Zhao Gu, defected to Le, apprehensive of an impending assault. He sent his military advisor Gao Shao bearing a letter extolling Le and seeking alliance against Cong. Le, on ethical grounds, demurred, inciting Gu's ire, who, alongside Guo Mo, then ravaged Henei and Jijun.

Duan Mobei killed the Xianbei Chanyu Jiefuzhen and installed Hubalin^{ix} as the new Chanyu. Duan Pidi, launching an attack on Mobei from Youzhou, was met with a counteroffensive and routed. Pidi fled back to Youzhou, where he then assassinated the Grand Commandant Liu Kun. Kun's commanders and advisors, in turn, capitulated to Le. Mobei sent his brother, leading cavalry, to assail Pidi in Youzhou. Pidi, intending to escape to Shao Xu with thousands of his followers, was intercepted at Yanshan by Le's general Shi Yue, who dealt him a crushing blow. Pidi withdrew to defend Youzhou. Yue, struck by an arrow, succumbed to his wounds during the engagement. Le mourned Yue for three months and posthumously bestowed upon him the title of General of Southern Pacification.

Initially commanding Qingzhou and having defied Liu Cong, Cao Ni yielded to the southern court. Given Jianye's remoteness and the challenge of reinforcement, coupled with apprehensions of Le's aggression, he thus endeavored for concord. Le, in response, designated Yi as the Grand General of the Eastern Provinces, Shepherd of Qingzhou, and elevated him to the Duke of Langya.

Liu Cong, gravely ill, urgently beckoned Le to assume the roles of Grand General and Director of the Imperial Secretariat, entrusting him with a will for regency. Le steadfastly

refused and halted there. Cong then dispatched his envoy, bearing the imperial insignia, to confer upon Le the title of Grand General, granting him military command, the station of a Palace Attendant, Colonel, Shepherd over two provinces, while maintaining his ducal title and augmenting his fief by ten commanderies. Le remained unyielding.

Following Cong's demise, his son Can ascended, only for Grand General Jin Zhun to slay him in Pingyang. Le commanded Zhang Jing to lead 5,000 cavalry as the vanguard against Zhun, with Le himself marshaling 50,000 elite troops in pursuit, establishing camp in the northern plains of Xiangling. Over 40,000 Qiang and Xiongnu capitulated to him. Despite Zhun's provocations, Le solidified his defenses, gradually exhausting them. Liu Yao, encamped at Puban from Chang'an, claimed the false title, appointed Le as Grand Marshal and Grand General, conferred upon him the Nine Bestowments, expanded his fief by an additional ten commanderies atop the preceding thirteen, and elevated him to Duke of Zhao.

Le besieged Zhun within Pingyang's confines, where Zhou Zhi, the Grand Governor of Pingyang, among others with 6,000 mixed households, yielded to Le. Over a hundred thousand Ba commanders alongside Qiang and Xiongnu submitted, subsequently resettled across various Sizhou counties. Zhun sent Bu Tai, bearing the imperial carriage and regalia, to negotiate peace. Amidst a strategic tussle with Liu Yao, Le sent Tai to Yao, signaling Pingyang's defiance to weaken Yao's martial resolve. Yao, covertly allying with Tai, returned him to Pingyang to reassure the Tuge.

Le, harboring suspicions of Tai's secret dealings with Yao, entertained thoughts of Tai's execution to expedite surrender. His generals counseled, "To dispatch Bu Tai at this juncture would but cement Zhun's defiance. Better to have Tai champion the cause of allegiance to Han amongst the city's denizens, urging them to rise against Jin Zhun. Faced with such treachery, Zhun shall surely be gripped by dread and swiftly seek to surrender." After deliberation, Le heeded his generals, sending Tai back. Tai, aligning with Zhun's generals Qiao Tai, Ma Zhong, among others, slew Zhun. They declared Jin Ming as the coalition's head, who sent Tai and Bu Xuan with the imperial seals to Liu Yao.

Infuriated, Le sent his secretary Yang Sheng to Pingyang to censure Ming. Ming, incensed, executed Sheng. Enraged, Le advanced his forces against Ming. Ming emerged to combat but succumbed to Le, leaving a trail of bodies spanning two *li*. Ming then secured the city gates, ceasing further conflict. Le dispatched his Left Chief Clerk Wang Xiu to announce the triumph to Liu Yao.

Zhou Jian, the Interior Clerk of Pengcheng under Jin, eradicated Zhou Mo, the Interior Clerk of Pei, and ceded Peng and Pei to Le. Shi Jilong mobilized the forces of You and Ji to bolster Le's siege of Pingyang. Liu Yao dispatched Liu Chang to Ming's aid. Le encamped his forces at Pushang. Jin Ming, leading Pingyang's populace, sought refuge with Liu Yao, who then absconded westward to Suyi. Le torched the Pingyang palaces, commissioned Pei Xian and Shi Hui to restore the tombs of Yuanhai and Cong, interred over a hundred bodies including Liu Can's, and transported the sundials and musical instruments to Xiangguo.

Liu Yao sent his envoy Guo Si^x among others, empowering them to elevate Le to Grand Governor and Grand General, bestow upon him the title of King of Zhao, and augment his domain by seven counties, atop the prior twenty. Le was accorded honors akin to those of Cao Cao in service to the Han dynasty: a retinue, a twelve-pendant crown, a golden-axled

chariot pulled by six horses. His spouse was named Queen, his heir, Crown Prince.

Cao Pingle, Le's man who came with the envoys, desired to serve Yao as an official. He warned Yao, "The Grand Marshal has dispatched Wang Xiu and associates with outward show of utmost piety. Yet, inwardly, they spy upon our might, scheming to launch a swift assault upon Xiu's return."

Yao, sensing his diminished strength and dreading Xiu's report, was incensed. He recalled Si and the envoys, executing Xiu in Suyi, and revoking the Grand Governorship. Liu Mao fled and relayed Wang Xiu's demise. Enraged, Le executed Pingle and his kin to the third degree. He honored Xiu posthumously as Minister of Ceremonies.

Aware the special honors were rescinded, Le was enraged. "Our devotion to the house of Liu has exceeded the path of a subject," he proclaimed. "Without the bond of us brethren, how could they reign supreme? Having established our foundation, they then sought our downfall. Yet, the heavens abhor wickedness and through Jin Zhun's unwitting hand, did aid us. In serving my lord, I sought to emulate the virtue of Shun in his dealings with the blind man Gu Sou, thereby restoring and exalting my sovereign, aiming for the amity of yore. Why then did they persist in vile schemes, murdering the envoy of sincerity? The rise and fall of emperors and kings are without constancy! The title of King of Zhao, Emperor of Zhao, I have seized by my own hand. Whether their ranks be high or low, are they not beyond restraint?"

Le then instituted the Imperial Medical Service, Workshops, and Treasury, and tasked military advisor Chao Zan with erecting the Zhengyang Gate. Its subsequent collapse incited Le's wrath, leading to Zan's execution. Later, mourning the harshness meted to the staff, he furnished them with coffins and funeral garb, posthumously naming Zan as Grand Herald.

General of Western Pacification, Zu Ti, launched an assault on Chen Chuan at Peng Pass, drawing Shi Jilong to Chuan's aid and compelling Ti to fall back and fortify in Liangguo. Jilong subsequently sent the General Who Displays Martial Valor, Zuo Fusu, to besiege him.

Le established over ten minor schools at the four gates of Xiangguo, dedicated to the dissemination of literature, education, Confucianism, and training. He handpicked over a hundred children from the progenies of his generals and the local nobility for education therein, ensuring their safeguarding. Furthermore, he founded the Office of the Flask Bearer and minted abundant currency.

The Xianbei in Hexi, under Riliuyan, rose against Le, prompting Shi Jilong to mount a campaign against them. He triumphed in Shuofang, decapitating 20,000 and seizing over 30,000 individuals, in addition to more than 100,000 cattle and horses. Kong Chang brought tranquility to various commanderies in Youzhou. Concurrently, Duan Pidi's forces, fragmented by famine and deserting their families, saw Pidi seeking refuge with Shao Xu. Cao Ni engaged diplomatically, proffering local commodities and proposing the river as a frontier. Tao Bao's arrival at Peng Pass drove Zu Ti to withdraw to Huainan, and the households under Chen Chuan, exceeding 5,000, were transplanted to Guangzong.

Shi Jilong, accompanied by Zhang Jing, Zhang Bin, and over a hundred other generals and officers, implored Le to adopt the August Title. "I, in my unworthiness, have been undeservedly laden with exalted favor," Le decreed. "Night and day, I am engulfed in trepidation, as if walking upon the thinnest of ice. How could I then presume to usurp a title of honor, inviting scorn from all directions? In bygone days, King Wen of Zhou, despite

wielding dominion over a third of the land, remained a vassal to the Yin dynasty; Xiaobai, at the pinnacle of his power, still paid his respects to the house of Zhou. Moreover, the state's prosperity now outshines that of Yin and Zhou, yet my virtue is but a shadow of these two venerable lords. Let this discussion be quelled immediately; let it not be stirred anew. From this moment forward, any who dare to speak of this shall be met with unforgiving punishment." Thus, the matter was dropped.

"In the aftermath of great turmoil, our statutes have become exceedingly cumbersome," Le further proclaimed. "Let us hence extract the crux of these laws for implementation." He instructed the legal secretary Guan Zhi to compose the "Xinhai Regulations," a manuscript of 5,000 characters, which served to guide the citizenry for more than a decade thereafter. Xu Kan, Jin's Administrator of Taishan, defected to Le.

Shi Jilong, Zhang Jing, Zhang Bin, the Left and Right Marshals Zhang Quliu, Cheng Xia, and 129 others petitioned:

"We, your subjects, have been enlightened by the adage that extraordinary epochs demand extraordinary feats; and such feats, in turn, necessitate extraordinary endeavors. Thus, through the waning of the Three Dynasties and the ascendancy of the Five Lords, amidst times of strife, deeds have rivaled those of the sagacious ancestors. We observe with utmost reverence that Your Highness, anointed by the heavens with divine wisdom and born to fulfill the destiny, has disciplined the cosmos and contributed to the foundation of the imperial cause. The entire realm looks to you for resurgence, and auspicious signs have manifested in succession, with the masses, nine in ten, yearning to forsake the Liu house and to pledge allegiance to Your Excellency.

Now, with mountains and rivers in tranquility, stars untarnished, and seas serene, verily, it is the moment to ascend the central altar and to claim the imperial throne, granting those who seek your shelter to bask in your benevolence. We beseech you, drawing inspiration from the precedents set by Liu Bei in Shu and King Wei in Ye, to amalgamate the eleven commanderies of Henei, Wei, Jijun, Dunqiu, Pingyuan, Qinghe, Julu, Changshan, Zhongshan, Changle, and Leping, together with the thirteen commanderies erstwhile under Zhao, including Guangping, Yangping, Zhangwu, Bohai, Hejian, Shangdang, Dingxiang, Fanyang, Yuyang, Wuyi, Yan, and Leling, thus constituting twenty-four counties and 290,000 households, to forge the state of Zhao. The governance within shall revert to that of an Interior Minister, in accordance with the 'Tribute of Yu' and the restoration of Jizhou by Emperor Wu of Wei, extending from the south at Mengjin, to the west at Longmen, eastward to the Yellow River, and northward to the Great Wall. Appoint the Grand Chanyu to pacify the myriad barbarians. Abolish the provinces of Bing, Shuo, and Si, and establish bureaus to oversee them. We earnestly hope you will accept this in alignment with the celestial will and meet the expectations of the multitude."

Le declined five times facing west and four times facing south. With all officials prostrate, fervently beseeching, he finally agreed.

ⁱ Zhou Jialu's research (《晉書校勘記》) suggests that "Beize" (北澤, lit. Northern Marshes) ought to be corrected to "Beibu" (北部, lit. Northern Division). *JS101* records that Emperor Wu of Wei segmented the Xiongnu into five divisions, naming Bao as the commander of the left division, with the leadership of the remaining divisions vested in members of the Liu family. It is likely an oversight by the historian.

ii *"Yuan He Xing Zuan" 2:*

Shi Zhao's Minister of Works, Zhi Xiong, declared his lineage traced back to the Yue Zhi people.

iii *TPYL391:*

Cui Hong's *SLGCQ* states: Tao Bao, courtesy Anbu, hailed from Fanyang. In his youth, he was celebrated for his courage and prowess in mounted archery. He once, with arm outstretched and voice raised, proclaimed, "He who has the fortune to encounter Wei Taizu (Cao Cao) and yet neither be ennobled as a marquis over ten thousand households nor ascend to the rank of a high commander is naught but a lesser man." At that moment, his declaration was met with mirth, to which Bao retorted, "You brood of vermin, how could you fathom the lofty aspirations of a gentleman!" Amidst the tumults in the Central Plains, Bao emerged as one of the Eighteen Riders of renown, dedicating himself to Le with profound loyalty.

ZZTJ:

Tao, during the Spring and Autumn period, was a township in the state of Lu, which was used as a surname. Another explanation is that it comes from the descendants of an ancient noble, Zuo Bo Tao.

iv According to *JS61*, Gou Xi held the titles of General of Eastern Conquest and Inspector of Qingzhou at the time, not Administrator of Puyang. It was a possible inconsistency or oversight by the historian.

According to *JS37*, in the biography of Prince Mo of Nanyang, Gou Xi was initially identified as Inspector of Yanzhou, and was subsequently appointed as Inspector of Qingzhou.

v *TPYL386:*

Zhang Mi, courtesy name Jujin, hailed from Jijun. In the Yongjia era of the Jin Dynasty, he was stationed alongside Liang Chen [sic! Should be Ju] in Wude City. Upon Shi Le's assault and the city's subsequent fall, Mi was to be buried alive along with others, but he loudly protested, saying, "Should not the officials preserve the vigor of stout-hearted men; wherefore does my demise beckon?" Le inquired, "What act of valor do you claim to merit your salvation?" Mi replied, "Atop the western ramparts of Wude, with a voice that commanded the fray, ever vigilant and with defenses meticulously arrayed, I thwarted the foe's ingress. Such was the deed of Zhang Mi." Le, amused, remarked, "A captive of such mettle is indeed remarkable and stout." Hence, he was spared.

vi *SJZ10:*

The Zhuozhang River [...] courses further eastward from the mountains, skirting to the west of Ye County. [...]

Northwest of the city, three terraces stand, all founded upon the city itself. They ascend grandly, their stature akin to that of mountains. Constructed in the 15th year of Jian'an (210) by Emperor Wu of Wei, they are both vast and flat.

vii *TPYL142:*

Shi Le's Empress Liu, sister to the Palace Attendant Liu Run and of the Hu people

from the northern tribes, was wed by Le at Hu Pass. She was beautiful and greatly favored. When Zhang Ping rebelled in Xiangcheng, she drew her sword and personally dispatched Ping, a decisive act upon which Le leaned to navigate the crisis. The Empress was both compassionate and astute, contributing to the oversight of military and state matters, mirroring the Lǔ family's support of the Han dynasty. Yet, she maintained a demeanor of strictness, modesty, and generosity, without succumbing to excessive jealousy. Upon Shi Hong's ascension, she was revered as the Empress Dowager. She, alongside Prince Kan of Pengcheng, orchestrated a plot against Shi Hu, which, upon discovery, led to her demise at Hu's hands.

viii *TPYL378:*

Wang Luosheng, whom Shi Le wanted to curb for his power and influence. While in prison, Luosheng stabbed himself in the abdomen, the wound being five *cun* deep. Luosheng was corpulent, so the stab did not reach his vitals. He then used a knife to further rupture his abdomen, causing his stomach to protrude, and died from the injuries.

ix Jiefuzhen was referenced as Shefuchen in the biographies of Liu Kun and Wang Jun. Therein, Mobei is said to have slain Shefuchen, subsequently proclaiming himself Chanyu. Following Mobei's demise, his brother Ya inherited the title, and upon Ya's death, the lineage passed to Jiulijuan's grandson, Liao. The mention of "Hubalin" appears to be the historian's oversight, as no such figure is documented in the succession.

x *TPYL382:*

The *SLGCQ* states: Guo Si, courtesy name Ziyu, hailed from Shangjun. His father, a county soldier, once followed a sorcerer and met a woman on the way. The sorcerer prophesied, "This maiden is fated to bring forth a son of distinction, as are you. Unite her to your household, for she shall elevate your lineage." Heeding this, he took her as his wife, and she bore Si. Si matured to less than seven *chi* in height, his visage marred by extreme ugliness. Initially, he was naught but a simpleton, devoid of wisdom, and followed in his father's footsteps as a county soldier. Discontented, he pursued education and apprenticed himself to Zhao Kongyao of Anping. Upon beholding him, Yao esteemed him greatly, proclaiming, "Here is a man endowed with the makings of a noble; verily, he shall ascend to great eminence."

105. Chapter 5 Shi Le Part Two



In the 2nd year of Taixing (319), Le, in falsehood, crowned himself King of Zhao. He pardoned those doomed to die and cut the commoner's land rent in half. He bestowed varying measures of silk upon those who had demonstrated filial devotion, fraternal respect, vigor in agriculture, or were orphans of those who perished in the cause of righteousness. He gave three *shi* of grain to the orphans, the aged, the widows, and the childless, feasting grandly for seven days. Following the precedent of the Spring and Autumn states and early Han dynasty's marquises and kings, who named each new generation "Yuan (inaugural)," he marked the year as the inaugural year of King of Zhao.

He raised altars for the gods of earth and grain, built ancestral temples, and palaces to the east and west. He named Pei Xian Attendant Officer in the Palace Secretariat, military advisors Fu Chang and Du Gu as Libationers of the Classics, Xu Xian and Yu Jing of the Law, Ren Bo and Cui Jun of History. Zhi Xiong, the Central Rampart, and Wang Yang, the Guerrilla, were appointed as Libationers for the gate officials, specifically to settle the Hu people's disputes, with Zhang Li, Zhang Liang,ⁱ Liu Qun, and Liu Mo as the main scribes for the Hu people, keeping strict watch, demanding respect from the Hu for the Chinese gentry. The Hu people were referred to as Nationals. Envoys spread to urge agriculture and sericulture throughout the provinces and commanderies.

Zhang Bin rose as Chief Law Enforcement Officer, taking charge of all government affairs and ranking above all other officials. Shi Jilong became the Chanyu's Chief Aide and Commander of the Guards, and Front General Li Han taught the state's sons the spear, combat, and the bow. Ming Kai and Cheng Ji were to pen the "Records of Shangdang State," while Fu Biao, Jia Pu, and Jiang Gui the "Daily Records of the Grand General." Military advisors Shi Tai, Shi Tong, Shi Qian, and Kong Long set to compile the "Annals of the Great Chanyu."

Court henceforth met with the rites and music due a Son of Heaven, whose majestic

demeanor and crown were indeed a sight to behold. When his ministers deliberated and sought to discuss merits, Le spoke: "From the time I levied my host, sixteen years have now passed. All those amongst the literati and the martial who have journeyed with me on campaigns, without exception, have been shrouded in the peril of arrows and stones, and have tasted the bitterness of adversity. Notably, in the engagement at Gebei, their valor shone most brightly, and verily, they ought to be foremost in receiving our largesse. As for those yet with us, let their rank and ennoblement be meted out in accordance with their deeds and station. And to the progeny of those who perished, let an additional degree of honor be bestowed, that it might adequately convey my appreciation to both the quick and the dead, and manifest the sincerity of my heart."

Furthermore, he issued an edict forbidding the Nationals from espousing their sisters-in-law and from marrying during mourning periods, yet he decreed that the rites of cremation and interment should adhere to the ancestral customs.

Kong Chang overran Shao Xu's eleven camps, seizing them all. Xu fell captive to Shi Jilong, sent forthwith to Xiangguo. Generals Yin An and Song Shi, under Liu Yao, took Luoyang, yielding to Le.

Jin's Inspector of Xuzhou Cai Bao bested Xu Kan at Tanqiu. Kan sent envoys to Le with a strategy to conquer Bao. Le sent General Wang Budu to lead Kan's charge, Zhang Jing and his cavalry in support. At Dongping, suspicion led Kan to slay Budu and over three hundred, then he submitted anew to Jin. Enraged, Le commanded Zhang Jing to secure strategic defenses.

Torrential rains inundated, particularly in Zhongshan and Changshan. The Hutuo River, engorged, swept away mountains and valleys. Giant pines, uprooted, drifted downstream to the Bo Sea, piling up in the plains and marshes like mountains.

Kong Chang took more than ten of Wen Yang's camps, but a nocturnal assault by Yang routed Chang.

Le revived the music of the hanging bells and chimes and the Dance of the Eight Rows. He built the Golden-Axled Grand Chariot, the Yellow Canopy with banners to the left, and the Chariot Banner of the Son of Heaven. All rites and melodies were thus set.

He dispatched Shi Jilong with an army of 40,000 to confront Xu Kan. Kan sent his chief secretary, Liu Xiao, to Le to request surrender, offering his wife and children as hostages, who accepted. Meanwhile, Cai Bao held Qiao City. Jilong's assault forced Bao's nocturnal flight. Jilong built city walls in Fengqiu, then withdrew.

Three hundred households of the court's officials and noblemen were settled in Chongren-Li (Village of Respecting Benevolence) within Xiangguo. A Grand Master of the Noble Clans was tasked to lead them.

With the completion of Le's palace and its various gates, the laws grew stringent, with the taboo against the name "Hu" particularly severe. A Hu, inebriated and on horseback, breached the Stopping Chariots Gate. Le, enraged, confronted Feng Zhu, a minor palace lawman, "A ruler promulgates decrees, aspiring for his majesty to be acknowledged under heaven, let alone within the confines of his palace! Who then is the one that dared to spur his horse through the gate, and why was he not rebuked and reported?"

Zhu, struck with fear and overlooking the taboo, replied, "A drunken Hu trespassed, against whom we did vehemently protest, yet he remained impervious to our words."

Le laughed. "Truly, it is hard to converse with a Hu." He forgave the transgression and imposed no penalty.

Shi Jilong marched against the Tuohou tribe's Jueduona in north of Qian and triumphed grandly, seizing over 200,000 cattle and horses.

Le reformed the five ranks and entrusted Zhang Bin to oversee the selection. He then reinstated the nine ranks system. He positioned Zhang Ban to the left and Meng Zhuo to the right as Law Enforcement Officers, charged with the noble families' regulation and aiding in the selection process. Annually, officials from every level and province were to nominate individuals distinguished by their talent, filial piety, integrity, virtue, outspokenness, and bravery, one for each trait. For each department and province, an office was instituted, its rank paralleling a Director in the Chancellor's office, with a stipend of two thousand *shi*.

Le issued a decree, stating, "The deluge last year brought forth timber of colossal girth, piled high as mountains, as if the Heaven itself commands the renovation of our palaces! We shall erect the Hall of Establishing Virtue (Jiande), in the likeness of the Hall of Supreme Ultimate (Taiji) of Luoyang." He tasked Ren Wang, the Attendant Officer in the Palace Secretariat, with leading 5,000 craftsmen to collect the timber.

A man from Liyang, Chen Wu, along with his wife, son, and daughter, went to Xiangguo and submitted a petition. Le, acknowledging their familial harmony as a reflection of harmonious *qi*, granted them a nursemaid, 100 *shi* of grain, and 40 pieces of silk.

Shi Jilong attacked Duan Pidi at Yanci, while Kong Chang took cities within Pidi's domain. Facing desperation, Pidi, with his officials and coffins, capitulated. Jilong brought him to Xiangguo, where Le named him Champion General, his brother Wenyng and Weilin as Left and Right General of the Palace Gentlemen, honoring them with gold seals and purple ribbons. Over 30,000 dislocated households were resettled, their lives restored, under appointed oversight. Thus, the territories of Ji, Bing, Youzhou, Liaoxi, and Baxi were secured by Le.

At the time, Jin's General of Northern Conquest, Zu Ti, fortified Qiao, intent on calming the Central Plains. Ti, adept in rallying support, swayed many south of the Yellow River to forsake Le and align with him. Le, wary of Ti, refrained from pillaging and decreed, "Zu Ti has oft been a scourge upon our borders. Ti, being a man of esteemed standing from the northern provinces, may well yearn for his ancestral hills. Let it be ordered that in Youzhou, the ancestral graves of the Zu family be restored, and two households be appointed to keep watch over the tombs. It is our hope that Ti, upon witnessing the benevolence extended by Zhao, will be moved to gratitude and thus forsake his violent incursions."

Ti, heartened by this gesture, dispatched his military advisor, Wang Yu, to Le with gifts, seeking to mend and nurture relations. Le welcomed the envoy with open arms, and in a gesture of goodwill, sent Dong Shu, the Left Palace Attendant, back with him, offering 100 horses and 50 jin of gold. Henceforth, tranquility returned to Yan and Yu, granting the populace respite.

