Murong Huang

Murong Huang, courtesy name Yuanzhen, was the third son of Murong Hui. He had a dragon-like countenance and prominent teeth, standing seven chi and eight cun tall. He was valiant, resourceful, and devoted to classical studies, with expertise in astronomy. When Hui was Duke of Liaodong, he appointed Huang as heir apparent. In early Jianwu era, he was appointed Champion General and Left Wise Prince, enfeoffed as Marquis of Wangping, and led troops in campaigns, accumulating numerous achievements. At the end of Taining era, he was appointed General Who Pacifies the North and promoted to Duke of Joseon. After Hui's death, he succeeded to the position, serving as Inspector of Pingzhou while retaining his role as General Who Pacifies the North, overseeing internal affairs. Soon after, when Yuwen Qidegui was driven out by his subordinate Yidougui and died in exile, Huang led cavalry to punish them. Yidougui, in fear, sued for peace. Huang then built two cities, Yuyin and Anjin, before returning.

Earlier, Huang's half-brother Han possessed martial prowess and great talent, and had long been viewed with suspicion by Huang. His maternal brothers Ren, Commander of Conquering Barbarians, and Zhao, Commander of Broad Martial Force, were both favored by Hui, which also displeased Huang. When Hui died, they all feared they would not be tolerated. At this time, Han fled to Duan Liao, while Ren persuaded Zhao to raise troops to depose Huang. Huang killed Zhao and sent envoys to investigate Ren's intentions, encountering Ren at Xiandu. Realizing his plot was discovered, Ren killed Huang's envoys and fled east to Pingguo. Huang dispatched his brothers You, Commander of Establishing Martial Force, and Marshal Tong Shou to suppress him. Ren fought with all his forces, greatly defeating You and his men, who were all captured by Ren. The Magistrate of Xiangping Wang Bing and General Sun Ji rebelled against Huang in Liaodong, while Colonel of Eastern Barbarians Feng Chou, Army Protector Yi Yi, Minister of Liaodong Han Jiao, and Administrator of Xuantu Gao Xu abandoned their cities and fled. Ren thus occupied all territory east of Liao, declaring himself General of Cavalry and Chariots, Inspector of Pingzhou, and Duke of Liaodong. Yuwen Gui, Duan Liao, and various Xianbei tribes all provided him support.

In the ninth year of Xianhe [334], Huang sent his Marshal Feng Yi to attack the Xianbei Mudi at Bailang, and Yang Weishuyu to attack the Wuhuan Xiluohou at Pinggang, both of whom were beheaded. Official Liu Pei attacked Yilian but failed. Duan Liao then raided Tuhe, but Huang's general Zhang Meng intercepted and defeated him. Liao's brother Lan and Han attacked Liucheng, but were defeated by Commander Wei Shi Cong. After ten days, Lan and Han again besieged Liucheng, and Huang dispatched Murong Han of Ningyuan and Feng Yi to rescue it. Huang warned Han: "The enemy is numerous and fierce, difficult to engage directly. Consider safety above all and do not advance rashly. Wait until the troops are assembled and formations are in order before attacking." Han, being naturally impetuous, sent over a thousand cavalry as vanguard. Feng Yi tried to stop him, but Han did not comply. He was defeated by Lan, losing more than half his men. Lan again attacked Liucheng, using scaling ladders and tunnels, maintaining the siege for twenty days. Shi Cong personally led his troops in a sortie, defeating them and taking fifteen hundred heads. Lan then fled and returned.

That year, Emperor Cheng sent Palace Attendants Xu Meng, Luqiu Xing, and others bearing imperial credentials to appoint Huang as Grand General of Garrison Forces, Inspector of Pingzhou, Grand Chanyu, and Duke of Liaodong, with authority to bear credentials, serve as commander-in-chief, and confer titles by imperial mandate, following the same precedent as Hui.

Huang personally campaigned against Liaodong and captured Xiangping. Liu Cheng, the Magistrate appointed by Ren, surrendered the city, and Zhang Heng of Xinchang captured his county magistrate and surrendered. Thereupon, Huang executed all the officials appointed by Ren, relocated prominent families of Liaodong to Jicheng, established three counties - Heyang, Wuci, and Xile - and then returned.

At the beginning of Xiankang era, Huang sent Feng Yi to raid the Yuwen sub-tribe of She Yiyu, capturing many prisoners before returning. She Yiyu led cavalry to pursue and fight at Hun River, but was again defeated. When Huang planned to cross the sea to attack Ren, all his subordinates advised against it, saying the sea route was dangerous and treacherous, and that they should take the land route instead. Huang said: "In the past, the sea never froze, but since Ren's rebellion, it has frozen three times. Emperor Guangwu of Han once used the ice of the Hutuo River to achieve his great enterprise. Perhaps Heaven wishes me to take advantage of this opportunity! My decision is final - anyone who tries to discourage this plan will be executed!" He then led his three armies to advance across the ice from Changli. Ren did not expect Huang's arrival, and scouts only reported when the army was seven li from Pingguo. Ren hastily went out to battle, was captured by Huang, who then killed him and returned.