While constructing the Jiande Hall, Liu Ao, an Attendant Officer in the Palace Secretariat, was executed on site for the misalignment and shrinking of the wood intended for the well. Le, filled with regret, posthumously honored him as Grand Herald.

Wang He, the Commandant of Jiande, unearthed a stone inscribed: "A stone of standard weight, four *jun*, for measurement uniformity, crafted by the Xin family." The

significance of this find stirred debates, some seeing it as a fortuitous omen. Military advisor Xu Xian said, "This is an artifact from the time of Wang Mang." Following the tumult of war, measurement standards had vanished, prompting an edict for ritual officials to establish standards and forms.

Another discovery was a ding capable of holding four *sheng*. It contained 30 large coins inscribed: "One hundred equals a thousand, a thousand equals ten thousand." The ding's thirteen-character seal script inscription remained a mystery and was stored in the Yongfeng Warehouse. An order mandated the use of this currency in both public and private transactions, yet it met with public disfavor. To encourage circulation, the government traded silk for coins, fixing rates at 1,200 for medium-quality silk and 800 for lower-quality one. Despite this, private transactions valued medium-quality silk at 4,000 and lower-quality one at 2,000. Those exploiting this disparity for profit, selling privately acquired currency at inflated prices to the government, were executed by the tens, but the currency failed to gain traction.

Le transported bronze horses and statues of the elders from Luoyang to Xiangguo, placing them at the Yongfeng Gate.

Zu Ti's Ivory Gate [General], Tong Jian, murdered Zhou Mi, the Interior Minister of Xincal, and sought to defect to Le. Le executed him and sent his head to Zu Ti, proclaiming, "The malevolence of under Heaven is one and the same. Treacherous vassals and fugitive officers are my sworn enemies, just as they are yours." Ti, in gratitude, sent envoys in response. Henceforth, within the bastions of Yan and Yu, Ti rebuffed all defectors, securing the allegiance of the populace to both factions.

Le summoned the elders from Wuxiang to Xiangguo. Upon their arrival, he personally joined them for drinks, reflecting on his past. Le and Li Yang,ⁱⁱ once neighbors, had yearly contended over the rights to a hemp pool, engaging in recurrent skirmishes. Thereupon, he addressed the elders, saying, "Li Yang is a man of valor; why has he not come? Our past contention over the soaking of hemp is naught but a petty grievance among common folk. Now, as I endeavor to establish credence throughout the realm, should I harbor animosity towards a single individual?" He summoned Yang.

Yang arrived. With a spirit of mirth, Le grasped Yang's arm, and with a laugh, proclaimed, "In days of yore, I found myself vexed by your fists, just as you were wearied by my forceful grip." He awarded Yang a set of armor and named him Military Advisor and Commandant.

Le declared, "Wuxiang shall be my Fengpei (Liu Bang's hometown), my spiritual home to which I shall return after ten thousand years, to be reborn across three lifetimes."

As the populace was just beginning to reclaim their livelihoods and the state's coffers remained modest, Le sternly reinstated the prohibition on private brewing. Only sweet wine was to be used for sacrifices at the suburban altars and ancestral temples. This directive, upheld for years, successfully eradicated private brewing.

Shi Jilong was named General of Chariots and Cavalry, leading a force of 30,000 to confront the Xianbei leader Yuzhou at Lishi. Victorious, they captured over 100,000 cattle and horses, with Yuzhou fleeing to the Wuhuan, his cities and people capitulating.

Following the death of his heir, Xing, Le designated his son Shi Hong as successor, bestowing upon him the title of Middle General.

Le sent Jilong with 40,000 elite troops to campaign against Xu Kan. Kan, opting for defense over battle, faced Jilong who, establishing quarters and taking to farming, initiated a protracted siege. Liu Wei, Jin's General of Northern Defense, defected to Le, who appointed him General of the Southern Defense and elevated him to marquis. Jilong captured Kan, delivering him to Xiangguo where Le had him executed from a 100-*chi* tall tower, commanding Budu's wife and children to eat his body, and buried 3,000 of Kan's troops alive. Terrified, Liu Xia, Jin's Inspector of Yanzhou, withdrew to Xiapi. Sun Mo, Langya's Interior Minister, rebelled against Jin, aligning with Le, as did numerous strongholds between Xu and Yan, all instated as local officials.

Zhang Pi of Qinghe, serving Cheng Xia as Chief Secretary and trusted immensely, was promoted by Zhang Bin to Attendant Officer, engaging in statecraft. Xia, resenting Pi's departure and Bin's ascension and aiming to augment his influence through his nephew, Le's heir Hong. He incited Hong's mother against Pi and Bin, who said to Le, "Zhang Pi and Zhang Bin, being wanderers of chivalrous repute, command the daily attendance of over a hundred carriages of followers, drawing all eyes to them. Such allure does not serve the interests of the state and the public weal. It would thus behoove the realm to dispense with Pi for the greater good of the nation."

Le, persuaded, sanctioned action against Pi, who was executed for tardiness upon urgent summons. Bin, wary of Xia's hostility, refrained from petitions. Xia then ascended as Right Chief Secretary, assuming control over governmental affairs, instilling fear and deference towards the Cheng family among court officials.

Upon Zu Ti's demise, Le intensified his incursions, targeting the border fortifications. His General of Barbarian Conquest, Shi Ta, overcame the royal troops west of Zan, capturing General Wei Rong and escorting him back. The General of the Northern Expedition, Zu Yue, stricken with fear, withdrew to Shouchun. A devastating epidemic swept through Le's domain, claiming two to three out of every ten, halting the construction of the Huiwen Hall. Le sent his general, Wang Yang, to Yuzhou with espionage in mind, escalating military skirmishes. Thus, the region between Liang and Zheng was embroiled in turmoil.

Le also sent Jilong with 40,000 footmen and horsemen to campaign against Cao Ni. Ni had once considered retreating to the sea, seeking sanctuary in the Yi mountains, but a severe epidemic thwarted these plans. Jilong marched forward, laying siege to Guanggu.ⁱⁱⁱ There, the Administrator of Donglai, Liu Ba, and Lü Pi of Changguang, capitulated their territories. Shi Ta was named General of the Eastern Expedition, tasked with subduing the Qiang and Hu peoples in Hexi. Meanwhile, the Left Army under Shi Ting reinforced the siege at Guanggu, culminating in Cao Ni's capture and his subsequent execution in Xiangguo. Le ordered the burial of 30,000 of Ni's followers alive. Jilong, initially intent on annihilating all of Ni's followers, was persuaded by Liu Zheng, the Inspector of Qingzhou, who argued, "I was appointed to shepherd the people. Without them, over whom shall I preside? I shall return." Heeding Zheng's plea, Jilong spared 700 men and women, resettling them in Guanggu to maintain control. Consequently, all counties and fortresses within Qingzhou succumbed.

Le's Inspector of Sizhou, Shi Sheng, launched an assault on Jin's General Who Displays Martial Prowess, Guo Song, at Yangdi, but to no avail. He pressed on to invade Xiangcheng, where he captured over a thousand prisoners and returned.

Le, noting that his military advisor Fan Yuan was mired, elevated him to the post of

Interior Minister of Zhangwu. Soon after, Yuan approached to resign his commission. Le, taken aback by Yuan's worn and tattered garb, voiced his shock, "How has military advisor Fan come to such penury!"

Yuan, ever forthright and simple, freely admitted, "Of late, I have been despoiled by the Jie marauders, left utterly bereft."

Le, with a chuckle, responded, "So the Jie brigands have ravaged even you! Compensation is now due." Yuan, gripped by trepidation, prostrated himself and shed tears of gratitude. Le declared, "My edicts are designed to curb the vulgar throngs, not venerable scholars of your ilk." He bestowed upon Yuan carriages, horses, attire, and a sum of three million, which inspired those driven by greed.

Le's Colonel, Shi Zhan, raided Xiapi, overcoming Jin's General Liu Chang, before proceeding to invade Lanling, where he also triumphed over Liu Xu, the Interior Minister of Pengcheng. The administrators of Dongguan, Zhu Zhen, and Donghai, Xiao Dan, revolted and ceded their territories to Le.

Le made personal visits to both the major and minor academies, quizzing the students on their grasp of the classics, and bestowed silk upon those who distinguished themselves.

Le's reverence for literature was profound. Even amidst military campaigns, he would have Confucian scholars recite historical texts to him. He engaged in discussions about the merits and demerits of ancient rulers based on his interpretations, earning the acclaim of court and Confucian scholars alike for his insights. Upon hearing the "Book of Han" and the story of Li Yiji's advice to restore the six states, he was astounded. "Such a scheme should have faltered!" He exclaimed, "How then did it manage to unify Under the Heaven!" Yet, upon hearing the remonstrance of the Marquis of Liu, he conceded, "It was by this alone that fortune was secured." Thus was his natural sagacity and understanding revealed.

Le mobilized troops from Xuzhou and Yangzhou to join Shi Zhan at Xia Pi. Terrified, Liu Xia fled Xiapi for Sirui.

Shi Sheng attacked Liu Yao's Administrator of Henei, Yin Ping, at Xin'an, slaying him and seizing more than ten strongholds. Capturing over 5,000 households, Sheng returned victorious. The skirmishes between Liu and Shi escalated, with daily battles causing despair among the people of Hedong and Hongnong.

Le designated Right Attendant Huo Hao as Grand Master of Encouragement and Education, alongside Zhu Biao, the Envoy of Agriculture, and Lu Chong, the Commandant of Encouragement. They were tasked with touring the provinces and counties to inspect household registrations and promote agriculture and sericulture. The most successful in these endeavors were honored with the title of Wu Dafu, or Five Senior Officials.

Shi Sheng, passing through Yanshou Pass, raided Xuying, capturing over 10,000 and receiving the surrender of an additional 20,000. He then seized Kang City. In pursuit, Jin's General Guo Song inflicted a severe defeat on Sheng, causing over 1,000 casualties. Regrouping his forces, Sheng encamped at Kang City. Upon learning of Sheng's plight, Le's Interior Minister of Jijun, Shi Cong, rushed to his aid and advanced to engage Guo Mo, capturing over 20,000 men and women. Shi Cong triumphed over Jin generals, including Li Ju and Guo Mo.

Le planned a hunt in nearby suburbs, but his registrar, Cheng Lang, counseled against it. "Assassins like Liu and Ma are shrouded amidst the forest as leaves. Unexpected upheavals

can diminish emperors to mere individuals opposed. Might the calamity that befell Sun Ce not warrant caution? Moreover, the hazards of unbridled galloping, likened to decayed timber and crumbling stumps, have been admonished through the ages."

"My own strength suffices, and I am well equipped to be cautious." Ablaze with vexation, Le retorted, "Your realm is but clerical affairs. Such worries need not concern you."

On that day, during the hunt, his horse crashed into a tree and died, while Le himself narrowly escaped death. He then conceded, "To disregard the words of a faithful subject was my error." Thereupon, he honored Lang with court garb, brocade silk, and the title of Marquis Within the Passes. Hence, courtiers approached, and candid counsel was fervently advanced.

A Commandant under Jin, Lu Qian, defected, delivering Xuchang into Le's hands. Shi Zhan overcame Jin's Inspector of Yanzhou, Tan Bin, at Zou Mountain, who was killed. Le's General of the Palace Gentlemen of the Western Barbarians, Wang Sheng, launched a surprise attack, slaying Bingzhou's Inspector, Cui Kun, and the Interior Minister of Shangdang, Wang Shen, thereby turning Bingzhou over to Le in revolt. Previously, Shi Jilong had engaged Liu Yao's general, Liu Yue, at Shiliang, and following the fortification's fall, Yue was seized and dispatched to Xiangguo. Jilong then turned his forces against Wang Sheng in Bingzhou, resulting in Sheng's death. Alarmed by Liu Yue's capture, Li Ju retreated from Xingyang to his stronghold. Ju's Chief Secretary, Cui Xuan, defected with 2,000 of Ju's soldiers to Le. Thus, the entire Si region, alongside Xuzhou, Yuzhou, and the counties bordering the Huai River, capitulated to Le.

Le ordered the transfer of the sundial from Luoyang to Xiangguo, placing it within the Chanyu's court. He inscribed the names of 39 meritorious officials who assisted in his rise to power on a stone casket, which was placed in the Jiande front hall. He founded the Mulberry and Catalpa Garden in Xiangguo.

Le once made a secret night inspection of the encampment and its sentry points, bearing silk, gold, and silver to bribe the gatekeepers for exit. The gatekeeper of Yongchang Gate, Wang Jia, contemplated apprehending him but desisted upon the arrival of Le's entourage. The next morning, Le convened with Jia, elevating him to the rank of Commandant of Zhenzhong and granting him the title of Marquis Within the Passes.

During Le's visit to Yuanxiang, he summoned the military advisor and scribe, Xu Guang, who, inebriated, failed to appear. Already harboring displeasure towards Guang for his inherent nature and perpetual complaints, Le was thus incensed, leading to Guang's demotion to Ivory Gate. As Le journeyed from Yuanxiang to Ye, with Xu Guang in attendance, Guang, in a display of defiance, briskly rolled up his sleeves and gazed upwards, paying Le no heed. This act of insolence incited Le's ire, prompting him to rebuke Guang, "What slight have I rendered to you, that you dare to show such insolence!" In response, Le imprisoned Guang along with his wife and children.^{iv}

Upon resolving to establish his palace in Ye, Le also aspired to designate his heir, Hong, as the governor there. He confided this scheme to Cheng Xia. Shi Jilong, valuing his substantial contributions and viewing Ye as his stronghold, was disinclined to depart. With the commencement of the Three Terraces' construction and the relocation of his family, Jilong nursed a profound grudge against Xia. In retribution, he sent scores of his men under the veil of night into Xia's residence, where they violated Xia's wife and daughters and

ransacked their garments and possessions.

Le installed Hong as the governor of Ye, endowing him with 10,000 imperial guards. The oversight of all fifty-four battalions under the charioteers and cavalry's command was likewise entrusted to him, with Wang Yang, the Libationer of the Cavalry at the helm of the elite forces, specifically charged with marshaling the six barbarian tribes in support.

Shi Cong launched an assault on Shouchun to no avail, then struck Qunqiu and Fuling, slaughtering and pillaging over 5,000 people, causing great alarm in the capital.

The Administrator of Jimin, Liu Kai, alongside General Zhang He and others, rose in rebellion, slew Xiapi's Interior Minister, Xiahou Jia, and ceded Xiapi to Shi Sheng.

Shi Zhan set upon the Administrator of Henan, Wang Xian, at Zhu, securing its capture.

The General of Dragon Soaring, Wang Guo, defected and yielded Nan Commandery to Le. Jin's Interior Minister of Pengcheng, Liu Xu, reclaimed Lanling and Shicheng, only for Shi Zhan to assault and seize them anew.

Le decreed that provinces and commanderies enforce penalties on those who disturbed graves without resealing them and mandated the provision of coffins and quilts for unsheltered skeletons. He named the General of Ivory Gate, Wang Bo, as a military advisor and scribe, tasked with delineating the nine philosophies, and inaugurated an examination system to identify talent and filial devotion.

The Prefect of Chiping, Shi Huan, captured a black rabbit and offered it up to Le. Cheng Xia and his peers interpreted this for Le as "the auspicious sign of the dragon's flight and the transition of dynasties, with Water succeeding Metal after Jin. The rabbit, a creature of *yin* essence, cloaked in black, the hue of water, indicates that Your Highness is destined to swiftly meet the expectations of both Heaven and the people." In response, a general amnesty was declared. In the 3rd year of Xianhe (328), the era was renamed to Taihe (Supreme Peace).

Shi Kan attacked Jin's Inspector of Yuzhou, Zu Yue, at Shouchun, deploying his forces along the Huai River. Jin's General of Dragon Soaring, Wang Guo, defected, handing over Nan Commandery to Kan. The Commandant of Nanyang, Dong You, likewise rebelled, leading the denizens of Xiangyang to capitulate to Kan. Zu Yue's generals and officers covertly dispatched emissaries to declare their loyalty to Le. Shi Cong and Kan forded the Huai River and overtook Shouchun. Zu Yue retreated to Liyang. More than 20,000 households in Shouchun were thus seized by Cong.

Liu Yao, having vanquished Jilong at Gaohou, besieged Luoyang. Le's administrators of Xingyang, Yin Ju, and Yewang, Zhang Jin, among others, yielded to him, stirring great dread in Xiangguo. Le, purposing to relieve Luoyang himself, was steadfastly dissuaded by his Left and Right Chief Secretaries and commanders, Guo Ao, Cheng Xia, among others. They advised, "Liu Yao, buoyed by victory, stands mighty. Direct contention is fraught with difficulty. The fortresses of Jinyong are well-stocked, and their swift capture is beyond reach. Yao's forces, extended over a thousand *li*, will not sustain. Your personal engagement is ill-advised. Without assurance of triumph, the great cause risks ruin." Enraged, Le brandished his sword, expelling Xia and the rest.

He then pardoned Xu Guang, summoned him, and said, "Liu Yao seizes his advantage at Gaohou and besieges Luoyang. The mediocre ones deemed his forces invincible. Yet, Yao, with a host of 100,000 in armor, has besieged a lone city for a hundred days to no avail. His troops were exhausted. With our initial vigor, we can rout him in a single battle. Should

Luoyang fall, Yao will surely bring death to Jizhou, and from the river northward, sweeping southward, our cause will be undone. Cheng Xia and others oppose my personal involvement. What say you?"

Guang replied, "Liu Yao, exploiting the situation at Gaohou yet failing to advance to Xiangguo, and further defending Jinyong, reveals his incompetence. His host, extended over three seasons, has forfeited the advantage of assault and combat. If the phoenix standard is personally led, victory is certain. The strategy to secure the realm under Heaven lies in this single action. This opportunity is what is termed heaven-sent. To ignore it is to invite calamity."

"Guang's words are verily true," Le laughed.

Fotucheng also assured Le, "Should the host march forth, Liu Yao will surely be captured." Pleased, Le decreed strict martial discipline, with death for any dissenter.

He instructed Shi Kan, Shi Cong, and the Inspector of Yuzhou, Tao Bao, among others, to amass their forces at Xingyang, while Shi Jilong advanced to Shimen, with Shi Sui of the Left Guard overseeing the Central Army. Le, with 40,000 foot and horse, approached Jinyong and forded at Da'e. A fierce gale had frozen the river. But as the host approached, the ice thawed, permitting an untroubled passage. Le deemed divine favor, christening it Lingchang (Divinely Prosperous) Ford.

Le turned to Xu Guang and said, "Should Yao assemble his host at Chenggao Pass, it would be his best stratagem. Should he block the Luo River, second-best. If he sits fast and defends Luoyang, his capture will be effortless."

The hosts convened at Chenggao, comprising 60,000 foot and 27,000 horse. Observing Yao's lack of defense, Le, elated, raised his hand skyward, then touched his brow, proclaiming, "Heaven's will!" He then took a hidden path, emerging between Gong and Zi. Learning Yao had arrayed his host of over 100,000 west of the city, Le's delight grew. He told his men, "You may congratulate me now!"

Le led 40,000 troops from Xuanyang Gate, ascending the erstwhile Taiji front hall. Jilong, with 30,000 footmen, assailed from north of the city to the west, targeting the central army. Shi Kan, Shi Cong, and others, with 8,000 elite horsemen, struck from west to north, engaging the vanguard in a grand battle at Xiyang Gate. Le, in full panoply, emerged at Changhe Gate, flanking them. Yao's host was routed. Shi Kan captured Yao, paraded him before the troops, and beheaded over 50,000 men, their corpses heaped in Jingu.

Le commanded, "Our desire was but to capture one man. Now that we have achieved this, let it be decreed that our warriors restrain their blades and dull their sharpness, allowing our foes a path to reclaim their fates." The army then turned homeward, with Shi Sui and others escorting Yao northward.

Upon this occasion, Zu Yue raised a host yet met defeat and yielded to Le. Le sent Wang Bo to reprimand him, saying, "You have ventured to the utmost bounds of insurrection and now, at the end of your tether, you come to tender your submission. Does my court look like a haven for the wayward and the fugitive? Yet you have the temerity to present yourself without a semblance of shame." He laid before him the edicts issued afore and after, and then granted him mercy.

Liu Yao's son Xi, among others, fled Chang'an for Shanggui. Le sent Jilong in pursuit.

Le toured the provinces and commanderies, summoning and rewarding individuals of

advanced age, filial piety, brotherly respect, agricultural productivity, and scholarly achievement with allotments of grain and silk. He enjoined the shepherds and administrators, both distant and nigh, to herald to their cities that they should voice their grievances unbridled, manifesting the court's sincere solicitude for candid counsel.

Jilong seized Shanggui and sent Registrar Zhao Feng to deliver to Le the state jade seal, the golden seal, and the crown prince's jade seal.^v Jilong then attacked the Jimuqie Qiang in Hexi. He routed them and took tens of thousands captive. The regions of Qin and Long stood wholly subdued. The Shepherd of Liangzhou, Zhang Jun, stricken with dread, sent envoys to acknowledge Le as his overlord, bearing tribute. He relocated 150,000 Di and Qiang tribes to Si and Ji provinces.

Le's ministers deliberated that, given Le's grand achievements and the convergence of propitious signs, it was meet to alter the title in consonance with the expectations of the heaven and earth. Thus, Shi Jilong and others tendered the imperial seal to Le, proposing to endow him with the August Title, yet Le demurred. The ministers implored once more, and thus, in the 5th year of the Xianhe (330), Le presumptuously adopted the title "King of Zhao," conducting himself in the manner of an emperor. He honored his grandfather Ye as King Xuan and his father Zhou as King Yuan. He elevated his consort, Lady Liu, to queen and his firstborn, Hong, to crown prince. He designated his son Hong as Bearer of the Insignia, Cavalier In Regular Attendance, Grand General of Agile Cavalry, Great Chanyu, vesting him with supreme command over all military endeavors, and conferred upon him the title of Prince of Qin. He proclaimed the General of the Left Guard, Bin, as Prince of Taiyuan; his younger son, Hui, as General Who Assists the State and Prince of Nanyang; Duke of Zhongshan, Jilong, as Grand Commandant, acting Prefect of the Imperial Secretariat, and Prince of Zhongshan; Shi Sheng as Prince of Hedong; Shi Kan as Prince of Pengcheng. He appointed Jilong's son, Sui, as Inspector of Jizhou, ennobled him as Prince of Qi, and also entrusted him as Cavalier In Regular Attendance and General of the Guards. Xuan was named General to the Left; Ting Palace Attendant and Prince of Liang. He installed the Chief Clerk to the Left, Guo Ao, as Deputy Director of the Left of the Imperial Secretariat, and the Chief Clerk to the Right, Cheng Xia, as Deputy Director of the Right and acting Minister of Personnel. The Marshal to the Left, Kui An, the Marshal to the Right, Guo Yin, the Gentleman of the Palace Secretariat, Li Feng, and the Frontal Prefect of the Gentlemen of the Palace, Pei Xian, were instated as Imperial Secretaries. Military advisor Xu Guang was appointed as Prefect of the Palace Secretariat and acting Director of the Imperial Secretariat. In recognition of their contributions, titles were bestowed: twenty-one individuals were ennobled as Dukes of the founding commanderies, twenty-four as Marquises, twenty-six as County Dukes, and twenty-two as Marquises, with other civil and military officials accorded distinctions in like manner.

Palace Attendant Ren Bo and his counterparts deliberated, proposing that Zhao, successor of the Metal, should embody the virtue of Water. For banners, black would be esteemed; for sacrificial animals, white preferred; and the communal and sacrificial ceremonies to be held in the twelfth month. Le assented.

Le issued an edict stating, "Henceforth, when matters of doubt and weight arise, let the assembly of the eight seats, along with the appointed officials, convey their concerns to the Eastern Hall for discussion and resolution. Should matters of the military and the state

demand attention, command shall be issued to the Imperial Secretaries to make their appearance, heedless of winter's cold or summer's heat, be it at dusk or in the night's deep."

Le deemed Zu Yue disloyal to the dynasty and put him to death along with his sons and over a hundred of his kin.

The ministers, with earnestness, beseeched Le to don the August Title. And thus Le, with presumption, ascended as Emperor, heralding a general amnesty across the land and renaming the era Jianping (Establish Peace). He moved the capital from Xiangguo to Linzhang. In posthumous reverence, he exalted his great-great-grandfather as Emperor Shun, his great-grandfather as Emperor Wei, his grandfather as Emperor Xuan, his father as Emperor Shizong Yuan, and his mother as Empress Dowager Yuanzhao. Titles were conferred upon civil and military officials according to their merits. He elevated his consort, Lady Liu, to Empress. Moreover, he instituted the ranks of Zhaoyi (Bright Consort) and Furen (Madame), granting them stature akin to that of a Duke; Guipin (Noble Consort) and Guiren (Noble Lady), their ranks paralleling that of a Marquis, with one appointee for each distinction; Sanying (Three Excellences) and Jiuhua (Nine Brilliances), their prestige matching that of an Earl; Shuyuan (Virtuous Lady) and Shuyi (Virtuous Consort), their status mirroring that of a Viscount; Ronghua (Glorious Beauty) and Meiren (Beauty), their honor comparable to that of a Baron, all the while focusing on the selection of individuals of virtue and merit, not setting bounds on the number of these positions.

Le's military inspector of Jingzhou, Guo Jing, alongside the Colonel of Southern Barbarians, Dong You, raided Xiangyang. Le sent a swift decree to Jing, bidding him withdraw and hold at Fancheng, with orders to obscure the standards and feign desolation, as though the place stood abandoned. Should any come to reconnoiter, they were to be advised, "We stand steadfast for our preservation. In seven or eight days, a vast cavalry shall descend, rendering escape futile." Jing commanded his men to cleanse their horses at the ford incessantly, through day and night without stopping. The scouts returned and conveyed their findings to the General of the Palace Gentlemen of the South, Zhou Fu, who, convinced of Le's imminent overwhelming onslaught, was stricken with dread and took flight to Wuchang. Jing made his entry into Xiangyang. His forces abstained from any personal plunder, thus the townsfolk found solace. Jin's General Who Pacifies the North, Wei Gai's younger brother Xia, among others leading Gai's legions, capitulated to Jing from Shicheng. Jing razed Xiangyang, transposed its citizenry north of the Mian River, and bolstered Fancheng for its safeguarding.

In Qinzhou, Wang Qiang of the Xiutu rose in revolt against Le. Inspector Lin Shen sent Commander Guan Guang with the provincial legion to quell this insurrection, yet they were vanquished by Qiang. Such defeat casted Longyou into great disarray, inciting all the Di and Qiang to rebellion. Le commanded Shi Sheng to advance and seize Longcheng. Wang Qiang, who was locked in a bitter feud with his nephew Zhuo, found himself outmanoeuvred as Sheng, through bribery, swayed Zhuo to join in a pincer against him. Bested, Qiang took flight to Liangzhou. Le relocated over 5,000 households of the eminent barbarian clans from Qinzhou to Yongzhou.

Le issued an edict stating, "Henceforth, all matters of the law shall be strictly governed by the statutes. For those upon whom I have visited punishment or execution in a fit of ire, or against whom I have decreed in a moment of wrath, should their virtue and station be lofty

and beyond the reach of chastisement, or should they be the solitary offspring of those who have toiled and perished in loyal service, having unwittingly fallen under censure, let each case be separately laid before me. I shall then deliberate and determine a course of action."

In Tangyang, Chen Zhu's wife gave birth to three sons. Le bestowed upon him garments, provisions, a nursemaid, and absolved him from duties for three years.

At this time, Goguryeo and Sushen sent their arrowheads. Yuwen Wugu proffered esteemed steeds to Le. The Shepherd of Liangzhou, Zhang Jun, sent his Chief Clerk, Ma Shen, with a map to present envoys from Gaochang, Yutian, Shanshan, and Dawan, tendering their native goods. Jin's Shepherd of Jingzhou, Tao Kan, sent Wang Fu, who bore the dual office of Chief Clerk, on an embassy to Le, bearing treasures and exotic beasts from beyond the Yangtze. Qinzhou offered a white beast and a white deer and Jingzhou a white fowl and a white hare. Jiyin bore trees that entwined. Sweet dew descended in Yuanxiang. Le, regarding these as propitious signs and the fact that distant lands showed homage, proclaimed amnesty for transgressions meriting three years or less, and forgave the prior year's levies for the populace. He extended a special reprieve for those in Liangzhou under sentence of death, elevated all accountants in Liangzhou to the rank of Gentleman of the Palace, and conferred upon them ten bolts of silk and ten *jīn* of cotton. During a sacrifice in the southern suburb, a white mist ascended from the altar to the sky, which greatly heartened Le. He returned to the palace and declared amnesty for offenses meriting four years or less. He sent envoys to invest Zhang Jun with the title of Duke of Wuwei Commandery, endowing him with the lands of various commanderies in Liangzhou. Le himself plowed the ceremonial field, returned to the palace, and proclaimed amnesty for crimes meriting five years or less, bestowing gold and silk upon officials beneath the rank of duke and marquis in accordance with their station. Following a solar eclipse, Le eschewed the main hall for three days, mandating all dukes, ministers, and officials to submit sealed reports. He decreed the demolition of all irregular temples and shrines across the provinces and commanderies, save those capable of summoning clouds and rain for the benefit of the populace. The counties were enjoined to erect new temples, plant favorable trees, and rank them as per the standards set for mountains and rivers.

When Le conceived the construction of the Ye Palace, the Minister of Justice, Xu Xian, submitted a letter of stern rebuke. Enraged, Le declared, "Should this aged servant not be beheaded, the construction of my palace shall indeed falter!" He thus decreed the Imperial Censor to detain him.

The Prefect of the Palace Secretariat, Xu Guang, advanced. "Your Majesty was endowed with a heavenly wisdom that eclipses Tang and Yu, yet now turns away from the counsel of the faithful. Does this not resemble the tyrants Xia Gui and Shang Xin? If their advice holds merit, let it be employed; if otherwise, it ought still to be tolerated. How can it be that for mere candidness, a minister is executed in but a single day?"

Le sighed. "To rule as monarch does not permit one to wield power so tyrannically! Am I not aware of the loyalty in his speech? That was merely in jest. If a family with a hundred bolts of silk still desires another residence, what more for one blessed with the riches of all under Heaven and the honor of ten thousand chariots! It shall eventually need repair. Let the construction be halted, to honor the spirit of my honest advisors." He rewarded Xian with a hundred bolts of silk and a hundred *hu* of rice.

He further decreed that the dukes, ministers, and officials annually nominate one individual each of virtuous and upright character, candor, exceptional talent, utmost filial piety, and integrity. Those topping the evaluation would be designated as Deliberative Clerks, those of intermediate standing as Attendant Officers, and those of lesser rank as Gentlemen of the Palace. This scheme permitted the recommended to nominate others in turn, widening the avenue for talent acquisition. He initiated the erection of the Mingtang, Biyong, and Lingtai west of Xiangguo city.

At that juncture, heavy rains caused the rivers in the northwest of Zhongshan to swell, sweeping away more than a million colossal timbers and gathering them at Tangyang. Le, greatly heartened, addressed his courtiers, "Perceive you not? This is not a disaster. It is the will of Heaven that we construct the capital at Ye." He then tasked the Minister of the Imperial Household, Ren Wang, and the Waterworks Commissioner, Zhang Jian, among others, to oversee the edification of the Ye Palace, with Le personally delineating the designs and specifications.

The savage Ba of Shu from the three commanderies of Zitong, Jianping, and Hangu capitulated to Le.

Viewing Chengzhou as the heartland and the erstwhile capital of the Han and Jin, Le nurtured the ambition to shift the capital once more. Consequently, he named Luoyang as the Southern Capital and set up a governmental bureau there, assigning a Supervisor of the Imperial Secretariat in Luoyang.

At a banquet in honor of envoys from Goguryeo and Yuwen Wugu, after having imbibed, Le inquired of Xu Guang, "To which founding ruler of yore might I be compared?"

Guang responded, "Your Imperial Majesty, with your divine martial prowess and strategic acumen, eclipses even the High Emperor. Your valor and illustrious deeds surpass those of the founder of Wei. Since the era of the Three Sovereigns, none can rival your greatness, save perhaps Xuanyuan."

Le chuckled, "Is it not the mark of every man to know his own measure? Your flattery verges on being excessive. Were I to meet the High Emperor, I would face north in servitude, ready to compete with Han and Peng in a whip race for supremacy. Encountering Guangwu, together we would stride through the Central Plains, with it unknown whose hand would claim the life of the deer. A true man's deeds should shine plainly like the sun and moon. I could never emulate Cao Mengde and Sima Zhongda, who, with their fox-like cunning, preyed upon orphans and widows to seize the realm Under the Heaven. I am to be counted among the likes of the two Lius. Xuanyuan is beyond comparison!"

Every minister in attendance prostrated themselves, exclaiming, "Ten thousand years!"

Jin's General Zhao Yin successfully seized Matou. Shi Kan sent General Han Yong for relief, but he arrived too late. Subsequently, he raided Nansha and Haiyu, capturing over 5,000 individuals. Initially, after Guo Jing's retreat to Fancheng, the royal forces had reinstated their garrison at Xiangyang. By this time, Jing once again overran it and left a garrison behind.

The tempest poured. Lightning struck the gates of Jiande Hall and the western gate of Xiangguo market, claiming five souls. At Mount Jie in Xihe, Hailstones, large as hen's eggs, carpeted the ground three *chi* deep, burying it over a *zhang* in places, leaving tens of thousands of travelers, birds, and beasts lifeless in its wake. The storm ravaged through

Taiyuan, Leping, Wuxiang, Zhaojun, Guangping, and Julu, stretching over a thousand *li*. Trees were uprooted, crops laid waste, as if the very earth had been swept clean.

Clad in formal attire, Le stood within the Eastern Hall, addressing Xu Guang, "What precedence do such calamities hold in the annals?"

Guang replied, "Such disasters have befallen the Zhou, Han, Wei, and Jin alike. Though the workings of heaven and earth they may be, a sagacious ruler perceives them as omens, hence the homage to the Heaven's ire. Last year's ban on Cold Food Festival, which was in honor of Jie Zitui - a deity from the imperial homeland - might have been ill-advised for alteration."^{vi} A single lament can erode the very path of the king; what more of the collective dismay of deities, let alone the stir of the Supreme Deity's wrath? While we cannot mandate uniformity all under heaven, the regions around Mount Jie, bestowed by Duke Wen of Jin, should be allowed their homage."

Le issued a decree stating, "The Cold Food Festival, an ancient custom of Bingzhou, is ingrained in me. An alteration of it is beyond me. The earlier counsel regarding Jie Zitui as a mere vassal's subject, unworthy of a sovereign's reverence, thus adopted, might have inadvertently beckoned this disaster. Despite Zitui being the guardian spirit of my homeland, neither he nor any unauthorized deities shall wreak havoc. Let the Imperial Secretariat expedite a review of ancient edicts for a resolution." Officials pleaded for the restoration of the festival, the planting of auspicious trees, and the erection of shrines for universal observance, with state provisions for the rites.

Wei Xiao, Le's Gentleman of the Yellow Gate, countered, "According to the *Spring and Autumn*, the misplacement of ice leads to its melting, releasing *yin* energy as hail. What, then, caused hail before Zitui's time? This is but a misbalance of *yin* and *yang*. And if Zitui was virtuous, how could he wreak such havoc? The realm of the dead would surely refute this. Now, although we build icehouses, I fear they're not situated in lands of extreme *yin*, hence the leakage of energy as hail. While Zitui was indeed loyal and upright, confining his worship between Mian and Jie might not resonate with all under heaven." Le agreed. He relocated the icehouses to places of utmost *yin*, thereby restoring the Cold Food Festival in Bingzhou to its original practice.

Le decreed that his Crown Prince oversee the submission of memorials from the Imperial Secretariat, appointing the Palace Regular Attendant, Yan Zhen, to deliberate their approval. Only matters of significant military campaigns and judicial decisions were to be presented to him. From then on, Zhen's influence and authority overshadowed even the sovereign and his ministers. It was said that traps for sparrows could be set at the gates of Jilong, such was his displeasure.

Guo Jing, raiding southward into Jiangxi, was countered by Huan Xuan, the Jin's General of the Gentlemen of the South. He seized the opportunity to attack Fancheng, capturing many and before withdrawing. Jing quickly returned to relieve Fancheng, engaging in battle at the Nie River. His vanguard was heavily defeated, and while Xuan also suffered great losses, he managed to reclaim the spoils and withdrew. Xuan then advanced southward to take Xiangyang, leaving troops to garrison it.

During his visit to Ye, Le stopped by Shi Jilong's residence and reassured him, "One should not rush to achieve both fame and fortune. Wait until the palace and halls are completed, and I shall build a mansion for you. Do not be disheartened by your current

modesty." Jilong, removing his cap, knelt in gratitude, to which Le responded, "We share the realm together. What need is there for thanks?"

A meteor, as large as an elephant and with a tail resembling a serpent, streaked from the North Star to the southwest for over fifty *zhang*, its brilliance illuminating the earth, before falling into the river with a sound heard for nearly nine hundred *li*. A black dragon was seen in a well in Ye, and Le looked upon the dragon with a pleased expression, holding court with his ministers in Ye.

He ordered the establishment of educational offices in each commandery, appointing two Erudites of Libation and 150 disciples per commandery, with those excelling in three examinations being promoted to the central government. Thus, five students from the Imperial Academy were appointed as Assistant Gentlemen for Literary Works, tasked with documenting current affairs. During a severe drought, Le personally attended the Court of Judicial Review, lightening the sentences of those convicted of minor crimes and providing sustenance and baths to those with heavier sentences, postponing their final judgment to autumn. Before he could return to the palace, a generous rain began to fall.

Le visited his Fengshui Palace. Due to the grievance of his ailment, he was compelled to return. He summoned Shi Jilong, the Crown Prince Hong, the Palace Regular Attendant Yan Zhen, among others, to keep vigil during his seclusion brought on by sickness. Jilong, overstepping his bounds, severed Hong and Zhen, along with all other courtiers and kin, from tidings of Le's fluctuating condition. With guile, he summoned Shi Hong (Prince of Qin) and Shi Kan back to Xiangguo. Upon a slight mending of his affliction, and upon beholding Hong, Le cried out in astonishment, "What brings the Prince of Qin hither? His station was ordained for times as these. Was it a call that brought him or did he venture of his own volition? Those beckoned shall meet their demise!" Jilong, stricken with dread, replied, "The Prince of Qin came merely out of longing for a brief sojourn. He will be sent away forthwith." When asked again a few days later, Jilong proclaimed, "He was sent forthwith by decree, now already on his mid-journey." He ensured Hong's presence outside, not sending him away.

A plague of locusts spread across Guang'a. Jilong secretly dispatched his son Sui with 3,000 horsemen to the afflicted areas. The Mars interfered with the Pleiades constellation. A meteor fell sixty *li* northeast of Ye, preceded by red, black, and yellow clouds like curtains, tens of spans long, crisscrossing, with a sound like thunder, heating the air as it struck the ground and raising dust to the skies. A ploughman went to investigate and found the earth still burning. He saw a light, blue stone, a square *chi* in size, which rang like a chime when struck.

As Le's illness grew severe, he issued a final decree: "Let my interment be three days following my demise. After the burial, let all officials, both within and without, dispense with mourning rites and not eschew the practices of marriages, sacrifices, drinking wine, or eating meat. Military governors and administrators must not forsake their charges to mourn. Wrap my form in the garments of daily wear, convey me in a chariot of ordinary make, and let there be no hoarding of gold, treasure, nor prized possessions with me in the earth. Daya, in his youth and rashness, mayhap lacks the mettle to uphold the burden of my will. From Zhongshan downwards, let each adhere to their appointed tasks, straying not from my decrees. Daya and Bin, in brotherhood, ought to sustain one another commendably, regarding the lineage of Sima as a solemn caution in the pursuit of modesty and reverence.

The Prince of Zhongshan would do well to ponder deeply upon the tales of Zhou and Huo, lest he furnish the tongues of posterity with matter for discourse." In the 7th year of Xianhe (332),¹ he passed away, aged sixty, after a reign of fifteen years. His body was entombed in secrecy within a mountain vale at night,^{vii} with a ceremonial barrow raised at Gaoping Tomb.^{viii} In death, he was falsely styled Emperor Ming, with the temple name Gaozu.

¹ This should be the 8th year of Xianhe (333). Both the Annals and the Treatise on Astronomy confirm Le died in the 7th month of the 8th year of Xianhe. His reign, from the 2nd year of Emperor Yuan's Daxing era (319) to the 8th year of Xianhe, spanned fifteen years. The "Book of Wei" notes: In the 5th year of Emperor Lie... Le died, and his son Daya took the throne. The 5th year of Emperor Lie matches the 8th year of Jin's Xianhe era. The 7th year death claim is incorrect.

Shi Hong

Hong, courtesy name Daya, was Le's second son. From a young age, he exhibited filial piety and conducted himself with humility. He studied the classics under Du Gu and recited the statutes with Xu Xian. Le remarked, "In this era of discord, we cannot depend solely upon the pursuits of the learned." Thus, he had Liu Zheng and Ren Bo teach him military strategies, and Wang Yang instructed him in spear and swordsmanship. Appointed as the heir apparent, he took command of the central army and later served as the General of the Guards during the summer. He was granted the authority to convene his own staff and eventually stationed in Ye.

Upon Le's usurpation of the throne, Hong was made Crown Prince. Renowned for his receptiveness towards the learned and his delight in the literary arts, he was ever surrounded by those steeped in Confucian virtues. Le once said to Xu Guang, "Daya is too gentle, hardly resembling a general's son." Guang replied, "Emperor Gao of Han seized the realm under heaven astride his steed, whilst Xiaowen preserved it with silence and humility. Such is the way of heaven that the descendants of sages shall eclipse their forebears." This response found favor with Le.

Guang further advised, "The Crown Prince, marked by his benevolence, filial piety, and deference, stands in stark contrast to the Prince of Zhongshan, known for his ferocity and guile. Should you be taken from us abruptly, the realm's stability would be imperiled. It is thus judicious to curtail the Prince of Zhongshan's dominion and hasten the Crown Prince's involvement in the governance of the state." Le received this advice with grace.

Cheng Xia also addressed Le, saying, "The Prince of Zhongshan, peerless in valor and cunning among your subjects, harbors ambitions not apparent to Your Majesty, viewing others with contempt. Long entrusted with unilateral command, his influence reverberates within and beyond our borders. His disposition is cruel, merciless, and untrustworthy. His offspring, mature in years, partake in this military clout. While Your Majesty reigns, tranquillity prevails, yet I harbor doubts about his support for a youthful sovereign. It is prudent to act pre-emptively in order to secure the great cause."

Le retorted, "The realm under Heaven remains unsettled, and martial tribulations persist. Daya, young and inexperienced, needs strong support. The Prince of Zhongshan, a stalwart ally from the outset, is akin to family. Why must it come to what you say? I am poised to entrust him with duties akin to those of Yi and Huo. Your fears stem from the prospect of serving a youthful monarch, anxious you will not monopolize the influence due an imperial uncle. You, too, shall be included in the governance, so let not your fears overwhelm you."

Xia wept, "My words are solely for the public good, yet Your Majesty dismisses them with personal favors. Is this the conduct of a sagacious ruler, open to earnest counsel? Though Zhongshan was nurtured by the Empress Dowager, he is not of your lineage and should not be counted upon as kin. With modest achievements under his belt, you have already compensated him and his forebears with lavish honors. The Wei entrusted the Sima family, culminating in their eventual downfall. Reflecting upon this, what future benefit can the Prince of Zhongshan offer? Fortunate enough to be entrusted with duties in the Eastern Palace, if I refrain from speaking, then who shall? Should Zhongshan remain unchecked, I

foresee a time when the state will be bereft of its offerings." Le turned a deaf ear to these admonitions.

Departing, Xia confided in Xu Guang, "The Emperor has spoken. The Crown Prince's standing teeters on the brink of peril. What is to be done?"

Guang replied, "Zhongshan bears enmity towards us both. The threat looms not just over the state but encroaches upon our kin. We must devise a strategy to shield both the state and our kin, lest we await calamity in idleness."

Guang found a moment and said to Le, "Your Majesty has brought peace to eight provinces and claimed dominion over all within the Seas, yet why does your countenance betray a hint of displeasure?"

Le replied, "Wu and Shu remain unconquered, our systems of script and passage are disparate, and the Sima lineage persists in Danyang. I fear posterity might judge me as having fallen short of the annals of history. Such thoughts, unbidden, manifest upon my visage."

Guang said, "In your subject's view, Your Majesty is beleaguered by the ailments of the heart and core, why then should you be vexed by the concerns of the limbs? Wei, succeeding Han, established the rightful succession of emperors. Though Liu Bei reclaimed dominion over Ba and Shu, it does not signify the undying flame of Han. Wu, though it straddles the east of the river, cannot tarnish the splendor of Wei. Your Majesty, having encompassed the twin capitals, stands as the sovereign of the Middle Kingdom. What then distinguishes the progeny of Sima from Xuande, or the Li clan from Sun Quan? Should the Mandate of Heaven not reside with Your Majesty, to whom else should it fall? These are but light afflictions of the limbs. The Prince of Zhongshan, under Your Majesty's enlightened strategy and divine wisdom, is acclaimed nearly your equal in valor. Yet, his heart harbors cruelty and deceit, a penchant for opportunism devoid of the loyalty seen in Yi and Huo. The weight of titles and influence bestowed upon his kin tilts the balance against the royal house. His discontent is palpable, evidenced by his recent disdain for the Crown Prince during a feast in the eastern palace. Your Majesty, in your forbearance, has suffered him, yet I dread that beyond Your Majesty's ten-thousand-year reign, brambles shall overtake the ancestral temple. This, indeed, is a malady of the heart and core which demands Your Majesty's attention." Le, in silence, gave no heed to these counsels.

Upon Le's death, Jilong captured Hong and presented him to the court, while demanding the arrest of Cheng Xia and Xu Guang for the Court Judge. He called his son Sui to lead troops into the palace, scattering both civil and military officials. Hong, stricken with dread, offered his throne to Jilong. Jilong retorted, "The emperor has passed and his heir is to ascend the throne. How could I, but a humble servant, dare to sow discord in such matters!" Hong, beset with tears, pressed for abdication. Now incensed, Jilong declared, "Should you be found wanting, the realm under Heaven shall of its own accord convene a grand deliberation. It is not a matter for us to conjecture ahead of its time!"

In the 7th year of Xianhe (332),² he forced Hong to take the throne, renaming the era Yanxi, and promoted all officials by one rank. Cheng Xia and Xu Guang were executed. Hong named Jilong Chancellor, King of Wei, and Great Chanyu, awarded him the Nine Bestowments, and granted him thirteen commanderies including Wei Commandery, giving

² Should be 8th year of Xianhe (333). See footnote 1.

him overall control of government affairs. Jilong feigned reluctance but eventually accepted. He declared an amnesty within his territories for all crimes short of death. He made his wife, Lady Zheng, Queen of Wei, and his son, Sui, Crown Prince of Wei, with titles including Bearer with the Imperial Insignia, Palace Attendant, Supreme Commander, Grand General, and Director of the Imperial Secretariat; his son Xuan became Bearer with the Imperial Insignia, Great General of Chariots and Cavalry, and Inspector of Jizhou, titled Prince of Hejian; his son Tao was named Vanguard General and Director of Retainers, titled Prince of Le'an; his sons Zun, Jian, and Bao were titled Prince of Qi, Prince of Dai, and Prince of Leping respectively; and Prince Bin of Taiyuan was moved to Prince of Zhangwu. Le's former civil and military officials were appointed as Left or Right Chancellors, while Jilong's staff and allies filled key roles in government and palace. The Crown Prince's palace was named Chongxun Palace, where Le's wife, Lady Liu, and others resided. Jilong claimed Le's finest concubines, chariots, treasures, and personal belongings. Kui An and Guo Yin were appointed Left and Right Directors of the Imperial Secretariat, respectively.

Lady Liu said to Shi Kan, "The imperial grace teeters on the brink of extinction. What schemes do you harbor?"

Kan replied, "The loyal servants of the late emperor have been cast aside, the multitude of soldiers no longer heed our call, and within the confines of the palace, we are bereft of counsel. I propose an escape to Yanzhou, to secure Linqiu, to place the Prince of Nanyang at our vanguard, and to proclaim an edict under the auspices of the Empress Dowager to all the regional shepherds and administrators, urging them to muster forces of virtue to rise against this despotism. Our success is nigh assured."

Lady Liu said, "The exigency of our plight demands swift action, lest hesitation breeds unforeseen consequences." Kan agreed and set out in disguise with a contingent of light cavalry to attack Yanzhou. He missed his opportunity, failed in his endeavor and was forced to flee southward to Qiaocheng. Jilong sent General Guo Tai, among others, in pursuit, who apprehended Kan at Chengfu, and conveyed him to Xiangguo, where he was condemned to death by fire. Shi Hui was recalled to Xiangguo. Upon the revelation of Lady Liu's conspiracy, Jilong ordered her execution. He elevated Hong's mother, Lady Cheng, to Empress Dowager.