Huang established sacrificial fields east of the Chaoyang Gate and appointed officials to manage them.

Duan Liao sent his general Li Yong to launch a night attack on Wuxing, but they encountered rain and withdrew. Commander Zhang Meng pursued and captured Yong. Duan Lan gathered tens of thousands of troops and camped at Qushui Pavilion, planning to attack Liucheng, while Yuwen Gui invaded Anjin to support Lan. Huang led 50,000 infantry and cavalry to attack them. When his army reached Liucheng, both Lan and Gui fled. He sent Feng Yi to lead light cavalry in pursuit, defeating them and capturing their military supplies, staying for twenty days before returning. He told his generals: "These two barbarians will be ashamed to return without achievement and will surely come again. We should set up ambushes around Liucheng to wait for them." He sent Feng Yi to hide cavalry along various routes at Ma'er Mountain. Soon after, Liao's cavalry indeed arrived, and Yi attacked from both sides, defeating them severely and beheading their general Rong Bao. He sent Deputy Chief Secretary Liu Bin and Gentleman of the Palace Yang Jing to escort Xu Meng and others back to the capital. He ordered his heir Jun to attack various cities held by Duan Liao, and Feng Yi to attack the Yuwen sub-tribe. Both returned with great victories.

He set up a "Suggestion Box" wooden post to open a channel for frank advice and criticism.

Later, he relocated to Changli Commandery and built Hao City east of Yilian, ordering General Lan Bo to garrison it to pressure Yilian. He also fortified Qushui to support Bo. When Yilian suffered severe famine, Duan Liao attempted to transport grain there, but Lan Bo intercepted and captured the supplies. Liao then dispatched General Qu Yun to attack Xingguo. Qu Yun engaged in a major battle with Murong Zun, Huang's general, at Wuguan River. Yun was defeated and beheaded, and his entire army was captured.

Feng Yi and others suggested that Huang's responsibilities were too great for his current position and that he should declare himself King of Yan. Thus, in the third year of Xiankang, Huang usurped the title of king and granted amnesty within his territory. He appointed Feng Yi as Chancellor of State, Han Shou as Marshal, and made Pei Kai, Yang Wu, Wang Yu, Li Hong, Du Qun, Song Gai, Liu Zhan, Shi Cong, Huangfu Zhen, Yang Xie, Song Huang, Ping Xi, Zhang Hong and others as high officials and generals. He built the Wenchang Palace, rode in a golden carriage drawn by six horses, and had roads cleared when he traveled. He made his wife Lady Duan the Queen and his heir Jun the Crown Prince, following the precedents of Wei Wu and Jin Wen in their roles as regents.

As Duan Liao repeatedly caused border troubles, Huang sent General Song Hui to pledge allegiance to Shi Jilong and request military assistance to attack Liao. Jilong then led his forces to arrive. Huang led his armies to attack various cities north of Lingzhi that belonged to Liao. Liao sent his general Duan Lan to resist, but in a great battle, Lan was defeated, with thousands beheaded and over 5,000 households captured before returning. When Jilong reached Xuwu, Liao fled to Miyun Mountain. Jilong advanced to Lingzhi and, angered by Huang's failure to join forces with him, attacked Huang, reaching Jicheng with several hundred thousand troops attacking from all sides. Thirty-six cities in the commanderies and counties rebelled to support Jilong. After more than ten days of standoff, Huang's advisers urged him to surrender. Huang said, "I am about to take the realm - how could I surrender to anyone!" He sent his son Ke and others to lead 2,000 cavalry in a dawn attack. Jilong's armies were thrown into chaos and abandoned their armor while fleeing. Ke pursued the victory, killing and capturing over 30,000, built a garrison at Fan city and returned. Duan Liao sent envoys to falsely surrender to Jilong and requested troops for support. Jilong sent his general Ma Qiu to lead troops to welcome Liao, but Ke ambushed them with 7,000 elite cavalry at Miyun Mountain, greatly defeating them and capturing their Sima Yang Yu and General Xianyu Liang, then returning with Duan Liao and his followers as captives.

The Emperor sent envoys to promote Huang to Grand General Who Conquers the North (Zhengbei Da Jiangjun), Governor of Youzhou, and Administrator of Pingzhou. He was additionally given the title of Palace Attendant (Sanqi Changshi), granted an additional 10,000 households, and retained his previous positions as Commander with Authority (Jie), Commander-in-Chief (Dudu), Chanyu, and Duke.

Huang's front army commander Murong Ping defeated Shi Jilong's generals Shi Cheng and others in Liaoxi, beheading their commanders Huyan Huang and Zhang Zhi, and captured over 1,000 households before returning. When Duan Liao plotted rebellion, Huang executed him.