Shi Sheng held Guanzhong, Shi Lang Luoyang, both raising troops. Jilong left his son Sui to guard Xiangguo, leading 70,000 foot and horse to strike Lang at Jinyong. Jinyong fell. Lang was captured, mutilated, and beheaded. The host advanced to Chang'an, with Shi Ting as Vanguard Grand Commander. Sheng sent General Guo Quan with 20,000 Xianbei troops from Shegui tribe as vanguard, himself with the main army following to Puban. At Tong Pass, the vanguard clashed with Ting in a major battle and was defeated. Ting and the Chancellor's Left Chief Clerk Liu Wei fell in battle. Jilong retreated to Mianchi, leaving a trail of corpses over 300 *li*. The Xianbei secretly communicated with Jilong, betrayed Sheng and attacked him. Sheng was halted at Puban, unaware of Ting's death. He fled alone on horseback to Chang'an in fear. Guo Quan regrouped 3,000 troops, holding Weirui in a stalemate with Cavalry Commandant Shi Guang. Sheng fled Chang'an and hid in Jitou Mountain, while General Jiang Ying staunchly defended the city. Hearing of Sheng's flight, Jilong advanced his troops into the pass and captured Chang'an after more than ten days, executing Jiang Ying among others. He stationed generals in Qian and moved over 100,000 Hu households from Yong and Qin east of the pass. Sheng was killed by his men on Jitou

Mountain. Jilong, back in Xiangguo, declared a general amnesty. He subtly suggested that Hong commission the construction of the Wei Platform, emulating the ancient precedent of Wei's assistance to Han.

After Sheng's fall, Guo Quan took Shanggui and surrendered. An edict named Quan General Who Guards the West and Inspector of Qinzhou. Jingzhao, Xinping, Fufeng, Pingyi, and Beidi rallied to him. Hong's Western Garrison Commander Shi Guang clashed with Quan, defeated. Jilong sent Guo Ao, his son Bin, among others, with 40,000 foot and horse to campaign against them, stopping at Huayin. Shanggui's elite killed Quan and surrendered. Over 30,000 households from Qinzhou were moved to the Qing and Bing's commanderies. Southern Di tribes and Yang Nandi, among others, sent hostages for peace. Chen Liangfu of Chang'an fled to the Black Qiang, stirring Northern Qiang's King of Four Corners, Bo Juda, and others to disturb Beidi and Fengyi, holding out against Shi Bin. Shi Tao, with horsemen, attacked Juda from behind. With Bin pinching, they defeated him. Juda fled to Malan Mountain. Guo Ao and others pursued northward but met defeat by Qiang, with seven or eight out of ten dead. Bin regrouped and returned to Sancheng. Hearing this, Jilong was enraged and sent an envoy to execute Guo Ao. Shi Hong's (Prince of Qin) protest led to his imprisonment.

Hong personally visited Jilong with the imperial seal and ribbon to convey his intention of abdication. Jilong said, "The people under the Heaven ought to engage in their own counsel. Why do you broach this matter of your own accord?" Upon his return to the palace, Hong, his cheeks moistened with tears, confessed to his mother, "The late emperor verily leaves no heir behind!" Soon after, Jilong sent Chancellor Guo Yin with a decree to depose Hong, relegating him to the rank of Prince of Haiyang. With a composure undisturbed, Hong ascended the carriage, addressing the assembly of officials, "Unfit am I to bear the heavy mantle of rule, and before my successors, I stand abashed. This too is the decree of Heaven. What more can be said?" The officials, one and all, were moved to tears, whilst the palace maidens lamented grievously.

In the 1st year of Xiankang (335), Hong, alongside Lady Cheng and both Hong and Hui, were confined within the walls of Chongxun Palace. Ere long, they were put to death. Hong reigned for two years and was twenty-two years old at the time.

Zhang Bin

Zhang Bin, courtesy name Mengsun, hailed from Zhongqiu in Zhao Commandery. His father, Yao, was the Administrator of Zhongshan. Bin, a lover of learning since youth, delved into classics and history, ignoring the trivial. With a spirit unconfined and principles steadfast, he often told his siblings, "In my own estimation, my sagacity and discernment are not inferior to that of Zifang. It is but the absence of a Gaozu that I lament."

He served as a Commandant under Prince of Zhongqiu, a role not to his liking, from which he withdrew on account of illness. Amidst the chaos that engulfed the Yongjia era, as Shi Le ventured forth into Shandong as General Who Assists the Han under Liu Yuanhai, Bin confided, "I have observed many a general, yet it is solely the barbarian General with whom I might forge greatness." He went to the military encampment, brandishing his sword, and with a resounding call, sought audience with Le. At first underestimated, Bin's strategies soon earned Le's respect, who made him chief strategist.

Bin's insights were precise, his plans thorough, underpinning Le's victories - All thanks to Bin. As Chief Clerk of the Right, Major Enforcer, and Marquis of Puyang, he was favored and respected beyond his peers. Yet, he stayed humble and cautious, open-hearted towards his subordinates. Regardless of their intelligence or foolishness, all who came to him felt understood. His administration was clear, disciplined, free of favoritism, instructive, always crediting others for successes. Le valued him highly, often adjusting his demeanor and speech in Bin's presence. He called him "Marquis of the Right" instead of his name, setting him apart in his court.

At Bin's death, Le himself attended the mourning, his sorrow profound amongst his companions. In tribute, he posthumously conferred upon Bin the titles of Cavalier In Regular Attendance, Grand Master of Splendid Happiness of the Right, and honors paralleling those of the Three Dukes, bestowing upon him the posthumous name "Jing." As the funeral cortege made its way to Zhengyang Gate, Le, his eyes brimming with tears, turned to those beside him and lamented, "Does the Heaven disdain the fruition of my ventures, that it should so prematurely bereave me of my Marquis of the Right?" Cheng Xia succeeded as the Chief Clerk of the Right. Whenever Le found himself at odds with Xia, he would exhale a sigh, remarking, "The Marquis of the Right has left me to toil alongside these individuals. Is this not the height of cruelty?" Thus, he would spend the day in tears.

ⁱ *TPYL658:*

The Biography of Fotucheng states:

Later Zhao's imperial secretaries, Zhang Li and Zhang Liang, were rich and built a great pagoda for Buddha. Cheng said, "True service to Buddha is found in a state of purity and the absence of desires, with a heart brimming with compassion. Though the lay followers may outwardly honor the grand Dharma, their hearts are yet ensnared by greed and stinginess. Their indulgence in hunting knows no bounds, and their pursuit of wealth is relentless. They are, in essence, embracing the sins of this world. What hope then do they harbor for divine blessings?"

ⁱⁱ *TPYL391:*

Jin Zhongxing Shu notes:

Shi Le and Li Yang were neighbors. Yang, of a stubborn and unyielding nature, would annually compete with Le at the hemp pool, engaging in physical contests where victory and defeat were shared between them. Upon his rise to prominence, Le summoned Yang, inviting him into his confidence to reminisce about their past encounters over drinks. With a hearty laugh, he questioned Yang, "As years have advanced, do your arms still possess their former strength? Do you still find yourself in combat with others? In days of yore, I found myself vexed by your fists, just as you were wearied by my forceful grip." Following this, he lavished Yang with gifts and, on that very day, named him Colonel of the Chariots and Cavalry and Administrator of Shixing.

iii *TPYL160:*

In the *Chronicles of Qi*, it is recounted: In the fifth year of Yongjia under Jin (311), when Cao Ni of Mouping served as the inspector in Donglai, he constructed a fortress by a vast (guang) ravine, which lent the stronghold considerable defensibility (gu). Thus, it was named Guanggu City. Beside the city lay the Mouth of the Five Dragons.

iv *TPYL653:*

Cui Hong's "Records of Later Zhao" notes: Shi Le confined Xu Guang, the Director of the Palace Secretariat, in Xiangyang's national prison. There, Guang annotated classics and histories, penning over a hundred thousand words.

v *TPYL350:*

"The Book of Zhao" notes: Shi Hu and his forces overcame Liu Yao at Shanggui, seizing two hundred horses, thirty red woolen rugs, gold, silver, steppe lances, bows, and quivers.

TPYL682:

"The Register of Jade Seals" notes: In the fifth year of Emperor Huai of Jin's Yongjia era, Wang Mi took Luoyang, captured Emperor Huai with the six imperial seals, delivering them to Liu Yao. Shi Le later annexed them, the seals falling into Le's hands. Le inscribed "Heaven's Mandate to the Shi Family" on one, an inscription now lost. After Ran Min annihilated Le's [lineage], the seals passed to Min. Following Min's fall, General Jiang Gan kept the seals.

vi *"Beitang Shuchao" 143:*

"The Book of Zhao" states that during Shi Le's Jianwu period, from the Cold Food Festival to the 5th month, storms brought thunder, rain, and hail so large they resembled pellets, flooding lands three *chi* high. In Bingzhou, Le consulted Xu Guang about it, who attributed it to the prior year's neglect of the Cold Food Festival. Le restored the observance.

"Beitang Shuchao" 155:

"Records of Ye" corrects a misconception about Bingzhou's custom of honoring Jie Zitui on the fifth day of the fifth month with fires. It's not a day for mourning or fasting. Instead, at noon in the north, this day celebrates the drying of yin energy after a hundred days, signaling the Earth's cycle's end.

"Xin Lun":

The people of Taiyuan Commandery, due to Jie Zitui, abstained from cooking with fire for five days during the deep winter. Even in cases of illness or emergency, they still dare not

break this tradition.

vii *TPYL760:*

Wang Yin's *JS* notes: In the era of Shi Le, there was a saying, " A cup of food, with two spoons. When Shi Le dies, people will not know."

viii *TPYL556:*

Records of Ye notes: Shi Le's grave lies thirty *li* southwest of Xiangguo, called High Grave. No walls built, no trees planted. A grand hall of five rooms stood, housing statues of Le and his chief ministers. East of this, a tower was built. Hu's grave found its place northwest of Ye. After his burial, Ye fell into turmoil. The site remained unnamed. It was soon dug up, revealing both graves as decoys. Shi Le and Hu rested elsewhere, deep in the mountains.

TPHYJ44:

Shi Le's tomb, forty *chi* tall, lies forty *li* southwest of Lingchuan County, within the Tian River.

TPHYJ55:

Shi Le's mound, fifteen *li* southwest of Longgang County, was falsely called "Gaoping Tomb." According to the "Records of the Provinces and States": "Le's body was laid in Mount Qu. The night they buried him, over ten coffins took different paths, a ruse to bewilder the people."

106. Chapter 6 Shi Jilong Part One



Shi Jilong was nephew to Le. He bore a name tabooed by Taizu's temple [name],¹ hence his courtesy name was used here. His grandfather was Beixie, and his father Koumi. Young Jilong was taken in by Zhu, Le's father, so some referred to him as Le's younger brother. A seer, struck by the boy at six or seven, proclaimed, "This child, graced with a visage most rare and bones of vigor, possesses a nobility beyond utterance."ⁱⁱ During the Yongxing period (304-306), Jilong lost touch with Le. Later, Liu Kun sent Le's mother Wang and Jilong back to Gebei when he was 17 years old.

Jilong was savage by nature, relishing the hunt and roaming without purpose. His prowess with the slingshot was unmatched, often turning it upon men. The army considered him a deadly pestilence. Le, contemplating his death, was stayed by Wang's counsel, "A fleet ox was once but a calf, oft inclined to upset the cart. You should forbear him for the nonce." At 18, Jilong's edge softened. Towering at seven *chi* and five *cun* (c. 183.75 cm), he was nimble on horseback and skilled in archery. His valor was unmatched, and he commanded respect from generals, officials, and kin alike. Le held him in high regard and named him General of Barbarian Conquest.

Jilong wed General Guo Rong's younger sister. Ensnared and led astray by the alluring actress Zheng Yingtao,ⁱⁱⁱ Jilong killed Lady Guo, thereafter wedding a maiden of the Cui clan of Qinghe. Yingtao then maligned her, ushering her likewise to death.ⁱⁱⁱ His deeds bore the mark of extreme cruelty. Within the ranks, any who exhibited valor, cunning, or bided their time for accolade were expediently dispatched by him, culminating in a tally of fatalities exceedingly vast. In the conquest of cities and bastions, he ceased to make distinction between the just and the unjust, slaughtering men and women alike, sparing scarcely any

¹ A naming taboo is a cultural taboo against speaking or writing the given names of exalted persons. In this cases, Shi Hu shared personal name with Li Hu, grandfather of the Tang founder and posthumously emperor. Hence, he is called Shi Jilong by the Tang compilers.

souls. Despite Le's recurrent admonitions and enticements, his conduct remained unaltered. Yet, he led his forces with rigor without burdening them needlessly. None dared to challenge his commands. His strategies in assault and conquest proved irresistible. Le esteemed him, with trust and dependence swelling ever more, conferring upon him the singular charge of spearheading military expeditions.

During Le's sojourn in Xiangguo, Jilong served as Administrator of Wei Commandery, holding fort at Ye's Three Terraces. His rise continued as Marquis of Fanyang. When Le became Great Chanyu and King of Zhao, Jilong was named Chanyu's Chief Aide and Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Guards. He was later promoted to the positions of Palace Attendant, Minister of Works, and Duke of Zhongshan. Upon Le's seizure of the false Title, Jilong was named Grand Commandant, Minister of the Imperial Secretariat, and King over a realm of 10,000 households.

Jilong deemed his deeds the loftiest of his era, foreseeing the title of Great Chanyu as his upon Le's ascension. Yet, it was Le's son, Hong, who received the honor, consigning Jilong to nurse his bitterness in solitude. To his son Sui, he confided, "Ever since His Majesty established his seat in Xiangguo, tirelessly have I toiled, facing arrows and stones at every turn. For nigh on two decades, I have vanquished Liu Yue in the south, routed the Suotou in the north, quelled Qi and Lu in the east, and subdued Qin and Yong in the west, subjugating a total of thirteen provinces. I am the one who forged the grandeur of Great Zhao. The Great Chanyu's trust was verily mine, yet he bestowed the honor upon a maid's yellow-lipped child. Each time this thought crosses my mind, I cannot sleep nor eat well. There shall be no cause to leave any descendent for His Majesty after his death."

In the 1st year of Xiankang period (335), Jilong ousted Hong, Le's son. His subjects pressed him to claim the August Title. Jilong's edict responded, "The royal family has weathered manifold trials, and Haiyang (Hong) has forsaken his duty. The governance over the Four Seas is immense, and I am not compelled to accept this position. I've learned 'Huang' is reserved for those whose Way harmonizes the universe, and 'Di' fits those who blessed by gods and men. The appellation of 'Huangdi' (emperor) is beyond my presumption, yet the title of 'Heavenly King of Zhao' I shall embrace, to meet the expectations of both heaven and humanity." He then granted amnesty within his domain and renamed the era Jianwu ("Building the Military").

Kui An became Attendant Minister, Grand Commandant, and Imperial Library Guardian. Guo Yin took up as Minister of Works, Han Xi as Deputy Director of the Left of the Imperial Secretariat. Wei Gai, Feng Mo, Zhang Chong, and Cao Xian were named Secretaries. Shen Zhong was appointed Attendant Minister, Lang Kai as Grand Master of Splendid Happiness, and Wang Bo as Prefect of the Palace Library. Military and civil ranks were adorned with new prestige. His son, Sui, was declared crown prince.

Convinced the Son of Heaven would rise from the northeast, as foretold, Jilong set forth from Xindu in his carriage to greet destiny. He split Liuxiang in Yingtao and founded Tingjia county.

Jilong's clerk in Xuzhou, Zhu Zong, assassinated Inspector Guo Xiang and ceded Pengcheng to Jin. Jilong dispatched General Wang Lang to retaliate, driving Zhu Zong beyond the Huai River's southern banks.

Jilong indulged in luxury, neglecting governance for grand building ventures. His son

Sui shouldered the state's administration, appointing governors and officials, and overseeing temple rites. Yet Jilong himself led military actions and dispensed justice in the courts. When the Sparrow Watching Tower fell, he executed the chief builder and steward Ren Wang. He then ordered the tower's reconstruction, at double the initial cost.

Jilong himself led a raid south to Liyang, but pulled back before reaching the Yangtze, sparking terror in the capital (Jiankang). He dispatched his General who Conquers the Barbarians Shi Yu to raid Zhonglu and laid siege to Huan Xuan, the General of Northern Pacification, in Xiangyang. Generals Mao Bao, Wang Guo, and Wang Qianqi, stationed in Jingzhou, marched to Huan Xuan's aid, encamping at Zhangshan. After twenty days of combat, with famine and disease rife, they were forced to fall back.

Jilong levied oppressive taxes and labor, mandating the central storehouse amass a yearly million *hu* of grain, stashing any excess at the docks. Meanwhile, Jin's General Chunyu An struck Fei County in Langya, returning with captives.

Liu Zhi, Shi Sui's nanny, wielded influence at court through sorcery. Having raised Sui, she enjoyed his deep trust. As he grew, she cemented her grip with bribes and flattery. Her kin filled high offices, and she ascended to Lady of Yicheng.

By Jilong's decree, redemption penalties were commuted to cash payments at designated offices. In the absence of money, wheat and barley were accepted at market rates, stored at dockside granaries. Yet, eight Jizhou counties were ravaged by rain and hail, ruining the autumn crops. An edict of remorse followed, distributing grain for autumn planting and intensifying relief in the hardest-hit locales, aiming to recoup losses the next year.

As Jilong planned his move to Ye, the Imperial Secretary suggested the Ministry of Rites consult the ancestral temple. Jilong responded, "In ancient times, pivotal decisions were laid before the ancestral temple, setting aside the altars of the land and grain. Let the Secretary deliberate further on this matter and present his reflections." The officials then proposed dispatching the Grand Commandant to brief the other gods, a motion Jilong approved. Arriving at Ye's palace, a torrential rain soaked the earth, filling Jilong with elation. He pardoned those condemned to death.

Xie Fei, overseer of the Imperial Workshops, crafted a compass-equipped carriage, a marvel that earned him the title Marquis of Guannei and lavish rewards. Henceforth, officials of Cavalier in Regular Attendance rank and above could use sedan chairs, while kings and dukes could take carriages to court. These carriages, drawn by four horses, bore the eight-streamered dragon flag. At significant ceremonies like the morning court, sedans were the custom.

During this period, the Qiang chieftain Boju Da held a strategic pass, resisting Jilong's rule. Jilong dispatched his son, Bin, Prince of Zhangwu, with an elite force of 20,000 cavalry and infantry from the Qin and Yong provinces to campaign against him.

On a visit to Changle and Weiguo, Jilong encountered landowners shirking their responsibilities, failing to upkeep their mulberry fields. He responded by stripping the local governor of his rank.

In the 2nd year of the Xiankang period (336), General Zhang Mi of the Imperial Guard was tasked with relocating treasures from Luoyang to Ye, including the "Set of Bells," "Nine Dragons," "Stone Sculpture of the Man," "Copper Camel," and "Flying Chimerical Beast." En

route, a bell plunged into the river. Three hundred divers were recruited to retrieve it, ultimately securing it with bamboo ropes and hauling it ashore with a hundred oxen. To ferry the bells to Ye, vessels capable of carrying ten thousand *hu* of grain were constructed. They were then transported on four-wheeled wagons with broad tracks, 2 *chi* deep and 4 *chi* wide. Jilong, delighted by the artifacts' safe arrival, declared a two-year amnesty for prisoners. Officials received grain, silk, and a rank advancement, while commoners were elevated one nobility rank.

Jilong decreed, "For three years, my reign has been scrutinized, elevating and demoting in the shadows and the light, according to the revered codes of the ancient monarchs and the arteries of statecraft. Initiated by the Wei, the system of Nine Ranks, subject to triennial review, aspires towards fairness. Though its virtue is not yet fully realized, it serves as the noble's code and the mirror reflecting the moral order. Since my tenure began, steadfastly have I adhered to this ordinance. The late Emperor, in his unification of all under heaven, twice reaffirmed its import through edicts. Yet, three years have passed without its examination. I now charge the officials with the task of revisiting these evaluations, to uplift the pure and stir the stagnant, that all classes might find their due accord. In the selection of officials, let the methodology of the Jin's Nine Ranks be our perpetual standard. Upon completion of selections, let them be proclaimed through the Imperial Secretariat and the Departments of State Affairs, thereafter to be enacted. This decree shall be inscribed within the statutes at the Board of Rites. Should there be those who do not uphold these measures, let them be reported to the censor for judgment."

The Suotou tribe's Yuju came forward with 30,000 men to yield to Jilong. Among them, thirteen, Yuju included, had corresponded directly with Jilong and were thus ennobled. Jilong dispersed their forces among six provinces, Ji and Qing among them.

Laborers were worn thin by relentless military campaigns. A severe drought spiked grain prices - 1 *jīn* (c. 0.605 kg) of gold bought merely 2 *dou* (c. 7.5 L) of rice. Desperation gripped the populace. Heeding Xie Fei's counsel, Jilong spent lavishly on an uncompleted flying bridge over the river south of Ye, leaving workers famished. Local authorities mobilized the fit to forage acorns and fish, sustaining the frail. Yet, the powerful seized these provisions, leaving the people empty-handed. Affluent families were paired with the destitute for food relief, and officials of all ranks donated grain. Despite these measures, corruption thrived. Officials exploited the crisis, feigning loans and aid while lining their pockets.

Jilong renamed the Zhidang General to Longteng General and donned ceremonial headwear to mark the occasion.

Jilong erected the grand Taiwu Palace in Xiangguo and saw through the completion of Ye's Eastern and Western Palaces. The Taiwu Palace's foundation soared 2 *zhang* and 8 *chi*, crafted from crushed ornamental stones, concealing a secret chamber, and watched over by 500 soldiers.^{iv} The structure stretched 75 steps from east to west, 65 from north to south, its splendor amplified by lacquered tiles, golden bells, silver columns, golden pillars, pearl drapes, and jade walls, a testament to exquisite artisanship.

Behind Xianyang Palace, Jilong constructed nine halls on the Lingfeng Terrace, staffing them with commoners' daughters. The palace's inner court brimmed with 18 tiers of female officials and more than 10,000 women garbed in fine textiles and exotic jewels, trained in astrology and mounted archery.^v A female soothsayer was appointed to the Lingtai to verify

external astrologers' predictions. Female performers within matched the talents of those beyond the palace walls.^{vi} Provincial and county practice of astrology and divination was banned, with transgressors facing execution.

The Left Wing Commander, Chenggong Duan, erected a colossal 10-*zhang* torch in Chonggang's courtyard, its upper disk ablaze and lower disk manned by flamekeepers. Intrigued, Jilong arranged a trial. Amidst the demonstration, Grand Guardian Kui An and 508 officials urged Jilong to assume the August Title. As they pled, oil cascaded from the torch's top to the bottom, killing seven. Enraged by the disaster, Jilong had Chenggong of Duan executed at Changhe Gate.

Following these events, Jilong, echoing the customs of the Yin and Zhou, declared himself Heavenly King of Great Zhao in Xiankang's 3rd year (337). His coronation at the Southern Altar was grave, and he pardoned those facing the death penalty. He posthumously titled his grandfather Beixie as Emperor Wu and his father Koumi as Taizong Emperor Xiao. His wife, Lady Zheng, became Empress of the Heavenly King, and his son, Sui, the Crown Prince. Princes were reduced to Dukes of Commanderies, Marquises to Counts of Counties, and other officials were granted ranks as he saw fit.

More than 500 households of Taiyuan migrants revolted and escaped to the Black Qiang lands.

Han Qiang, a resettler from the Great Wall in Wuxiang County, fortuitously discovered a black jade seal, measuring 4 *cun* and 7 *fen* in length, adorned with characters inscribed in gold and crowned with a turtle-shaped knob. He submitted it to the Ye authorities and was named Captain of the Cavalry, his family status reinstated. Seizing the moment, Kui An and others urged Jilong to ascend as emperor, arguing, "We, your humble servants, have examined the great virtues of water as symbolized by Zhao. The black turtle, being the quintessence of water, and jade, the treasure of stones, with its dimensions reflecting the Seven Celestial Bodies and the Four Cardinal Points, signify that the celestial mandate has been fulfilled; it behooves you not to delay. Let the historians choose an auspicious day and prepare the ceremonial rites to respectfully bestow upon you the august title of Emperor."

Jilong replied, "Your excessive praises and the pressure to ascend unsettle me deeply. Such desires are far from my own. Let this discussion be promptly concluded. As the Eastern Constructions are but newly announced, let there be no declarations of celebration or promotion beyond the confines of the capital." The Palace Secretary, Wang Bo, composed 'Praise to the Black Seal' in admiration of the artifact. Jilong later learned Shi Hong had crafted the seal, which Han Qiang fortuitously found and presented.

Since assuming governance, Sui indulged in wine and women, his behavior growing arrogant and debauched. He would hunt late, enter the city after curfew, and secretly consort with palace officials' wives and concubines. Beautiful palace women were beheaded, their blood washed away and their heads displayed on platters. Attractive nuns were violated, then killed, and cooked with beef and mutton for his subjects to taste.

Duke Xuan of Hejian and Duke Tao of Le'an, favored by Jilong, irked Sui. Jilong himself was prone to excess and harsh punishments. Dismissing Sui's report once as insignificant, he snapped, "Such trifles are unworthy of notice." Yet, when later occurrences went unreported, he flew into a rage, demanding, "Why have you not brought this to my attention?" He thrashed Sui with a rod several times a month. Resentful, Sui confided in his valets Wu Qiong

and Chang Sheng, and retainer Li Yan, "Serving the ruler of our house proves arduous. I desire to undertake actions akin to those of Modu. Would you stand with me?" Yan and his companion, prostrate, dared not respond.

Sui, pretending to be sick, avoided duties and led over 500 from the palace and army to feast at Li Yan's residence. He declared to Yan and the others, "I resolve to go to Jizhou and slay Shi Xuan. Any who does not follow shall be beheaded!" Yet, after riding a few *li*, all deserted him. Li Yan, on his knees, urged him to drop the plan. Sui was also drunk and returned home. When Lady Zheng, Sui's mother, learned of this, she sent a secret envoy to scold him. Enraged, Sui killed the envoy.

When Jilong heard of Sui's sickness, he sent a trusted woman to investigate. Sui called her in, talked, then suddenly drew his sword, and killed her. Furious, Jilong seized Li Yan and others for questioning. Yan confessed, leading to over thirty executions, including his own. Sui was confined to the Eastern Palace, later pardoned, and brought to Taiwu East Hall. Showing no thanks, Sui left court. Jilong sent a messenger, who asked, "Crown Prince, you are obliged to be present at the royal court. Whence comes this departure?" Sui walked away without answering. Incensed, Jilong demoted Sui to a commoner. That night, Sui, his wife Zhang, and 26 others died, buried in one coffin. Over 200 palace functionaries and sympathizers were put to death. Lady Zheng was demoted to Dowager Empress of the East Sea. Jilong's son, Xuan, became Crown Prince, and Xuan's mother, Du Zhaoyi, became Heavenly King's Empress.^{vii}

Hou Ziguang of Anding, famed in youth for his looks and grace, claimed he was Buddha's eldest son from the Great Qin (Rome), destined to rule the Lesser Qin. Renamed himself as Li Ziyang, he reached a certain Yuan Chimei's home in Hu County, showing some true supernatural powers. Chimei believed and revered him, offering his two daughters in marriage. Ziyang charmed them both. Fan Jing, Zhu Long, Yan Chen, and Xie Lezi from Jingzhao rallied thousands at Du'nian Mountain. There, Ziyang crowned himself the Great Yellow Emperor, initiating the Longxing era. Chimei and Jing became his Left and Right Chancellors, Long and Chen his Left and Right Grand Marshals, and Lezi his Grand General. Shi Guang, the West Garrison General, defeated them. Ziyang was executed, yet his headless body stayed fresh, complexion vibrant even after ten days.

Jilong prepared to attack Duan Liao, the Xianbei leader in Liaoxi. He enlisted 30,000 valiant men as Central Commanders of Dragon Soaring. Liao sent his younger brother Quyun to stir Youzhou. Inspector Li Meng fell back to Yijing. Jilong named Tao Bao Sea-Crossing General and Wang Hua Liao-River-Crossing General, commanding 100,000 ships at Yu and Jin ferries. Zhi Xiong became Dragon Galloping Grand General and Yao Yizhong Champion General, leading 100,000 as vanguard. Jilong's forces moved on Jintai, Zhi Xiong swiftly entering Ji, seizing over 40 cities, including Yuyang. Officials like Ma Bao and Yang Yu surrendered. Zhi Xiong took Anci, killing chieftain Nalouqi. Duan Liao fled to Miyun Mountains, abandoning Lingzhi. His ministers Liu Qun, Lu Chen, and Sima Cuiyue, sealing their treasury, sought peace. Jilong sent Guo Tai, Ma Qiu and 20,000 light cavalries after Liao. They caught up with him in Miyun and fought a battle, capturing his mother and wife and beheading 3000 men. Liao escaped alone and offered his son Qitezhen and horses in surrender, which Jilong accepted. He resettled 20,000 households to Yong, Si, Yan, and Yu, rewarding the skilled. Earlier, northern Chanyu Yihui was ousted by Xianbei Dunna. After

Liaoxi's conquest, Jilong sent Li Mu to attack Dunna and restore Yihui. Jilong entered Liao's palace, bestowing rewards by merit.

Initially, Murong Huang clashed with Duan Liao. Huang sent emissaries to Jilong, pledging fealty and seeking support against Liao. Jilong's forces reached Lingzhi, but Huang held back from battle. Jilong then targeted Huang. Fotucheng, a Buddhist monk from Tianzhu, cautioned Jilong, "The land of Yan, blessed with fortune and virtue, should not be assailed by arms." Jilong, with a flash of anger, responded, "With such forces at my command, what fortress could withstand our siege? With such a multitude for battle, who might resist us? How then could a mere stripling find escape?" Zhao Lan, the Imperial Astronomer, steadfastly counseled against the campaign, asserting, "The Yan cities are guarded by the auspicious star of the year. To march against them would be to achieve naught but to invite calamity upon ourselves." Jilong, incensed, lashed him and demoted him to Feiru's governor. Jilong's siege on Jicheng faltered after ten days. Huang sent his son Ke with 2,000 Hu horsemen for a dawn raid. They swarmed the gates, feigning reinforcements, startling Jilong. He shed his armor and fled. Afterwards, Zhao Lan was reinstated as Court Astronomer. Jilong retreated to Lingzhi, passing Yijing, decrying its defenses, demanding their destruction. He then paid homage to Shi Le's tomb, lauding him at Xiangguo's Yin Palace. Back in Ye, he feasted his troops, lavishing rewards on captives for his people.

Jilong set his sights on Changli, dispatching Cao Fu, General of Liao-River-Crossing, with troops from Qingzhou to cross the sea and occupy Tadun City, later relocating to an island for lack of water. He supplied them with 3,000,000 *hu* of grain. Additionally, 300 ships carried 300,000 *hu* of grain to Goguryeo, where General Wang Dian and his 10,000 soldiers established a farming outpost along the coast. Qingzhou was tasked with constructing 1,000 ships. Jilong also sent Shi Xuan with 20,000 soldiers to strike at the Xianbei in Shuofang, Humotou, where they triumphed, decapitating over 40,000 foes.

In Jizhou, a grievous locust plague afflicted eight counties. The Commandant of the Sili proposed the chastisement of the local governors. Jilong retorted, "This calamity signals a lapse in the administration, a testament to my own lack of virtue. To attribute such misfortunes to the governors would be to abandon the principles of self-criticism held by Yu and Tang. You, as the Commandant of the Capital, have neither provided candid counsel nor adequately aided me, yet you seek to impute blame upon the innocent. This only compounds my culpability. You are hereby dismissed from your post as the Commandant of the Capital and are to assume the station of a commoner."

Jilong conferred upon his sons the titles of Minister of Works, along with gold and bronze badges of honor. He further permitted them the privilege of the imperial carriage, adorned with nine ornamental finials.

Initially, Duke Shegui of Xiangcheng and Duke Rigui of Shangyong commanded their forces to fortify Chang'an. However, they reported that Shi Guang, the General of the Western Garrison, had privately bestowed favors and schemed against the state. Enraged, Jilong chased Guang to Ye and put him to death.

At Miyun Mountains, Duan Liao dispatched envoys to feign surrender to Jilong. Jilong, deceived by the stratagem, commanded Ma Qiu, the General of Eastern Conquest, to advance a hundred li from the capital to the suburbs to welcome them. Jilong warned Qiu, "Treat their submission as though you're facing a foe. Exercise great caution." In tandem,

Liao sent emissaries to submit to Murong Huang, proclaiming, "The barbarians, avaricious and devoid of stratagem, shall not doubt my proffered submission. By laying in ambush with a formidable host, we may capture and vanquish them." Huang instructed his son, Ke, to conceal troops near Miyun. Ma Qiu led thirty thousand soldiers to greet Liao, but they were ensnared by Ke's ambush, incurring severe losses with six to seven out of every ten men killed. Qiu barely escaped on foot and made his way back. When Jilong heard of the calamity, he was furious and regurgitated his meal. He promptly divested Qiu of his military rank and title.

Jilong decreed that all commanderies and states should appoint Erudite of the Five Classics. Initially, Le had established Erudite with varying levels of education, but Jilong restored the positions of Erudite of the Imperial Academy and their teaching assistants. Through the Ministry of Personnel's selection process, Jilong ousted esteemed elders from their posts, while numerous young and unseasoned individuals from influential families were elevated to prominent offices. He stripped Langzhong Wei Shen of his rank, reducing him to a commoner. He appointed his son, Xuan, as the Great Chanyu and hoisted the imperial standards and ensigns.

Jilong named Kui An as the Grand Commander of the Expedition, marshaling a host of 70,000 infantry and cavalry to breach the northern frontiers of the Jing and Yang provinces. Shi Min routed the imperial [Jin] forces at Mianyin, where General Cai Huai met his end in combat. Zhu Bao of Xuancheng also triumphed at Baishi, slaying Generals Zheng Bao, Tan Xuan, Hao Zhuang, Sui Xiang, and Cai Xiong. Under Zhang Hedu's command, Jilong's troops took Zhucheng, overpowering the Jin general Mao Bao and slaughtering over ten thousand at Zhuxi. Kui An pressed forward to take Huting, compelling Jin's General Huang Chong and the governor of Liyang, Zheng Jin, to capitulate. An captured 70,000 households before withdrawing.

At the time, the powerful clans were steeped in corruption and bribery. Disturbed by this, Jilong appointed Li Ju, a palace censor, as the chief censor, placing in him exceptional trust and responsibility. Henceforth, all officials and local administrations were struck with reverence and fear. Jilong remarked, "I have heard that virtuous officials are akin to fierce beasts, who tread with lofty steps upon the mainways, whilst the jackals and wolves forsake their path. Indeed, it is so!"

Wang Zhuo of Zhenyuan presented a petition on behalf of the distinguished families from the Yong and Qin provinces who had migrated eastward and were now enlisted in military garrisons. Having fulfilled their military obligations and donned civilian attire, they sought exemption from further service. Jilong concurred with his suggestion. Subsequently, seventeen family names, including Huangfu, Hu, Liang, Wei, Du, Niu, and Xin, were relieved from military duties and reinstated to their ancestral estates. They were appointed to positions suited to their skills and permitted to return to their native places. Nonetheless, this dispensation was exclusive to these clans and would not set a precedent for others.

Jilong named his Military Governor, Li Nong, as the imperial envoy with credentials, tasked with supervising the military matters of the northwestern Liao territory, and also as the General of the Eastern Expedition and Governor of Yingzhou, with his post at Lingzhi.

During a period of severe drought, a white rainbow stretched across the sky. Jilong

proclaimed, "In my six years of rule, I have failed to align with the celestial patterns above and to succor the commonality below, bringing about this portentous bow. Let it be decreed that the restrictions on felling timber in the West Mountains be rescinded, and the levies and tributes on commodities such as reed mats, fish, and salt be diminished, save only for the supplies due annually to the court. Let not the nobles and high officials claim dominion over mountains and lakes, usurping the rightful gains of the Hundred Surnames."

He further decreed, "Of late, with the establishment of the iron foundries in Fengguo and Mianchi, we assigned the penalized to labor as a measure to address the pressing needs of the times. Yet, those in charge has enforced this policy with undue severity, engendering voices of discontent. From this day forth, all those condemned to exile must be duly reported and not arbitrarily assigned. Those confined within the capital's prisons, save for those who have committed homicide, shall all be pardoned and released." That day, it rained heavily.

As Jilong readied to wage war against Murong Huang, he decreed that families in the Si, Ji, Qing, Xu, You, Bing, and Yong provinces must supply three out of every five adult males, and those with four adult males must contribute two. This conscription aimed to bolster the Ye army's numbers to a formidable 500,000 soldiers. A fleet of 10,000 vessels would navigate from the Yellow River to the sea, transporting eleven million *hu* of grain and legumes to Anle City, stockpiling provisions for the impending military campaign. Additionally, he commanded the resettlement of ten thousand households from Liaoxi, Beiping, and Yuyang to the Yan, Yu, Yong, and Luo provinces.

Following Jilong's seizure of the throne, in the realm of recruitment and appointment, only those candidates endorsed by the Ministry of Personnel were taken into account. Their official appointments were ratified solely with his approval. Should an official's performance prove unsatisfactory, the blame fell exclusively on the Junior officials, sparing the Chief Minister and the Court Officials from accountability. Nevertheless, Liu Zhen, the official presiding over the Ministry of Personnel, contended that this practice strayed from the established norms of merit-based official selection and voiced his criticism. Angered by this, Jilong chastised the Minister of Personnel. Zhen was promoted to the esteemed position of Grand Tutor, bestowed with a golden seal and a purple ribbon.

Jilong journeyed to Wanyang, where he staged an impressive military review at the Yaowuchang grounds.

Murong Huang launched an assault, ravaging the You and Ji provinces, seizing in excess of thirty thousand households before withdrawing. The Inspector of Youzhou, Shi Guang, faced allegations of ineptitude and was recalled to the capital.

Jilong granted the conscripted soldier Xin Mi numerous bolts of cloth and 500 *hu* of grain, and commanded the erection of a military encampment in Pingyuan.

Previously, Li Shou's general, Li Hong, had defected from Jin to Jilong. Shou dispatched a letter to Jilong requesting the return of the defector, addressing him as Mr. Shi, King of Zhao. Jilong took umbrage at this and submitted the issue for external deliberation, which elicited a spectrum of views. Wang Bo, the Director of the Palace Secretariat, counseled, "Now that Li Hong has sworn allegiance to death, should he be dispatched back to Shu Han, perchance he might persuade his lineage to blend with the royal culture. Should this repatriation bear fruit, Liang and Yi might be subdued without the need to trouble a single battalion. What detriment exists if he chooses to flee once more? Shou has dared to

compare himself to sun and moon and unlawfully claimed dominion over a region. Should we issue a decree and he dares to respond with rebellion, it would invite derision from the descendants of warriors. It is prudent to pen a response and bestow upon him a bow and arrows, thereby conveying to Shou that our influence is bound to reach the most remote territories." Thus, they sent Hong, furnishing him with gifts to satisfy Shou's demands.

Jilong named Shi Tao as Grand Commandant. He, along with Crown Prince Xuan, alternated daily in addressing the petitions from the various ministries. Additionally, Jilong initiated the development of expansive farmlands stretching from the east of Youzhou to Bailang.

Overawed by Jilong's might, Zhang Jun dispatched his attendant officer, Ma Shen, to pay tribute. Initially, Jilong received this with pleasure, but upon perusing the letter, he deemed it presumptuous. Enraged, Jilong was on the verge of executing Shen. Shi Pu, the Palace Attendant, intervened, "The true menace to Your Majesty lies in Danyang. The lands beyond the Yellow River pale in comparison. Why should we be swayed by such a minor issue? To execute Ma Shen and then wage war on Zhang Jun would bifurcate our southern offensive, granting the rulers and subjects of Jianye years more of life. Our victory over them should not be our measure of strength; otherwise, we invite the scorn of the barbarians. Better to show magnanimity. Should he reconsider, apologize, and dispatch his officials to us, what more could we desire? If he persists in his obstinacy, we can always strike later." Persuaded by this counsel, Jilong spared Shen.

Upon Li Hong's return to Shu Han, Li Shou sought to flaunt his domain and proclaimed, "The envoy from the Jie has arrived at our court bearing a bow and arrows as gifts." Learning of this, Jilong flew into a rage and stripped Wang Bo of his role as Director of the Palace Secretariat, demoting him to the status of a commoner.

Resolved to wage an all-out war, Jilong, facing a shortage of horses in his lands, prohibited private horse ownership and decreed that anyone concealing horses would face execution by bisecting at the waist. He seized over 40,000 horses from the populace for his cavalry. Moreover, he commissioned the construction of numerous palaces and pavilions in Ye, erected over 40 watchtowers, and laid the foundations for imperial palaces in Chang'an and Luoyang, engaging over 400,000 laborers. He directed the four provinces of Henan to gear up for the southern offensive and bolstered military forces in the Bing, Shuo, Qin, and Yong regions. He deployed troops from the Qing, Ji, and You provinces and conscripted half a million people to manufacture armor and weaponry. Amidst this, the nobility and officials vied for personal gain, leading to widespread unemployment and hardship, with seven in ten households afflicted by poverty. The toll was heavy: 170,000 boatmen perished in the waters or to wild beasts, with a third of them dying. A man named Li Hong from Beiqiu capitalized on public discontent, claiming a prophesied destiny of leadership. He colluded with other malefactors, assigning them official roles. Upon the conspiracy's exposure, he was put to death, and thousands of families were ensnared in the fallout.

Jilong had an excessive penchant for the hunt, often setting out at dawn and returning at dusk, and would sometimes roam in disguise to personally oversee the laborers' work. Palace Attendant Wei Song counseled him, saying, "It is said that the scion of a wealthy clan does not sit in a lowly chamber, and the sovereign of myriad chariots does not tread perilous paths. Your Majesty, indeed a leader of great prowess who commands the four seas,

is lauded by Heaven and Earth for your feats. Yet, even the White Dragon and the fish may encounter peril, and the ocean's depths hold their own hazards, as the tale of Gebei Pond illustrates. I earnestly implore Your Majesty to choose a path of clarity and safety, to heed the guidance of the twin spirits, for one cannot disregard the world's burdens and act with abandon. Should a lunatic wreak havoc, the bravery of dragons avails naught, and the sage's wisdom falls short against the might of arms. Furthermore, in bygone eras, sagacious monarchs timed their palace constructions to the lull of the agricultural season, avoiding disruption to the farmers' labors. To exhaust them during sowing or reaping would lead to death en route, their grievances obstructing your way. Such outcomes ill befit a benevolent ruler. In days of yore, Emperor Ming of Han, heeding Zhongli's counsel, ceased the Deyang Canal's construction—a paragon of wisdom. My own inadequacy shames me, and my words may scarcely merit attention, but Your Majesty would do well to emulate the ancients and ponder my words." Jilong heeded the advice, bestowing upon Wei Song grains and silk as a reward. Nevertheless, he persisted with his construction endeavors and his roaming.

Zhang Li, the Right Deputy Director, became head of the Five Military Departments, charged with the army's oversight. Seeking Shi Xuan's favor, he advised, "The nobles, officials, and scholars have grown too powerful. Weaken them to strengthen your authority." Xuan, envious of Shi Tao, agreed. Li proposed to strip the noble officials of their power. The dukes of Qin, Yan, Yiyang, and Leping were left with only 197 officials and 200 soldiers each. The rest, 50,000 soldiers, were reassigned to the Eastern Palace. The dukes resented this, brewing conflict.

Jilong sent his General of Northern Conquest, Zhang Ju, from Yanmen to strike north at Suotou Yuju. They defeated him.

A decree stated, "Conscript five men, furnishing them with a single cart, a pair of oxen, fifteen hu of rice, and ten bolts of silk each. Those who fail in this duty shall be met with execution." This was intended to prepare for military campaigns in the regions south of the Yangtze River. The people, driven to poverty and distress, sold their children to fulfill the military's demands, yet still unable to meet them. Countless perished upon the wayside, lying in sight of one another, all the while wishing that the conscription might spare them.

From Qingzhou, word spread that a stone beast, once stationed north of Pingling in Jinan, that had, in a single night, transported itself to the southeast, to the Shanshi Gully. It was followed by thousands of marks, those of wolves and foxes, all converging into a path well-trodden. Jilong rejoiced, "This beast represents me. Its journey from the north of Pingling to the southeast heralds my destined pacification of the lands south of the Yangtze. Heaven's will cannot be resisted. Let it be known that next year, all forces from the provinces shall gather. I myself shall take up the mantle to command the Six Armies, in pursuit of fulfilling this auspicious sign." The courtiers all offered their congratulations, with 107 of them composing *Hymns of Imperial Virtues*. In these times, the presence of malevolent spirits was particularly pronounced. A Mount Tai stone combusted and was extinguished within eight days. A stone by the Eastern Sea stood erect of its own accord, beside which blood flowed. Blood seeped from Ye's western mountain rocks, stretching ten steps long, two *chi* wide. Taiwu Hall's portraits of ancient sages morphed into barbarians, their heads entirely retracted into their shoulders within 10 days. These signs greatly disturbed Jilong, while Fotucheng responded with tears streaming down his face.

Liu Ning of Ningyuan struck and seized Didao in Wudu. Shi Xuan marched against Xianbei chieftain Huguti and triumphed, decapitating 30,000 troops.

Shen Bian, the Chief Palace Attendant, enjoyed Jilong's favor, and Xuan was close to him too. Sharp and resolute, Bian handled tasks of trust and significance. Jilong ignored official papers, Xuan reveled in drink and wanderlust, and Shi Tao hunted obsessively. Bian alone decided on appointments, dismissals, and executions. His power and influence were immense, drawing inspectors and high officials to his doorstep in homage. Officials up to the Nine Ministers bowed before him, save for a few like Palace Attendants Zheng Xi, Wang Mo, Palace Eunuch Lu Chen, and Cui Yue, who would not.

Jilong took over 14,000 horses from provincial and commandery officials for the generals at Yaowu Pass. The horses' owners were repaid with another horse after a year.

Yuwen Gui, the General of Northern Garrison, seized Duan Liao's son, Lan, and offered him and 10,000 fine horses to Jilong as a token of surrender.

Jilong named Zhang Fudu, the General of Western Conquest, as the top Commissioner and military Commander. Fudu took 30,000 soldiers to strike Liangzhou. They crossed the Yellow River and clashed with Zhang Jun's general, Xie Ai, west of the river. Fudu was soundly beaten.

Despite his despotism and moral failings, Jilong held some esteem for Confucianism. He dispatched National Academy Erudite to Luoyang to transcribe the stone scriptures and verify the classics at the Imperial Secretariat. The Academy's head, Nie Xiong, annotated the *Guliang Chunqiu*, incorporating it into the academy's syllabus.

Shi Bin, the Duke of Yan, notorious for his heavy drinking and passion for hunting, often used his key to enter the palace after hours. Zhang Heduo, the General of Northern Conquest, warned him to stay vigilant on the frontier. Bin, incensed, insulted Heduo. Learning of this, Jilong furiously ordered Bin to be caned 100 times and sent the Imperial Secretariat's Chief to oversee him. Defiant, Bin killed the Chief when he tried to impose order and plotted to kill Heduo, who escaped and informed Jilong. Jilong dispatched Zhang Li, the Secretariat's Chief, with cavalry to apprehend Bin. After 300 lashes and being stripped of his title, Bin was sent home. Over ten of his kin and aides were executed.

In Jianyuan's early days (343-344), Jilong feasted his courtiers in Taiwu Palace's front hall. Over a hundred white geese flocked on the horse path's south side. He ordered his men to shoot, but none were caught. As he prepared to campaign on three fronts, over a million troops from various provinces converged. The Court Astronomer, Zhao Lan, privately warned Jilong, "The white geese's assembly foretells an empty palace. It's unwise to proceed." Jilong listened and eased his severity while inspecting troops at Xuanwu Gate.

Jilong named Duke Bin of Yan as Commissioner-in-Chief, Palace Attendant, Grand Marshal, and Imperial Secretariat Recorder. He instituted Left and Right Rongzhao and Yaowu Generals, ranking them with the Left and Right Guards. The Eastern Palace received Left and Right Generals, on par with the Four Commanders. He established Upper and Middle Grand Masters of Splendor and Happiness, ranking them above the Left and Right Grand Masters of Splendor. Moreover, he created the General of the Guard, ranking above the General of Chariots and Cavalry.

During that period, Shi Xuan's tyranny and debauchery grew ever more intolerable, yet none dared to voice this grievance. Military Leader Wang Lang presented himself before

Jilong, saying, "As the deep winter brings its snow and cold, the Crown Prince has decreed the felling of palace timbers, to be transported to the waters of the Zhang. This task weighs heavily upon tens of thousands, and their lamentations rise. It would be prudent, Your Imperial Majesty, to see this for yourself and henceforth put an end to their toil." Jilong heeded his advice.

When he learned of Lang's interference, Xuan was consumed with fury, desiring Lang's death yet finding no just cause to enact it. Concurrently, Mars lingered in the constellation of Scorpius. Zhao Lan, sent by Xuan, interpreted the celestial message to Jilong, "Lyra, the domain of Zhao, is afflicted, a sign of great misfortune for its lord. Scorpius, the emblem of the imperial house, faces calamity. A noble of the Wang lineage must be chosen to bear this burden."

Jilong inquired, "And who might stand in this stead?"

After a pause, Lan suggested, "None other than Military Leader Wang."

Jilong, fond of Lang, hesitated and requested, "Name the next best person."

Lan proposed, "The only other is Wang Bo, Director of the Palace Library."

Thus, Jilong summoned Bo to account for his prior misjudgment in sending Li Hong with bows and arrows as envoys. Bo was executed by bisecting at the waist, and his four sons were cast into the Zhang River to quell the ominous stirrings in the heaven. In time, Jilong recognized Bo's innocence and posthumously appointed him as Minister of Works, bestowing upon his grandson the title of marquis.

The General of Northern Conquest, Yin Nong, mounted an assault on Murong Huang's Fancheng. His efforts to seize the city were unsuccessful, and he was forced to withdraw. Nong was reduced to the status of a commoner.

At that time, a white rainbow emerged from the Taishe altar, traversing through the Fengyang Gate and stretching southeast towards the sky, where it lingered for more than ten quarters before vanishing. Jilong proclaimed, "Verily, the ancient sovereigns who with wisdom ruled under the Heaven did place fairness and justice at the forefront of governance, and kindness and benevolence as the foundation of their rule. Thus were they able to harmonize the will of the people and bring peace to all beings under heaven. I, in my humble capacity as ruler over myriad realms, vigilant by night and diligent by day, aspire to follow in the footsteps of those illustrious predecessors. It is for this reason that I have oft decreed the alleviation of taxes and labor, to grant repose to the common folk, that they may live in ease and prosperity under the watchful eyes of the celestial bodies. Yet, as the middle years of my reign have unfolded, the land has been beset by increasing misfortunes and disturbances, with the Heaven showing signs most strange and the seasons falling into disarray, a reflection of the grievances of the people and the admonitions of the celestial sphere. Though the shortcomings in my governance may be evident, the root of these tribulations lies not solely in my actions but also in the failure of those who serve to uplift and guide. In times past, when the Chancellor of Chu set about reforming the state, the great floods were swiftly quelled; when the Minister of Zheng enforced righteousness, the noxious mists and chaos naturally dissipated. These examples bear witness to the effectiveness of their governance, which brought stability amidst change. Yet now, when every noble, minister, and scholar adheres stubbornly to their own philosophies, leading the state astray, and remains silent through prosperity and adversity alike, can such be the expectation placed

upon the shoulders of our nation's counselors and officers? Let them all submit their petitions and express their convictions without fear or reservation." Jilong then sealed the Fengyang Gate, only to open it on New Year's Day. He also erected two altars at Lingchang Ford for sacrifices to Heaven and the Five Suburbs.

Li Shou ceded the five commanderies of Jianning, Shangyong, Hangu, Bazheng, and Zitong to Jilong.

Previously, Jilong had initiated the construction of a bridge over the river at Lingchang Ford, quarrying stones for the central support. Regardless of size, the stones would be swept away by the current as soon as they were placed, and despite over five million units of labor expended, the project remained uncompleted. Jilong sent envoys to make sacrificial offerings, casting jade discs into the river. Shortly thereafter, the submerged jade appeared on a sandbank. The earth trembled, water surged upwards, and every pavilion and viewing platform at the ford was toppled, crushing over a hundred people to death. Enraged, Jilong ordered the execution of the craftsmen and ceased the construction.

Jilong granted Shi Xuan and Shi Tao the authority to make decisions on life, death, appointments, and dismissals without further consent. The Minister of Works, Shen Zhong, objected, stating, "The allocation of rewards and penalties, the wielding of authority and influence, and the handling of the imperial regalia are all critical matters that should not be lightly delegated. They serve to deter malfeasance and promote integrity. The Crown Prince, though heir apparent, is charged only with his personal affairs and remains uninvolved in state governance. Sui, recently demoted to commoner status, had previously been entrusted with significant responsibilities and failed, as history has recorded. It is imperative that we forsake this approach and restore proper administration. Furthermore, splitting power between two can lead to calamity. The strife among King Zhou's sons and the turmoil incited by Duke Shuduan of Zheng both stemmed from misguided partiality. Your Majesty ought to consider these historical precedents." Jilong, however, dismissed these concerns.

The Crown Prince's counselor, Sun Zhen, inquired attendant Cui Yue, "I am afflicted by an ailment of the eyes. Pray, what remedy might there be?" Yue, who was wont to jest with Zhen, quipped, "A dose of your own urine might serve as a cure." Bemused, Zhen queried, "How could such a thing benefit an eye malady?" Yue rejoined, "Given the ample size and depth of your eyes, they would well accommodate such a treatment." This remark offended Zhen, who relayed it to Xuan. Among Jilong's sons, Xuan was marked by a visage most reminiscent of the barbarians, with notably deep-set eyes. Hearing of the jest, he was seized by a great fury and decreed the execution of Yue and his sons. Zhen, favored by Xuan, had a hand in courtly matters. In the wake of the execution of Yue, contempt and dread colored the gazes of all officials towards him.

Jilong's son, Duke Jian of Yiyang, was stationed in Guanzhong. His conscription was burdensome and his levies heavy, disrupting the harmony of the regions west of the Pass. His friend, Li Song, advised Jian that officials with long hair, whether civilian or military, should have it plucked for use as tassels on crowns, with the remainder provided to the palace women. The Chief Clerk reported this incident with the hair, which greatly angered Jilong. He appointed his Deputy Minister of the Right, Zhang Li, as the Chief Clerk of the Western Expedition, General of the Dragon Cavalry, and Inspector of Yongzhou to investigate the matter. Finding the reports true, Jilong summoned Jian back to Ye, arrested

Song and brought him before the court, and replaced him with Shi Bao to garrison Chang'an. He conscripted 160,000 people from Yong, Luo, Qin, and Bing provinces to fortify the Weiyang Palace in Chang'an.

Jilong was partial to the hunt, yet his substantial girth precluded him from horseback riding. In response, he commissioned the construction of 1,000 hunting carts, each yoked at 3 *zhang* in length and 1 *zhang* 8 *chi* in height. The nets attached to the carts stood 1 *zhang* 7 *chi* tall, and there were 40 carts designated for the capture of wild beasts. These carts were outfitted with three-tiered platforms from which the generals could engage in the hunt. He mandated that the imperial censors oversee the hunting grounds, extending from Lingchang Ford southward to Xingyang, and eastward to Yangdu. He decreed that any transgression of the hunting edicts would incur harsh punishment. Consequently, the imperial censors exploited their positions, and baseless accusations of hunting infractions proliferated. Those with attractive women or fine livestock were particularly susceptible to these spurious charges, culminating in the ruin of over a hundred families. The populace within the regions of Haidai and Heji lived in a state of dread and turmoil.

Jilong commanded the conscription of 260,000 individuals from diverse provinces to undertake the restoration of the Luoyang Palace. Additionally, he dispatched over 20,000 head of cattle to the governor of Shuozhou for governmental purposes.

Jilong instituted 24 tiers of female officialdom, reserving 12 of these for the Eastern Palace. He further decreed that the estates of the various dukes and marquises, numbering over 70, establish 9 levels of female officials. Initially, from among the populace, more than 30,000 girls aged 13 to 20 were chosen and categorized into three classes. Local authorities vied to fulfill Jilong's desires, selecting the most comely and virtuous maidens, which led to the forceful removal of over 9,000 women from their spouses. Husbands of women of notable beauty were often subject to the coercions of the influential and affluent, with many opting for suicide. Shi Xuan and other functionaries also covertly selected and abducted approximately 10,000 girls. These were all assembled at the Ye Palace, where Jilong personally picked out girls for his palace, much to his satisfaction. He even elevated all 12 of his envoys to the rank of marquis. From the onset of the selection until their arrival at Ye, over 3,000 husbands of these women were slain, and numerous women took their own lives following separation from their kin. In the provinces of Jing, Chu, Yang, and Xu, insurrection and disorder were widespread, with local officials failing to suppress the upheaval. Over 50 officials were apprehended and executed for their inability to restore peace. The Grand Master of the Golden Purple Imperial Palace, Lu Ming, ventured to protest against Jilong's actions but was executed by being dragged by the Dragon Cavalry. Henceforth, the courtiers remained mute, claiming they held their posts merely for the pay. Jilong frequently rode out accompanied by a thousand female riders, all adorned in purple silk headbands, embroidered silk trousers, gold and silver belts, and boots of five-fold weave. They reveled in spectating horse races.^{viii} The imperial decrees were inscribed on five-colored paper and affixed to the beak of a wooden phoenix. Using a rope from a windlass, they circled like a soaring phoenix.^{ix}

Jilong dispatched the Inspector of Liangzhou, Ma Qiu, among others, to launch an assault on Zhang Chonghua.

The Minister of Personnel, Zhu Gui, and the Chamberlain of the Yellow Gate, Yan

Sheng, fell into discord. Amidst a torrential downpour that rendered the roads unnavigable, Sheng seized the chance to defame Gui for neglecting road maintenance and to decry the court's governance. Consequently, Jilong ordered Gui's execution. Thereafter, private discourse was forbidden, and even offhand comments incurred harsh penalties. Subordinates were incited to denounce their superiors, and slaves to betray their masters. Punishments grew indiscriminate, casting a pall of anxiety from the imperial court to the common folk. Discussions of fortune, auspicious or otherwise, ceased in the court.

When Gui was detained, the Champion General Fu Hong challenged Jilong, stating, "It is said that a sagacious monarch rules from a modest earthen dais and a simple thatched abode. He subsists on plain fare and eschews opulence. He resorts to penalties only when indispensable. In contrast, a sovereign who leads his realm to ruin revels in sumptuous palaces, dines with ivory sticks and jade vessels, savors gourmet dishes, and metes out savage punishments, such as mutilations and the evisceration of expectant mothers. Such excesses often precipitate abrupt demise. Presently, the imperial residences in Xiangguo and Ye suffice for an emperor, so what purpose do the palaces in Chang'an and Luoyang serve? Your hunts with a thousand carts, your hoards of captive beasts, and the seizure of people's wives and daughters to populate your palace - these are the very deeds that precipitated the fall of the three prior dynasties. Zhu Gui, a venerable minister, faces severe reprisal for a failure in road upkeep. This bespeaks a deviation in your rule. The celestial imbalance of Yin and Yang has unleashed rains for 70 days, and the skies have cleared but two days hence. Not even a legion of spectral soldiers could mend the rain's ravages. How then could mortals? Should governance and punishment persist thus, what fate awaits our annals and the Four Seas? I implore you to cease the conscription of slaves and concubines, to absolve Zhu Gui, and to heed the people's desires." Jilong, discomfited by the counsel yet wary of Hong's might, chose to feign sleep, sparing Hong from punishment. He halted the construction projects in the two capitals.

ⁱ *TPYL730*:

SLGCQ states: Zhang Xiu, courtesy name Wenbo, was of the Qiangqu people. Somewhat versed in physiognomy, he often said to Shi Hu, "Your Excellency's features are not those of a subject." Hu covered his mouth, saying, "Do not speak recklessly, lest you doom my family."

ⁱⁱ *TPYL380*:

Cui Hong's "Later Zhao, Shi Hu" in *SLGCQ*: The Empress Zheng, named Yingtao, was originally a courtesan in the household of Zheng Shida, a minor official in Jin. Among the lowly courtesans, Hu often lamented her beauty to the Empress Dowager, who then granted her to him.

YFSJ85:

Yingtao was beautiful and favored in the imperial harem, who inspired the Music Bureau to compose the "Song of Zheng Yingtao:"

Shi Jilong, with Heaven's grace defied,
Seized the hero's throne with pride.
In his court, a gem did glow,
Zheng Yingtao's beauty stole the show.

Radiant as the morning's break,
In the bedchamber, her place to take.
Exclusive to the palace core,
None could match her, thirty thousand more.

Her brows, a mirror's clarity,
Outshone the rear court's vast array.
A thousand riders, female, strong,
By Zhang's spring, they rode along.

Blossoms bright on silken scarf,
Red banners waved on her behalf.
The roster fresh, the soldiers keen,
Drums and hooves, a vibrant scene.

Birds in flight, the chase was on,
Bronze quivers clinked till dust was gone.
Fengyang's gates, grand and tall,
The Auspicious Pavilion, above it all.

A golden ladder, skyward bound,
Her claims of wealth knew no ground.
Princess daughters, princely sons,
Her coral bed, where dragons run.

Canopy of fight, in amber's hue,
Her lust for power, the gods well knew.
The Shi's end, by just hands brought,
Ye city stands, with lessons taught.
Dew glistens faint, the day anew,
As fortunes flip, and yellow clouds pursue.

iii *TPYL371:*

The "Affairs of the Two Shis" states: Shi Hu attacked Zhongshan, captured Zheng Lüe's sister and fathered two sons with her. He later married Cui, who treated him with great respect, yet they had no children. Zheng bore another son, and Cui asked to adopt him. Zheng refused. Within a month, the baby fell ill and died. Zheng slandered Cui, saying, "Cui complains about raising too many of my barbarian children." At that time, Hu was sitting on a Hu bed in the courtyard. Furious, he called for his bow and arrows. Hearing that Hu wanted to kill her, Cui, barefoot, approached him and said, "My lord, do not kill me unjustly. Please hear my words." Hu did not listen, saying only, "Return to your seat, this does not concern you." As Cui walked away, before she reached her seat, Hu shot her from behind, the arrow striking her waist, and she fell.

TPYL387:

The "Book of Zhao" states: Shi Hu took Lady Cui as his wife, but she found no favor with him. His beloved Lady Zheng suffered from a woman's ailment for a hundred days, and accused Cui of giving her a potion. Later, Shi Hu, in a show of authority, questioned her. Cui

replied, "I saw a young servant spit on her face, pretending it was a real remedy." Afterwards, Shi shot her with a single arrow, which pierced her through and killed her.

^{iv} *TPYL173:*

The "Records of Ye" state: During Shi Hu's time, from Xiangguo to Ye, within a span of two hundred *li*, a palace was erected every forty *li*. Each palace housed a consort, attended by dozens of maidservants, with eunuchs guarding overnight. Wherever Shi Hu's carriage stopped, he would stay. In all, Hu constructed forty-four structures, including inner and outer halls, platforms, towers, and palaces.

TPYL700:

The "Collection of Lost Records" states: Shi Hu built a tower in front of the Taiwu Hall, ten zhang high, with curtains of strung pearls and pendants of five-colored jade that tinkled and chimed harmoniously.

^v *TPYL710:*

The "Records of Ye" state: Shi Hu appointed the women of his palace as female officials and had his secretaries under the gate use jade tablets to issue documents.

TPYL145:

The "Records of Ye" state: Shi Hu, from his conquests, acquired over ten thousand beautiful women for his palace, selecting those with talents and skills to serve as female secretaries.

^{vi} *TPYL747:*

The "Records of Shi Hu in Ye" state: Shi Hu had a courtesan who, dressed in vermillion and wearing the crown of advancement, would stand atop a horse. As the horse moved, she would write, her characters all upright and proper.

^{vii} *TPYL145:*

Shi Hu's Empress Du was named Zhu, of unknown origins. During the conquest of Youzhou, she was among the courtesans of Wang Jun. Hu saw her and was pleased, and thus he requested her from Le. Le presented her, bestowing upon her the title of Talented Lady, and gave her to Hu. Her nature was respectful, gracious, and gentle, and she was favored second only to Empress Zheng.

^{viii} *TPYL300:*

The "Old Tales of Ye City" record: Liang Horse Terrace, also known as Review Horse Terrace or Play Horse Terrace.

According to the "Records of Ye," in the sixth year of King of Zhao, Hu's Jianwu era, the Liang Horse Terrace was constructed to the south of the Zhang River, west of the city, with an embankment forming the platform. Hu often used this terrace to select and train cavalry, tiger guards, and the imperial guard, known as the Cloud-Soaring Black Spear Cavalry, five thousand strong. On each new and full moon, a cavalry review was held on this terrace. South of the Zhang River, banners were unfurled and drums sounded, the cavalry arrayed like stars in the sky. Hu would ascend the terrace and shoot an arrow; at its launch, five thousand cavalry would charge at once, racing from the south of the Zhang River to gather beneath the terrace. Officers and below were all rewarded in rank. Hu would shoot another arrow, and the five thousand cavalry would again race to the north of the Zhang River. The five thousand, tightly packed, appeared as tens of thousands of riders, all wielding lacquered

spears, hence the name "Black Spear." Additionally, Jilong often had a thousand female riders as his vanguard, all dressed in purple silk scarves, brocade pants, belts of gold and silver, and boots woven with patterns, parading on the terrace.

^{ix} *TPYL915*:

Lu Hui's "Records of Ye" states: Shi Jilong and the Empress issued edicts from the tower, written on five-colored paper, placed in the mouth of a phoenix. The phoenix, grasping the edict, was released by attendants who unwound hundreds of zhang of crimson rope from a windlass, allowing the phoenix to descend in flight. The phoenix was crafted from wood, painted in five colors, with feet made of gold.

107. Chapter 7 Shi Jilong Part Two



In the 3rd year of Yonghe (348), Jilong broke earth himself in the Mulberry and Catalpa Garden. His wife, Lady Du, honored the first silkworms in the outskirts, then journeyed to Xiangguo to bow at Shi Le's grave.ⁱ

Jilong named Shi Ning, the Palace Library's Director, as the General of Western Conquest. Commanding over 20,000 from Bing and Si, he reinforced Ma Qiu. Zhang Chonghua's men, Song Qin among them, led 20,000 households to yield. Across Yellow and Huang Rivers, ten thousand Di and Qiang tribes, under Zhang Qu, made Ma Qiu hesitant to advance. Chonghua's Jincheng Administrator, Zhang Chong, also capitulated to Ning. Ma Qiu pushed to Quliu. Meanwhile, Liu Ning and Wang Zhuo struck Wujie in Jinxing. Chonghua's Yang Kang clashed with Ning at Shafu; Ning fell back to Jincheng. Zhuo took Wujie, seizing Chonghua's men, Cao Quan and Hu Xuan, and herded 7,000 households to Yongzhou. Jilong appointed Sun Fudou as General of Western Conquest. and together with Ma Qiu, they led 30,000 troops to cross the Ji River, capturing many cities. With Ma Qiu, they crossed the Ji with 30,000, seizing cities. Chonghua, in dread, dispatched Xie Ai. Qiu was beaten back to Jincheng.

Le and Jilong, insatiable and ill-mannered, ruled ten provinces, amassing gold, silver, pearls, and rarities, yet craved more. They plundered the graves of emperors and sages. At Handan's western stone ridge lay Zhao Jianzi's tomb. Jilong commanded its breach. They dug through a *zhang* of charcoal, boards a *chi* thick, then eight *chi* of planks, until hitting a spring, clear and cold. For a month they drew water with a cowhide sack and winch, yet the spring held. The effort was forsaken.ⁱⁱ They raided Emperor Qin Shi Huang's tomb, melting bronze pillars into vessels.ⁱⁱⁱ

The monk Wu Jin counseled Jilong, "Hu fortunes wane, Jin's ascend. Employ the Jin as labor to sap their strength." Jilong tasked his Personnel Minister, Zhang Qun, to draft 160,000 from nearby, with 100,000 carts, to raise Hualin Garden and a northern wall at Ye,

dozens of li long. Zhao Lan, Shen Zhong, Shi Pu, among others, submitted memorials citing celestial anomalies and people's plight. Summoned, they spoke truth to Jilong, met with fury and dismissal. Jilong, incensed, declared, "Should the wall rise at dawn and fall by dusk, I'll harbor no regret." He pressed Qun to toil by night's candle. Three towers, four gates, three to Zhang River, all iron-doored, were raised. A storm claimed thousands. From Yangzhou, five yellow cranes, necks a zhang, cries spanning ten li, graced Xuanwu pond. Sixteen blue unicorns, seven white deer from commanderies arrived; Jilong had Court Musician Zhang Hezhu array them with a grand canopy for his carriage. A canal was cut from the north gate to Hualin's waters. Yet the wall fell, crushing a hundred lives.

Jilong sent Shi Xuan to bless the mountains and rivers, then embarked on a hunt. His procession: a grand carriage, feathered banners, opulent canopies, 16 armies, 180,000 troops. Departing Jinming Gate, Jilong watched from Lingxiao Pavilion in his harem, laughing, "My kin and I are thus. Save for the sky's fall and earth's split, we've naught to fret. We live for joy with our offspring!" Shi Xuan hunted unrestrained, erecting palaces, camps. Wild herds were driven from hundreds of li to converge. Officials knelt; torches and stars turned night to day. A hundred riders loosed arrows into the throng. Xuan, with favored beauty Xian De, watched from their carriage, lost in the thrill, halting only when the beasts tired. Those missing their quarry faced punishment: nobles walked a day without horses, others took a hundred lashes. Over 10,000 soldiers perished from hunger and cold. Xuan had all for his bow, horse, attire, and sustenance. Troublemakers faced exile. They ravaged fifteen commanderies in three provinces, leaving desolation. Jilong then commanded Shi Tao to mimic the hunt, traversing Qin and Jin from Bingzhou. Xuan, resenting Tao's preferment and eunuch Zhao Sheng's partiality to Xuan, not Tao, conspired against Tao's life.

Ma Qiu struck again, routing Zhang Chonghua's general, Zhang Mao, in He and Shaan, severing over 3000 heads. Fuhan's Protector-General, Li Kui, with seven thousand troops, yielded to Jilong. South of the Yellow River, all Di and Qiang tribes submitted.

Shi Tao erected Xuanguang Palace within the Grand Commandant's quarters, its beam stretching nine zhang. Enraged upon seeing it, Xuan ordered the craftsman beheaded, the beam hewn. Tao, incensed, lengthened the beam by ten zhang. Learning of this, Xuan seethed, confiding in confidants Yang Bi and Mou Cheng, "Tao is vile, a traitor. He flouts my authority! Slay him, and upon my Western Palace entry, his lands are yours." He mused, "Tao's death will draw the emperor's grief. In that moment, I shall execute the great deed otherwise unattainable." Mou vowed action.

At that time, yellow-black clouds loomed southeast, vast as several mu, splitting into three, like cloth swathes. They sailed the sky, east to west, black and blue, piercing the sun at the you hour. Post-sunset, they branched into seven trails, dozens of zhang apart, fish-scale white clouds in between, vanishing at the zi hour. Tao, adept in astronomy, found the omen troubling, telling his men, "This bodes not a minor shift. Assassins may stir in the capital. Who is marked?" That night, Tao hosted a feast at Dongming Temple for his peers. Amidst music, he drank, lamented, "Worldly ties shift, partings come. Let's drink to our sentiments, for who can say if we'll share wine again?" Tears followed, and all joined in weeping. They spent the night at the temple.

Xuan dispatched Yang Bei, Mou Pi, Mou Cheng, Zhao Sheng, and others up a narrow stair to slay Tao with sword and arrow. Leaving their arms, they fled. Come morning, Xuan

relayed the deed to Jilong, who reeled in shock and grief, nearly swooning. Poised to mourn Tao, his Minister of Works, Li Nong, cautioned, "The Duke of Qin's slayer might lurk within; your life hangs in peril. Best not venture forth." Jilong heeded, halting his plans. The army was sent to grieve at Taiwu Hall. Xuan, in a modest carriage flanked by a thousand men, attended Tao's rites. Tearless, his tone scornful, he demanded the shroud raised to view the body, then erupted in laughter, and departed. Generals' aides Zheng Jing, Yin Wu, among others, were seized, charged with conspiracy.

Jilong harbored suspicions of Xuan's hand in Tao's demise, contemplating a summons. Fearing Xuan's evasion, he feigned news of Xuan's mother's grave illness. Unsuspecting, Xuan entered the palace to see her and was seized. Shi Ke of Jianxing disclosed, "On Tao's death night, I lodged at Eastern Palace official Yang Bei's. Bei and five others, fresh from outside, conversed, 'Our grand scheme's done. We'll live long, bask in riches and honor. What's to fear?' They withdrew indoors. I feigned sleep, unseen by Bei. I fled, hid. Later, Bei and two searched for me in vain. Bei fretted, 'The eavesdropping guest must die, lest he spill our plot. His escape spells trouble.' I, Ke, survived only by scaling a wall."

Jilong dispatched his men to seize Yang Bei, Mou Pi, Zhao Sheng, and the rest. Bei and Pi slipped away, but Zhao Sheng was captured, confessing to the crime and spilling the assassination's details. Jilong, stricken with sorrow and rage, jailed Xuan in a storehouse, thrust iron rings through his cheeks, and caged him in a wooden crate. He fed him gruel as one would feed swine or hounds, and made him lick Tao's blood from the murder weapons. Xuan's wails shook the palace. North of Ye, Jilong stacked firewood, setting a standard atop with a pulley, a rope, and stairs to add more wood. He commanded Tao's favored eunuchs, Hao Zhi and Liu Ba, to tear out Xuan's hair, slice his tongue, and drag him up the ladder to the pyre. Hao Zhi looped ropes around his cheeks, strangling him with the pulley. Liu Ba hacked off his limbs, gouged his eyes, and speared his gut, mirroring Tao's wounds. Flames were lit on all sides, smoke and fire leaping skyward. Jilong, with thousands, ascended a central platform to observe. Post-blaze, the ashes were scattered at gates and thoroughfares.

Xuan's wife and nine children were slain. Jilong, fond of Xuan's youngest son, embraced him, weeping. The boy protested, "Not my fault!" Jilong wavered on sparing him, but his ministers insisted, slaying the child in Jilong's grasp. Clinging to Jilong's robe, the boy's cries moved onlookers to tears. The ordeal sickened Jilong. He ordered the execution of three hundred of Xuan's subordinates and fifty eunuchs, quartering and casting their parts into the Zhang River. The Eastern Palace was reduced to a sty and cattle yard, its hundred thousand guards dispatched to Liangzhou. Palace Attendant Zhao Lan had forewarned Jilong of potential rebellion, but with suspicion that Lan concealed Xuan's conspiracy, Jilong had him killed too. Xuan's mother, Du, was stripped of her status. Jilong's beloved concubine Liu, whose brothers Xuan had esteemed, was put to death. Captivated by her beauty, Jilong replaced her with another daughter of the same retired official, taking her to his Hualin Garden.

While deliberating on a crown prince, Grand Commandant Zhang Ju proposed, "Duke Bin of Yan and Duke Zun of Pengcheng, both skilled in arms and letters, are fit for succession. Your Majesty's divine health falters, Within the Four Seas yet not united. Pray, choose one as heir." Previously, General Zhang Chai, having conquered Shanggui, captured the comely

twelve-year-old daughter of Liu Yao. Jilong, smitten, took her as a consort. She bore him a son, Shi, later Duke of Qi. Chai, noting Jilong's decline, schemed to make Shi heir, elevating Liu to Empress Dowager, thus securing his own influence. He urged Jilong, "Your Majesty has twice established a prince from lowborn concubines. Now, it would be wise to select a noble, virtuous successor." Jilong cut him off, "Enough. I know the prince's seat." The discussion continued in the eastern hall, where Jilong mused, "I'd cleanse my bowels with 3 *hu* of pure ash, for they've birthed vile offspring. My son, in his twenties, covets patricide. Shi, just ten, will grow to his twenties as I wither." Li Nong and Zhang Ju, resolved, bid ministers endorse Shi's princely bid. The Minister of Agriculture, Cao Mo, abstained, prompting Jilong to dispatch Chai for his reasons. Mo, prostrate, argued, "The empire's fate is grave. No child should be heir!" Jilong retorted, "Mo's loyal yet misunderstands my will. Zhang Ju and Li Nong see my heart. Enlighten him." Shi was named crown prince, Liu empress. Jilong charged Ceremonies Master Tiao You and Guanglu Minister Du Gu, "Guard the prince, guide his reform. This is my will; make it known." You became Grand Tutor, Gu Junior Tutor.

While Jilong convalesced, in Yonghe's fifth year, he seized the Huangdi throne at the southern outskirts, proclaiming himself emperor. He declared amnesty across the land, inaugurating the Taining era. All officials ascended one rank, sons were ennobled as kings. Minister Zhang Liang assumed the role of Right Deputy.

Thousands of exiles, the gaoli (tall and strong one) from the Eastern Palace among them, were dispatched to fortify Liangzhou. En route at Yongcheng, excluded from amnesty, they were commandeered by Yongzhou Inspector Zhang Mao. Stripped of their horses, they were made to haul supply-laden carts to the garrison. Liang Du of Dingyang, a gaoli leader, fanned the soldiers' ire, plotting an eastern return. In secrecy, he tasked the Hu, Jieduluwei, to spread the word. The soldiers, roused, roared their assent. Du declared himself Jin's Grand General of the Eastern Conquest, seizing Xiabian. He coerced Zhang Mao into Grand Commander and Grand Marshal roles, parading him in a sedan chair. Western Pacification General Liu Ning struck from Anding but was routed, retreating. Du's forces razed every stronghold from Qin to Yong, executing officials of 2000 shi salaries, pressing east. The gaoli, archers of ten men's strength, cleaved through foes with large axes, divine in battle. Garrison troops swelled their ranks; reaching Chang'an, they numbered a hundred thousand. Leping's Prince Shi Bao, stationed there, dispatched his best, yet fell in one clash. Du pressed through Tong Pass, fording the Luo River.

Jilong named Li Nong Grand Commander and Generalissimo, with a hundred thousand foot and horsemen, including Guard Army's Zhang Hedu, Western Conquest's Zhang Liang, and Barbarian Conquest's Shi Min, to meet Du. They clashed at Xin'an; Nong's forces faltered. At Luoyang, they stumbled again, retreating to Chenggao. Du plundered Xingyang and Chenliu counties, striking terror in Jilong. He tasked Yan's Prince Shi Bin as supreme military commander, with ten thousand elite horsemen, Yao Yizhong and Fu Hong among them, to strike Du east of Xingyang. They triumphed, decapitating Du, extinguishing his band.

Not long after, Jin General Wang Kan seized Pei County. In Luoshi's Gegu, Ma Xue of Shiping rallied troops, declaring himself a general. Shi Bao launched an assault, overcame him, and put to death over three thousand of his men.

At that juncture, Mars transgressed against the Jishi star, traversing the Mǎo constellation and the Moon. Mars then loomed in the north, affronting the Hegu star. Soon

after, Jilong was stricken with grave illness. He designated Shi Zun as Grand General, positioning him east of the pass. Shi Bin ascended as Chancellor and Chief of the Secretariat, while Zhang Chai rose to Grand General of the Guard and Commander-in-Chief, also charged with government stewardship. Lady Liu, apprehensive of Bin's clout and the threat to Shi, colluded with Zhang Chai to orchestrate Bin's demise.

At the time, Bin was in Xiangguo when a deceitful message from Liu arrived, "The emperor's health turns; he soon hunts. You may take leave from duties." Bin, keen on the hunt and wine, set out to indulge. Liu then slandered Bin, branding him disloyal and unfilial, stripped him of his post, and exiled him under the watch of Zhang Chai's brother, Xiong, with five hundred Dragon Cavalry. Shi Zun, coming from Youzhou to Ye, accepted imperial commission in court, with thirty thousand guards for his escort. Stricken with sorrow, Zun wept and departed. Jilong, briefly rallying, inquired, "Has Zun come?" Informed of Zun's departure, he mourned, "I regret missing him."

At the western pavilion, over two hundred Dragon Cavalry leaders knelt before Jilong. Jilong asked, "What do you want?" They proposed the Prince of Yan command the guard or be named crown prince, citing the emperor's frailty. Unaware of Bin's fall, Jilong demanded, "Is not the Prince of Yan here? Summon him!" Told of the prince's wine-induced indisposition, Jilong ordered, "Bring him by carriage, present his seal and ribbon!" Yet no one fetched Bin. Jilong, overcome by dizziness, slipped into unconsciousness. Zhang Chai, with Xiong, fabricated Jilong's command for Bin's execution. Lady Liu proclaimed Jilong had named Zhang Chai Grand Protector, military and secretarial chief, bolstering his ranks, emulating Han's regent Huo Guang. Attendant Xu Tong, foreseeing disaster, lamented, "Calamity looms, beyond my readiness," and took his life with poison.

Jilong soon perished. His reign, usurped in Xiankang's first year, lasted fifteen years, ending in Taihe's sixth.

Shi Shi, Shi Zun & Shi Jian

Shi thus took the false throne, with Liu as Empress Dowager, commanding the court. Zhang Chai ascended as Chancellor, proposing Shi Zun and Shi Jian as Left and Right Chancellors, respectively, to placate them. Liu concurred with his counsel. Chai, conspiring with Zhang Ju to eliminate Li Nong, was thwarted when Ju, Nong's confidant, revealed the plot. Nong, fearing for his life, fled with over a hundred horsemen to Guangzong, rallying tens of thousands of *qihuo* (the Begging-for-Life) at Shangbai in defense. Liu dispatched Zhang Ju and others with palace guard elites to lay siege. Chai installed Zhang Li as Grand General of the Guard, Commander-in-Chief, and Colonel of the Sili, his second-in-command. Meanwhile, rampant banditry plagued Ye, with marauding bands pillaging one another.

Upon learning of Jilong's demise, Shi Zun took position in Henei. Military leaders Yao Yizhong, Fu Hong, Shi Min, Liu Ning, and officers Wang Luan, Wang Wu, Shi Rong, Wang Tie, along with Duan Qin, General of Loyal Valor, having quelled unrest in Qin and Luo, returned. They encountered Zun at Licheng, advising, "Your Highness, of age and ability, was favored by the late emperor. Yet his final years were clouded by Zhang Chai's deceit. With Shangbai locked in a standoff and the capital vulnerable, we could expose Chai's misdeeds and move to punish him. Who would not forsake him and greet Your Highness?" Zun consented. Luozhou Inspector Liu Guo also led Luoyang's populace to Licheng.

Shi Zun dispatched a decree to Ye, alarming Zhang Chai who hastily recalled his army from Shangbai. Zun encamped at Dangyin with 90,000 soldiers, Shi Min leading. As Chai's forces prepared to confront them, the elder Jie tribesmen declared, "The emperor's son arrives to mourn; we must receive him. We won't hold the city for Zhang Chai." Defying threats of execution, they left the city. Zhang Li with two thousand Dragon Cavalry breached the gates to greet Zun. Lady Liu, in fear, brought Chai to her, weeping, "The late emperor lies unburied, calamities mount. The young emperor relies on you. What will the general do? Might honoring Zun quell unrest?" Chai, petrified, offered no strategy, merely nodding.

Lady Liu appointed Zun Chancellor, Commander-in-Chief, and Edict Recorder, bestowing the yellow axe and nine insignia, enlarging his fief by ten counties, charging him with the nation's stability. Zun, reaching Anyang Pavilion, saw Chai emerge to meet him. Zun ordered his arrest. In gleaming armor, his troops arrayed, Zun entered Fengyang Gate, wept at Taiwu's front hall, then withdrew to the eastern pavilion. Chai met his end in Pingle market, his lineage eradicated.

Zun compelled Lady Liu to proclaim, "The heir, young and unversed, burdened by the late emperor's private favor, cannot manage imperial affairs. Thus, Zun shall ascend." Zun feigned refusal thrice, but at the courtiers' insistence, he accepted. He claimed the throne in Taiwu's front hall, pardoned minor offenses, and lifted Shangbai's siege. He ennobled Shi as King of Qiao with 10,000 households, exempt from kneeling. Lady Liu, reduced to Grand Consort, met her demise. Shi's reign lasted but 33 days.

Li Nong returned to confess his faults, and Zun reinstated him with former honors. Zun elevated his mother, Lady Zheng, to Empress Dowager, his wife, Lady Zhang, to Empress, and Shi Bin's son, Yan, to Crown Prince. Appointments followed: Shi Jian as attendant, Shi

Chong as Grand Guardian, Shi Bao as Grand Marshal, Shi Kun as Grand General, and Shi Min as commander-in-chief, the Grand General's aide, and edict recorder, aiding in state governance.

A fierce tempest toppled trees, thunder quaked the ground, and hailstones the size of bowls plummeted. The Taiwu and Huihua palaces sustained damage, numerous gates and pavilions lay in ruins. Most of the carriages and garments were consumed by fire, which blazed a month, lighting the sky. Gold and stone vanished in the flames. A rain of blood descended upon Ye's city.

Stationed in Ji, Shi Chong learned of Zun's regicide and usurpation. To his advisors, he declared, "The late emperor's trust in Shi was betrayed by Zun's treachery and murder. I'll lead our forces to exact vengeance; ready the troops for battle." Leaving Shu Jian of Ningbei to hold Youzhou, Chong led 50,000 from Ji to challenge Zun. His proclamations rallied support in Yan and Zhao, swelling his ranks to over 100,000 by Changshan. Encamped at Yuanxiang, he received Zun's offer of clemency. To his men, he said, "He was my brother; the dead won't return. Why persist in mutual destruction? I'll withdraw." General Chen Xian countered, "Pengcheng's crime demands justice. With you as our northern standard, I'll bear the southern burden and seize the capital. After capturing Pengcheng, we'll hail your return." Chong consented.

Zun dispatched Wang Zhuo with a letter to sway Chong, to no avail. Zun armed Shi Min with the yellow axe and golden bell, and with Li Nong and an elite 100,000, marched to battle. At Pingji, Chong's forces crumbled. Captured at Yuanshi, Chong was granted an honorable death. His 30,000 fallen were interred in a communal grave.

Only then was Jilong interred. His resting place was named Xianyuan Tomb.^{iv} Posthumously, he was styled with the false honorific Emperor Wu and the ancestral temple name Taizu.

Zun's Yangzhou Inspector, Wang Jia, capitulated Huainan to Jin. Jin General Chen Kui seized Shouchun. The General of Northern Conquest, Chu Pou, set out against Zun, encamping at Xiapi. Zun named Li Nong Grand Commander of the Southern Expedition, leading 20,000 horsemen to meet Pou. Stymied, Pou withdrew to Guangling. Upon hearing this, Chen Kui, stricken with fear, torched Shouchun's stores, razed the city, and fell back.

Stationed in Chang'an, Shi Bao aimed to lead Guanzhong's troops against Ye. His Left Chief Clerk, Shi Guang, and Marshal, Cao Yao, vehemently opposed the plan. Incensed, Bao executed over a hundred, including Guang. His avarice and lack of foresight were clear, and Yongzhou's influential families doubted his prospects. They alerted Sima Xun, Jin's Liangzhou Inspector. Xun advanced with his forces, encamping at Xuangou, a distance of over 200 li from Chang'an. He commanded Liu Huan, the magistrate, to strike down Liu Xiuli, Administrator of Jingzhao, and decapitated him. Sanfu's powerful families slew many officials, seizing over 30 fortresses. A force of 50,000 rallied to Xun.

Bao, scrapping his Ye campaign, dispatched Ma Qiu, Yao Guo, and others to counter Xun with cavalry. Zun sent Wang Lang and 20,000 elite horsemen ostensibly to assault Xun, but instead seized Bao, delivering him to Ye. Xun, thwarted by Lang, abandoned Xuangou's siege, took Wancheng, executed Zun's appointee, Nanyang Administrator Yuan Jing, and withdrew.

When Zun first rose in Licheng, he promised Shi Min, "Strive hard! Upon success, you

shall be my heir." Yet, when he later designated Yan as heir, Min felt a deep sense of betrayal. Respected and expecting central authority, Min found Zun envious, reluctant to share power. As commander-in-chief, Min wielded military clout, winning the loyalty of generals and soldiers. He elevated over 10,000, including the Eastern Palace's former gaoli, to palace generals, granting them titles and wives. Unconcerned, Zun began to undermine Min's influence, sowing discord and public ire. Heeding Central Secretariat Minister Meng Zhun and Left Guard General Wang Luan, Zun grew suspicious, stripping Min of military command.

Min's resentment grew. Zhun and others urged Zun to eliminate him. In counsel with Shi Jian before Empress Dowager Lady Zheng, all pressed for Min's death. Lady Zheng objected, "Our power stems from Jinu's deeds in Licheng. Arrogant he may be, but we must bear him, not slay him." Post-meeting, Jian dispatched eunuch Yang Huan to warn Min. Joining forces with Li Nong and Right Guard Wang Ji, Min plotted Zun's downfall. Generals Su Hai and Zhou Cheng, with thirty armored men, seized Zun at Ruyi Temple. Amidst a game of chess, Zun confronted Cheng, "Who betrays?" Cheng replied, "Prince Jian of Yiyang is fit to rule." Zun mused, "My fate has come to this. How long will Jian reign?" They slew him in Kunhua Palace, along with Lady Zheng, Crown Prince Yan, Zhang Fei, Meng Zhun, and Wang Luan. Zun's reign lasted but 183 days.

Jian seized the throne and proclaimed amnesty for all condemned to death. Shi Min was named Grand General and titled Prince of Wude. Li Nong ascended as Grand Marshal, overseeing the imperial secretariat. Lang Kai took office as Minister of Works, Liu Qun, the Qinzhou Inspector, became Left Deputy Director of the Imperial Secretariat, and palace attendant Lu Chen was appointed chief of the imperial secretariat.

Jian commanded Shi Bao, Central Secretariat Minister Li Song, Palace General Zhang Cai, and others to slay Min and Nong at Kunhua Palace under cover of night. Their attempt failed, sparking turmoil in the palace. Anticipating Min's reprisal, Jian feigned ignorance of the plot. That very night, he had Song and Cai put to death at West Zhonghua Gate and executed Shi Bao for his complicity.

While Shi Zhi was in Xiangguo, he allied with Yao Yizhong, Fu Hong, and others, collectively issuing a military edict to eradicate Min and Nong. In response, Jian sent Shi Kun as Grand Commander with 70,000 troops, accompanied by Zhang Ju and palace attendant Huyan Sheng, to quash Zhi and his confederates. Concurrently, imperial guard leader Shi Cheng, palace attendant Shi Qi, and former Hedong Administrator Shi Hui conspired to assassinate Min and Nong, but their plot backfired, resulting in Min and Nong killing them instead.

The General of Dragon Soaring, Sun Fudu, Liu Zhu, and their cohorts, allied with 3,000 Jie tribesmen, knelt before Tengri, conspiring to eliminate Min and his allies. As Jian presided over the Central Terrace, Fudu, alongside more than thirty men, compelled him to strike at Min. When Jian saw Fudu destroying the walkway, he asked the reason. Fudu replied, "Li Nong and his rebels have risen; they now stand at the Eastern Ye Gate. I, your subject, have stringently commanded the guards and hastened to inform you beforehand."

Jian said, "You are a subject of merit, ever diligent in your duties for the realm. From the terrace, I shall observe your deeds. Fret not about the absence of your reward."

Yet, when Fudu and Zhu endeavored to assail Min and Nong, they were repulsed to the

Fengyang Gate. Min and Nong, at the head of their thousands, breached the Jinming Gate and made their ingress into the palace. In dread of Min's vengeance, Jian beckoned them to the hall, urging, "Sun Fudu has rebelled. You shall quash his insurrection with haste!" Min and Nong struck, decapitating Fudu and his men, leaving a trail of bodies and blood from Fengyang to Kunhua Palace. An edict was pronounced, decreeing death to any amongst the inner and outer six barbarian tribes who dared to take up arms. Amongst the Hu, some hewed down the gates, whilst others, in their desperation, scaled the walls to make their escape, their numbers beyond reckoning.

Min entrusted the Imperial Secretary Wang Jian and Treasurer Wang Yu with the safeguarding of Jian at the Yulong Temple, commanding thousands of troops, their sustenance raised by ropes.

Min proclaimed throughout the city, "Those who share our heart may abide; those who do not, let them depart as they will." He ordered the gates flung wide, and the folk of Zhao within a hundred li flocked into the city, whilst the multitudes of Hu and Jie made their exodus, thronging the exits. Recognizing the fickleness of the Hu, Min charged the people of Zhao to slay any Hu they encountered. For each Hu head delivered to the Fengyang gate, civil officials were to ascend three ranks, and warriors were to be appointed to the Ivory Gate. In one single day, the heads of tens of thousands were claimed. Min himself led the Zhao in a merciless purge of the Hu and Jie, sparing neither high nor low, male nor female, young nor old, rich nor poor. Over 200,000 fell, their corpses cast beyond the city walls, left to be devoured by the scavenging jackals and wolves. Those garrisoned in the four corners, upon receipt of Min's commands, carried out the executions. Among those of high noses and beards, half were slain in error.

The Grand Preceptor, Zhao Lu, the Grand Commandant, Zhang Ju, the General of the Central Army, Zhang Chun, the Director of the Imperial Household, Shi Yue, the Governor-General of the Cavalry, Shi Ning, the Captain of the Guards, Zhang Ji, and a host of dukes, ministers, and soldiers, including the Dragon Cavalry, escaped to Xiangguo for sanctuary. Shi Kun absconded to seize Jizhou. The Cavalry's Governor-General, Zhang Shen, fortified Fukou; Zhang Hedou claimed Shidu; Duan Qin of Jianyi entrenched in Liyang; Yang Qun of Ningnan fortified Sangbi castle. Liu Guo commandeered Yangcheng, Duan Kan secured Chenliu, Yao Yizhong held Hunqiao, and Fu Hong dominated Fangtou. Each faction mustered tens of thousands of troops. Wang Lang and Ma Qiu fled Chang'an for Luoyang. Following Min's directive, Qiu slaughtered over a thousand Hu from Lang's ranks. Lang escaped to Xiangguo, while Ma Qiu and his men sought asylum with Fu Hong.

Shi Kun, joined by Zhang Ju and Wang Lang, marshaled an army of 70,000 to assault Ye. Shi Min, commanding a cavalry barely a thousand strong, confronted them north of the city. Brandishing a double-edged spear, Min shattered their ranks, sending them into a chaotic retreat. Three thousand of the enemy fell, beheaded. Kun and his cohorts, utterly vanquished, retreated to Jizhou.

Min and Li Nong, at the head of 30,000 cavalry, set out to confront Zhang Hedou at Shidu. Unbeknownst to them, Jian dispatched a eunuch with covert orders for Zhang Shen and his allies to blindside Ye. The eunuch, however, divulged Jian's scheme to Min and Nong. They wheeled around, deposed Jian, and put him to death, along with all 38 of Jilong's grandsons, eradicating the Shi lineage. Jian's rule spanned a mere 103 days.

In Yonghe's eighth year, Jilong's youngest, Hun, fled to the Jin capital with his wife and concubines. Captured by authorities, he was swiftly executed in Jiankang's marketplace. Of Jilong's thirteen sons, five fell to Ran Min, the rest succumbing to fratricidal strife, Hun last of all. A prophecy foretold the Shi's fall by one named Ling. Min, titled Duke of Lanling, a name Jilong scorned, rebranding the post to Wuxing, ultimately wrought the clan's ruin.

Shi Le seized the throne in Emperor Cheng's Xianhe third year. Over 23 years, two emperors and four princes reigned, the dynasty concluding in Jin's Emperor Mu's Yonghe fifth year.

Ran Min

Min, courtesy name Yongzeng and known as Jinu, was the adopted grandson of Jilong. His father, Zhan, also called Hongwu, was originally Ran Liang from Neihuang in the Wei region. Zhan hailed from a lineage of cavalry commanders from Liyang who served under the Han dynasty, a family of gate guards through the ages. At the age of twelve, during Le's campaign against Chen Wu, Zhan was taken prisoner and subsequently adopted by Jilong. Renowned for his courage, Zhan was named General of Archers on the left flank and was later honored with the title Marquis of Xihua.

Min, in his youth, was marked by audacity and valor, earning Jilong's affection as a grandson. Growing to a formidable eight *chi*, his strategic genius, unmatched strength, and martial prowess became legendary. Named General Who Establishes Righteousness, later Marquis of Xiucheng, he held key military roles: General of the Northern Command and Agile Cavalry. At Changli, amidst Jilong's defeat, only Min's forces held firm, which catapulted him to fame. His triumph over Liang Du cemented his status, striking fear in the seasoned generals of both Hu and Xia.

In Yonghe's sixth year, Min executed Shi Jian. Minister of Works Shen Zhong, Minister of Justice Lang Kai, and 48 others proffered Min the August Title. Min demurred, proposing Li Nong for the honor. Nong's steadfast loyalty and threat of suicide swayed Min to relent. Crowned Emperor in the southern suburb, Min declared amnesty and inaugurated the "Yongxing" era, renaming the state Great Wei and reclaiming the Ran surname.^y His father, Emperor Gao, and ancestor, Emperor Longyuan, were posthumously enshrined.

Lady Wang, his mother, was named Empress Dowager; his wife, Lady Dong, became Empress. His son Zhi ascended as Crown Prince. Li Nong received titles: Grand Preceptor, Grand Commandant, Director of the Imperial Secretariat, and Prince of Qi. Nong's sons became county dukes; Min's sons Yin, Ming, and Yu, kings. Civil and military ranks rose three steps. Officials earned promotions and nobility by merit. Min's envoys extended amnesty to independent lords, all of whom spurned the gesture.

Upon learning of Jian's demise, Shi Zhi crowned himself emperor in Xiangguo, rallying support from barbarian tribes and their provincial forces. Min dispatched emissaries across the Yangtze to Jin, proposing, "The Hu rebels on the Central Plain are quelled. Should you wish to join the purge, send reinforcements." Jin's court stayed silent. Min then purged Li Nong and his three sons, alongside Imperial Secretariat Prefect Wang Mo, Palace Attendants Wang Yan and Yan Zhen, and Zhao Sheng. Meanwhile, Jin's Lujiang Governor Yuan Zhen struck Hefei, seized Southern Barbarian Colonel Sang Tan, relocated the populace, and withdrew.

Shi Zhi tasked Chancellor Shi Kun with 100,000 troops to seize Ye, and they took Handan. Zhi joined Liu Guo at Fanyang, leading a coalition. Min dealt Kun's Handan forces a severe blow, inflicting over ten thousand casualties. Liu Guo withdrew to Fanyang. Fu Jiān breached the pass at Fangtong. Zhang Hedu, Duan Qin, Liu Guo, and Jin Tun allied at Changcheng to strike Ye.

Min named his Left Deputy, Liu Qun, as Imperial Secretariat Commander-in-Chief, with 120,000 troops under Wang Tai, Cui Tong, Zhou Cheng, and others at Huangcheng. Min,

with 80,000 elite soldiers, met them, clashing with the enemy at Cangting. Heduo's ranks crumbled, 28,000 falling; Jin Tun was seized and executed at Yinanxiang, his forces captured. Their numbers surpassed 300,000, their banners and drums stretching for hundreds of li, eclipsing the Shi might.

Triumphant at Cangting, Min hosted a victory feast, promoted meritocracy, and rewarded skill. Confucian scholars flourished, steering governance and society towards a renaissance akin to Wei and Jin's dawn.

Min marched with a hundred thousand to besiege Xiangguo and Shi Zhi. He named his son, Prince Yin of Taiyuan, Grand Chanyu and General, enlisting a thousand surrendered Hu. Wei Xiao, the Grand Master, protested. Enraged, Min killed him and his kin. The siege lasted over a hundred days, with earthworks and tunnels dug, fields sown. Zhi, fearing death, renounced his emperorship for kingship of Zhao, seeking aid from Murong Jun and Yao Yizhong. Shi Kun from Jizhou and Yizhong's son Xiang with thirty-eight thousand cavalry from Getou came. Jun sent Yue Wan with thirty thousand from Longcheng. Together, they numbered a formidable hundred thousand.

Min sent Sun Wei to stop Kun at Huangqiu, and Hu Mu, his cavalry general, to face Xiang at Changlu. Both Wei and Mu lost, their forces shattered, retreating alone. Kun's forces neared, and Min readied himself for a frontal assault. The General of the Guard, Wang Tai, warned, "The enemy, cornered and bewildered, seeks allies in desperation. Now, with their ranks swelled by eager reinforcements, they wish us to engage, that they might strike us from front and rear. It is prudent to fortify our position and not venture forth, to observe and act accordingly, thus foiling their schemes. Should Your Majesty personally enter the fray and a mishap ensue, the consequences would be dire beyond measure. I implore you to refrain from action; allow me and the other generals to extinguish this threat on your behalf." Min was inclined to heed this advice, until the Daoist Fa Rao stepped forward. "With Venus crossing the Pleiades, time to slay the Hu king. One battle, a hundred victories. Do not miss this chance." Min, his resolve hardened, declared with a sweep of his arm, "My decision to battle is irrevocable! Let those who dare to counsel caution be met with the sword!" With that, he led his full might into the fray.

Assailed by Yao Xiang, Yue Wan, Shi Kun, and Zhi from behind, Min's forces crumbled. He fled to Xiangguo, then with ten horsemen to Ye. A surrendered Hu, Su Tekang, seized Ran Yin and Liu Ji, delivering them to Zhi for execution. Over ten thousand, including Shi Pu, Xu Ji, Hu Mu, Li Lin, Lu Shen, Wang Yu, Liu Qin, and Liu Xiu, died, as did many civilians. Bandits roamed, famine and cannibalism struck Si and Ji.

Since Jilong's last years, Min squandered stores for favor. Endless wars with Qiang and Hu meant no month without conflict. Hundreds of thousands from Qing, Yong, You, and Jing, and various tribes, were sent home. Chaos reigned on the roads, with rampant attacks and looting. Famine and plague ravaged, only two or three out of ten survived the trek. Xia's lands lay fallow. In remorse, Min executed Fa Rao and his sons, dismembering them, and posthumously honored Wei Xiao as Grand Minister of the Masses.

Shi Zhi dispatched Liu Xian with seventy thousand to attack Ye. Unbeknownst to all, Min had secretly returned. The city was rife with fear, the rumor being that Min was dead. Zhang Ai, the Deputy Commander of Archers, advised Min to show himself and quell the rumors. Min did, and the rumors died.

Liu Xian approached Mingguang Palace, 23 *li* from Ye. Min, fearful, called for Wang Tai's counsel. Tai, still bitter from being ignored, feigned illness. Min, after a personal visit, was met with claims of Tai's grave sickness. Furious, Min returned to his palace, and with a fierce glance to those beside him, he declared, "That Ba slave, does he presume to dictate my fate? First shall I vanquish the horde of barbarians, and then shall the blade find Tai's neck!" He led his entire troops to battle, routing Xian's forces and slaughtering thirty thousand at Yangping. Xian, in fear, secretly offered surrender and Zhi's death as loyalty. Min returned victorious to Ye.

Rumors spread of Tai's plot to defect with Qin people to Guanzhong. Enraged, Min executed Tai and his family. Xian kept his word, killing Zhi, Zhao Lu and others, and sent their heads to Ye. Zhi's general, Shi Ning, fled to Bairen. Min had Zhi's head burned publicly.

Min's Inspector of Xuzhou, Liu Qi, handed Juancheng over to Jin. Liu Xian attacked Ye again but was beaten by Min. Min then assumed the August Title in Xiangguo. His inspectors, Zhou Cheng of Xuzhou, Wei Tong of Yanzhou, Ran Yu, governor of Yuzhou, and Le Hong, inspector of Jingzhou, all yielded their cities to Jin. Generals Gao Chong of Southern Conquest and Lyu Hu of Barbarian Conquest seized Luozhou's inspector, Zheng Xi, and took Sanhe for Jin. Muyong Biao captured Zhongshan, killing Min's men Bai Tong of Ningbei and Liu Zhun, inspector of Youzhou, before surrendering to Muyong Jun.

During this period, yellow and red clouds appeared in the northeast, stretching over a hundred *zhang*. A white bird flew out from these clouds, heading southwest, prompting scorn from the astronomers.

Liu Xian marched on Changshan, and Governor Su Hai sought Min's aid. Min left Grand General Jiang Gan and others to guard the crown prince, Zhi, in Ye, while he himself rode with eight thousand cavalry to the rescue. Xian's Marshal, Prince Ning of Qinghe, defected to Min at Zaoqiang, his troops following suit. Xian, defeated in Xiangguo, saw his general Cao Fuqu betray him, opening the gates for Min's forces. Min executed over a hundred of Xian's officials, torched the palace in Xiangguo, and forced its inhabitants to relocate to Ye. Xian's Lieutenant-General, Fan Lu, with a thousand soldiers, cut through to Fangtou.

Murong Jun had seized You and Ji, extending his dominion to Jizhou. Min, leading his cavalry, set forth to confront Murong Ke's forces at the gates of Weichang City. Min's Grand General, Dong Run, alongside the General of Chariot and Cavalry, Zhang Wen, counselled caution, saying, "The Xianbei, riding the crest of victory, possess a might unassailable. It behooves us to eschew direct engagement, to sap their vigor, and thereafter to marshal our forces for a decisive blow. By such means shall victory be ours." Min, incensed, retorted, "With an army at my back, I set forth to subdue Youzhou and to slay Murong Jun. Should I now shun Ke, scorn shall be my lot." Min clashed with Ke ten times, victorious in each.

Ke then deployed 5,000 of his fiercest, chaining their horses in a square formation, advancing on Min. Min, astride Red Dragon, a steed that could cover a thousand *li* in a day, brandished a double-bladed spear and a hook-spear. Charging with the wind, he fell over 300 Xianbei. But Yan cavalry encircled Min, outnumbered, he fled east. After twenty *li*, the horse collapsed inexplicably, and Min was captured, along with Dong Run, Zhang Wen, and others, and taken to Ji by Ke.

Jun confronted Min, inquiring, "You, of lowly birth and servile position, whence comes this deluded claim to Son of Heaven?"

Min retorted, "With the realm in utter disarray, you, barbarians with the faces of men but the hearts of beasts, still dare to usurp. I am a hero of our times! Why should I not ascend to the imperial dignity?" Enraged, Jun ordered Min whipped 300 times and sent to Longcheng, notifying the temples of Hui and Huang.

Murong Ping laid siege to Ye. Liu Ning and his brother Chong led three thousand Hu cavalry to Jinyang, while Su Hai fled Changshan for Xinxing. Starvation in Ye led to cannibalism; even Jilong's former concubines were consumed. The young Ran Zhi remained. Jiang Gan sent Miao Song and Liu Yi to Jin, seeking help. Stopped at Cangyuan by Dai Shi, Governor of Puyang, they were denied entry and asked for the imperial seal. Yi returned to Ye, while Gan hesitated. Then, Shi entered Ye with a hundred men, defended three terraces, and demanded, "Give me the imperial seal. The roads are blocked by the barbarian invasion, so I can't return the seal to the emperor. Once I have it, I'll ask the emperor for troops and provisions to help us." Gan complied.

Shi tasked He Rong with provisioning but covertly sent the seal to the capital. Military officers Tian Xiang and Ma Yuan opened the gates to Ping. Shi, Rong, and Gan escaped to Cangyuan. Ping captured Min's wife, Lady Dong, Prince Zhi, and officials including Grand Commandant Shen Zhong, Minister of Works Tiao You, Director of Records Nie Xiong, Captain of the Imperial Guard Ji Pi, Chief of Imperial Texts Li Yuan, sending them to Ji. The Masters of Writing, Wang Jian, the Left and Right Attendants Zhang Qian and Lang Su, committed suicide.

Jun sent Min Longcheng and executed him at E'xiang Mountain. Within seven //, vegetation withered, locusts invaded, and from the 5th to the 12th month, no rain fell. Jun sent an envoy to sacrifice, bestowing upon Min the posthumous title "Heavenly King of Martial Mourning." Heavy snow fell that day. This was in the 8th year of Yonghe. (352)

Comment

The historian notes:

To save the drowning, to quell the flames—these are deeds of emperors and kings. To spread malice, to impose tyranny—this is the way of nomads and barbarians. These harbingers of discord have been the scourge of our lands since time immemorial. With walls we must encircle ourselves, ever wary of their trespass. What peril surpasses their encroachment upon our soil, their covetous gaze upon our royal decrees, seizing upon our moments of weakness, exploiting the fissures of our calamities? With ferocious cries, they unleash turmoil, upending the celestial order!

Shi Le, sprung from the Qiangqu, was marked by a visage most peculiar among his unsightly peers. Upon hearing the war drums in Shangdang, Jizi [Shi Huan] espied in him a nature far from the mundane. As he leaned against the battlements of Luoyang, whistling into the wind, Yifu [Wang Yan] recognized in him the seeds of tumult. In the days when Emperor Hui's grip on the realm weakened and chaos reigned supreme, Le gathered a band of outlaws, wreaking havoc, laying waste to our cities, and slaughtering our people. The markets and streets were plunged into despair, as if cast adrift amidst the surging waves; the noble and the dignified vanished as if spirits lost in the barren deserts. Could it be that the

Heaven, grown weary of Jin's virtue, bestowed their favor upon this demon's progeny?

In the face of the enemy and amidst peril, Le demonstrated shrewdness and valor, his strategies imbued with ingenuity, his martial spirit soaring unchecked. He eclipsed Emperor Wu of Wei in splendor, and in his dealings with Liu Kun, he displayed a wit and elegance surpassing all. He set Yuanchao [Sima Yue] ablaze in Ku County, laying bare the deep-seated corruption of the empire; he executed Pengzu [Wang Jun] in Xiangguo, condemning him for his leaderless treachery. Thus, he extended his dominion over Yan and Zhao, swallowed Han and Wei whole, wielding extraordinary talent to usurp titles and honors, reclaiming the ancient capitals, standing defiant against the royal lineage. Casting aside his fur garments for the regalia of state, donning crowns, discarding the old ways for the founding of schools—such was his might that neighboring foes trembled and offered tribute, while distant lands heeded his influence and paid homage. What then could be added to the annals of statecraft to surpass his deeds?

Though his reign was marked by cruelty and savagery, Le stood as a marvel of his age. Alas, entrusting his legacy to the unworthy, blind to the morrow, his demise heralded the extinction of his line. Thus, we are reminded of the peril in the failure to discern the true character of men.

Jilong cloaked a heart devoid of virtue and righteousness. From youth he trifled with peril, donning the guise of a sheep whilst harboring the ferocity of a leopard, letting loose the heart of an owl within the nature of a wolf. Initially nursing grievances, he ultimately embarked upon a path of usurpation and tyranny. Thus, his reign was characterized by boundless arrogance and extravagance, the people burdened by relentless toil and warfare, the clatter of spades and swords unceasing, the administration of justice severe and merciless, with executions and massacres commonplace. The few survivors, desolate and bereft of solace, sought pity where none could be found, as the barbarians wrought havoc and cruelty with abandon. Was there ever a greater calamity?

Thereafter, distrust and animosity festered among his own progeny. Brothers and fathers and sons turned against each other. Their internecine slaughter was a spectacle for all under Heaven. The earth over their graves scarcely dry, turmoil and disorder swiftly followed. The calamity began with Zhang Chai and reached its zenith with Ran Min, who brought about the extinction of his clan. Their accumulated wickedness inevitably led to their downfall, a fate decreed by Heaven. Indeed, treachery begets calamity, as if following an immutable law; guilt finds its due response, in a cycle as predictable as the course of nature. The annihilation wrought by Shilong upon the Jin, marked by its sheer cruelty, and likewise, the purge conducted by Yongzeng against the Jie, sealing their fate—both attest to the unerring principle that no deed, virtuous or vile, remains unrewarded. Such is the inexorable truth of the cosmos!

Eulogy

In the dwindling court's heart, where power ebbed,
Barbaric tribes clashed, for high seat they webbed.

The Five Summits, veiled in dust's grey cloak,
While fog's cold fingers the Three Spirits choked.

Amidst the chaos, the cunning Shi rose,
In the dance of discord, their strategy flows.
Endless, the war they craftily waged,
As calamity's tapestry was darkly staged.
Towns wept, cities bled, under their cruel game,
From brigands to nobles, they sought to claim.
Yet monstrous their acts, in the annals of time,
Their dark place secure, in history's climb.

Jilong, whose reign in excess was drowned,
With cruelty's echo, his name was bound.
Infamy's shadow, his legacy's shroud,
His downfall, the state, in silence, enclouded.

i *TPYL196:*

The "Records of Ye" state: Three *li* west of Ye city was the Mulberry and Catalpa Garden, with a palace overlooking the Zhang River. All these palaces were inhabited by consorts and their maidservants. Additionally, there were gardens and parks for raising deer, pheasants, hares, and tigers, where frequent banquets and excursions took place.

TPYL955:

The "Records of Shi Hu in Ye" state: Within the Mulberry and Catalpa Garden, mulberries were planted throughout. On the third day of the third month and during the silkworm season, Hu's Empress, accompanied by thousands of palace women, would go out to the colorful mulberry trees and amuse themselves beneath them.

ii *TPYL53:*

The "Comprehensive Geographical Records of the Sui Dynasty" states: Ten *li* west of Liling County lies Shizi Hill, also known as Treasure Mountain, tall and imposing. There is a tomb shaped like an inkstone, commonly called the Yanzi Tomb, which is the tomb of Zhao Jianzi. Shi Hu ordered the tomb to be excavated. At first, charcoal was found, then at a depth of one *zhang*, connected wooden planks were uncovered, eight *chi* thick and tall. Next, a flowing spring was discovered, its water unusually cold and blue. Using oxhide bags and a winch, water was drawn for a month without end, until finally the effort ceased. A city was built around it, and its energy formed towers and pavilions.

iii *TPYL559:*

Pan Yue's "Records of Guanzhong" states: The tomb of Qin Shi Huang is to the north of Mount Li, tens of *zhang* high, with a circumference of six to seven *li*, now within the boundaries of Yin Pan. Although the tomb is grand in scale, it does not fully reveal the efforts of 600,000 people over many years. Much of their labor remains hidden. The springs of Mount Li, which originally flowed north, were all dammed to make them flow west. Furthermore, there were no large stones in the area, so they were transported from various mountains north of the Wei River. Hence the song: "Haul stones to the mouth of Ganquan, the Wei River ceases to flow. A thousand men sing in unison, ten thousand work in concert."

TPYL560:

The tomb of Qin Shi Huang is located on Mount Li, the ancient land of the Li Rong,

now known as Sufeng. Duke Xian of Jin conquered the Li Rong and captured two women. The northern side of the mountain was rich in gold, the southern side abundant in fine jade, known as Lantian. Thus, out of greed, he was buried there.

More than 700,000 convicts were mobilized from across the empire to dig into the earth, penetrating three springs to place the coffin. Palaces and observatories, along with all manner of rare and strange treasures, were concealed within. A craftsman was ordered to create crossbows with mechanisms that would shoot anyone who approached the tomb. Mercury was used to represent the hundred rivers, the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers, and the great seas, with gold and silver forming ducks and cranes. The machinery was designed to interact and cycle endlessly. The heavens were depicted above, with lamps made of fish oil, expected to burn for a long time without extinguishing. Those women of the harem without children were all buried alive, and the number of those who followed him in death was considerable. Fearing that the workers would reveal the tomb's secrets, they were killed within the tomb, and the excess door was sealed. The earth was then covered with trees and vegetation to resemble a hill, the mound rising over fifty *zhang* high, with a circumference of more than five *li*.

Later, Xiang Yu set fire to the palaces and observatories, and bandits from the east plundered it. Subsequently, a shepherd boy, searching for his lost sheep, entered the tomb with a torch to find the sheep and ended up burning the coffin. The bandits then took the copper.

^{iv} *TPYL556:*

The "Records of Ye" state: Hu's tomb is located at the northwest corner of Ye. After the burial, chaos ensued within Ye. The tomb's boundary was not yet named. Soon after, it was excavated.

^v *TPYL120:*

Shi Min sought to eradicate the names of the two Shis and proposed, "Confucius said, 'Those who have changed their surnames and ruled for seven months are seventy-two in number.' Following the prophecies of Zhao and Li, which are clearly recorded, and with the Virtue Star standing guard, it is fitting to change the state's name to 'Da Wei' and adopt the Li surname."

[...] Min usurped the imperial throne at the southern suburbs, declared a general amnesty, changed the era name, and called the state Da Wei, reverting to the Ran surname.

Era & Events

Western Jin(265-316)						
Common Era	Major Events	Jin rulers era names		Era names of other rulers		
		Era names	Literal Meanings	Ruler names	Era names	Literal Meanings
		Sima Yan, Emperor Wu	The Martial	Sun Huo	Emperor Wu of Wu	The Last Emperor of Wu
265	Sima Zhao died in the 8th month. His son, Yan, declared himself emperor in 12th month.	1st Year of Taishi	Peaceful Beginning		1st Year of Ganlu	Sweet Dew
266	Cao Huan, last emperor of Cao Wei, abdicated in favour of Sima Yan.	2nd Year			2nd Year	
267	Emperor Wu established his oldest living son, the developmentally disabled Sima Zhong, as heir.	3rd Year			1st Year of Houding	Treasure Ding
268		4th Year			2nd Year	
269	Xianbei rebels led by Tufa Shuyieng invaded Liangzhou. The rebellion lasted 11 years.	5th Year			4th Year	
270		6th Year			1st Year of Jianhong	Establish Balance
271		7th Year			2nd Year	
272		8th Year			3rd Year	
273		9th Year			1st Year of Fenghuang	Phoenix
274		10th Year			2nd Year	
275		1st Year of Jianming	All Peaceful		3rd Year	
276		2nd Year			1st Year of Tianze	Heavenly Book
277		3rd Year			1st Year of Tianji	Heavenly Seal
278		4th Year			1st Year of Tianji	Heavenly Record
279		5th Year			2nd Year	
280	Wu collapsed in the 3rd month. There were 2,659,940 households in Jin. The <i>shenjianfa</i> was implemented.	6th Year			3rd Year	
281		1st Year of Taiang	Great Tranquility		4th Year	
282		2nd Year				
283	Prince Sima You of Qi died in the 3rd month.	3rd Year				
284		4th Year				
285		5th Year				
286		6th Year				
287		7th Year				
288		8th Year				
289		9th Year				
290	Emperor Wu died in the 3rd month. His son, Zhong, took the throne as Emperor Hui with Yang Jun as regent.	10th Year	Great Splendor			
291	War of the Eight Princes: In 3rd month, Empress Jia conspired with Prince Sima Wei of Chu and murdered Yang Jun, starting her regency. In 6th month, Empress Jia ordered Wei to kill Prince Liang of Ru'nan and Wei Guan. She killed Prince Wei later.	Sima Zhong, Emperor Hui	The Benevolent			
292		1st Year of Yongxi	Eternal Splendor			
293		1st Year of Yongping	Eternal Peace			
294		1st Year of Yongkang	Primary Health			
295		2nd Year				
296	In 5th month, Xiongnu rebel Hao San emerged in Shangdang.	3rd Year				
297		4th Year				
298		5th Year				
299	Refugees from 6 commanderies of Luoyang and Tianshui migrated to Liang and Yi provinces.	6th Year				
300	Jiang Tong published <i>Thesis on the Relocation of Dunhuang</i> . In 12th month, Empress Jia deposed crown prince Yu.	7th Year				
301	In 3rd month, Empress Jia killed Yu. In 4th month, Prince Sima Lun of Zhao killed Jia, Zhang Hua and others. Pan Yue and Ouyang Jian were also killed this year.	8th Year				
302	In 1st month, Sima Lun declared himself emperor. In 4th month, Lun was defeated and killed. Emperor Hui was reinstalled. The civil war began. In 10th month, Li Fe rebelled in Mianzhu.	1st Year of Yongkang	Eternal Health			
303		2nd Year				
304		1st Year of Yongning	Eternal Tranquility			
305		2nd Year				
306	In summer, Zhang Chang rebelled in Aelu. In 10th month, Lu Ji was killed.	1st Year of Tai'an	Great Tranquility			
307	In 10th month, Liu Yuan rebelled in Douguo city and declared himself King of Han. Li Xiong declared himself King of Changshou. Zhang Gou was sent to Liangzhou.	2nd Year		Li Yu of Cheng	1st Year of Jianhu	Beginning of Construction
308		1st Year of Yong'an	Eternal Peace	Li Xiong of Cheng	1st Year of Jianming	Flourishing Construction
309		1st Year of Jianwu	Building Military	Liu Yuan of Han	1st Year of Tianji	Flourishing Happiness
310	In 6th month, Li Xiong declared himself Emperor of Cheng. In 8th month, Prince Sima Yue of Donghai acted as regent. In 11th month, Emperor Hui died. His younger brother Chi ascended the throne as Emperor Huai.	1st Year of Yongping	Eternal Prosperity			
311	Hui was poisoned, probably by the regent Sima Yue. Hu's brother, Chi, became Emperor Huai. In 9th month, Prince Sima Rui of Langye migrated to Jianye.	2nd Year			1st Year of Tianping	Peaceful Stability
312		1st Year of Guangji	Radious Joy			
313	In 10th month, Liu Yuan declared himself Emperor of Han, with Pingyang as his capital.	1st Year of Yongjia	Eternal Harmony			
314		2nd Year			1st Year of Yongfeng	Eternal Phoenix
315	In 7th month, Liu Yuan died and his eldest son, He, took the throne. Yuan's 4th son, Gong, usurped the throne by killing He. In 8th month, Pang Bu rebelled in Huayang.	3rd Year		Liu Yuan of Han	1st Year of Shouji	Auspicious River
316	In 1st month, 4-5k refugee households from Baifu rebelled in Xiangzhou, led by Du Tan. In 4th month, Shi Le annihilated Western Jin's main army in Moping city of Ku county, resulting in the death of over 100,000 soldiers. In 6th month, Liu Yao seized	4th Year		Liu Gong of Han	1st Year of Guangping	Radious Prosperity
		5th Year		Li Xiong of Cheng	1st Year of Tianping	Jade Balance
		6th Year		Liu Gong of Han	1st Year of Jiaoping	Auspicious Peace
		7th Year				
		1st Year of Jianping	The Pitiful			
		2nd Year	Flourishing Construction	Zhang Shi of Former Liang	1st Year of Yong'an	Eternal Peace
		3rd Year		Liu Gong of Han	1st Year of Jianping	Beginning of an Era
		4th Year		Liu Gong of Han	1st Year of Linjin	Auspicious Unleash