Shi Jilong again sent Shi Cheng to attack Fan city, but he failed to take it and instead captured Guang city. Although Huang had declared himself King of Yan, he had not yet received imperial recognition. He therefore sent his Chief Clerk Liu Xiang to present news of his victory to the capital, while also explaining his temporary assumption of authority and requesting permission to launch a major campaign to pacify the Central Plains. Upon hearing of Yu Liang's death and that his brothers Bing and Yi had succeeded him as general and minister, Huang submitted a memorial stating:

Your subject has studied the enlightened and misguided rulers of past dynasties. Those who employed worthy men achieved peace and prosperity, while those who favored their relatives and in-laws inevitably met with disaster. Thus, Duke Shen of Zhou was praised as a worthy royal uncle precisely because he remained on the frontier and did not grasp power at court. Coming to King Zhao of Qin, though he could have been an excellent ruler, he entrusted power to his two uncles and nearly ruined the state. When it came to Emperor Wu of Han, he greatly favored Tian Fen and let him decide all important matters, only to bitterly regret it after Fen's death. Emperor Cheng was weak and unable to stand on his own, being deceived by his beautiful wife within and indulging his five uncles without, ultimately allowing Wang Mang to seize the throne. Who can read of these events without pain! Even if royal uncles were as worthy as Marquis Rang or Wang Feng, one would only hear of two ministers, not two rulers. If they lack ability, disasters like those of Dou Xian and Liang Ji will follow. These successes and failures are clear precedents. If one can change course, catastrophe can be avoided.

Your Majesty, born to rule by Heaven's mandate, should restore the way of Jin. Yet you face many national difficulties and are beset by grave concerns. Reflecting on past events still burns like fire. Examining the causes, they stem from the former Minister of Works, Liang, who, as the emperor's uncle, wielded such heavy influence that he governed imperiously and insulted frontier generals. This led Su Jun and Zu Yue to act in anger, resulting in national disaster. Even now, the Empress Dowager's rage led to her passing. If the state altars lack divine blessing and neither gods nor men offer aid, how far might these wolves' ambitions extend! Past events serve as warnings for the future, yet now Bing and others serve as Director of the Imperial Secretariat and General of the Left, controlling internal affairs while commanding armies outside. These brothers hold concurrent positions unmatched by other officials. Your Majesty shows deep respect for these maternal relatives, and they should be grateful. I have always believed that if rulers wish to honor their uncles, why not enfeoff them with frontier domains, grant them generous stipends, but limit their power and influence? This way, there would be no favoritism above or private criticism below. How then could honor or disgrace arise? What cause would there be for rumors? Previously, Liang alone had established reputation and prestige, yet still caused upheaval - how much worse might it be with those currently in power who lack any reputation! Moreover, human nature is easily misled and difficult to counsel. Even if Your Majesty shows no favoritism to them, who in the empire would believe there is no favoritism!

I hold a different rank and position from Bing and others, and our circumstances are vastly different. Though they are imperial relatives who should naturally receive favor, I must speak against current developments. I make these forthright statements primarily for Your Majesty's sake, and secondarily for Bing's benefit. I detest those officials who merely acquiesce, who witness success and failure but do nothing. What use are ministers who see someone stumble but do not help them up! In the past, Xu Fu warned of the dangers of the Huo clan, but Emperor Xuan did not heed him, leading loyal ministers to be branded as traitors - all because the situation was not properly assessed and preventive measures were not taken early. What I present now can be considered early prevention. I only fear Your Majesty will not recognize my loyalty or implement my suggestions, and when matters worsen, it will be too late for regret. In the past, Wang Zhang and Liu Xiang submitted memorials consistently criticizing the Wang clan, resulting in their sons being executed or punished. Gu Yong and Zhang Yu remained ambiguous and noncommittal, thus preserving themselves but earning the world's contempt. I, though of different customs with my unbound hair, serve as a high general. Day and night I worry, not knowing how to repay the state's kindness except by defeating external enemies and offering loyal counsel internally, dedicating my strength and sincerity to repay the nation's grace. If I do not speak up, who will!

He also wrote a letter to Bing saying: You, through your connection to the imperial family as an uncle, control the crucial mechanisms of state, issue imperial commands both inside and outside the court, while also holding positions commanding provinces and armies. You and your brothers have spread your network of influence throughout the capital region. Since the times of Qin and Han, has there ever been such extreme prominence and power! From my perspective, if you succeed in your endeavors, you might earn a reputation like Duke Shen; but if you fail to establish merit, you will not escape following the path of Liang Ji and Dou Xian.

Every time I read historical records, I see that favoring maternal relatives and allowing them to hold power inevitably leads to court chaos. First comes extraordinary glory, followed by the burden of downfall - this is what they call "love becoming the very source of harm." I have always been angered that rulers throughout history failed to prevent such problems from the beginning and continued to show favoritism. Why not simply grant them a territorial fief, allowing them to establish hereditary domains like the states of Qi and Chen during the Zhou Dynasty? In this way, the emperor's authority would be permanently preserved - what need would there be to worry about future disgrace! Dou Wu and He Jin were virtuous and humble. Though they won the hearts of worthy men, and even when threatened by eunuchs, earning the sympathy of all under heaven, they remained free from arrogance because they focused on serving the state rather than themselves, even at the cost of their lives.

At present, the empire faces urgent crises, with rebels and usurpers plaguing the Central Plains. Every family harbors blood-soaked grievances, every person bears the pain of seeking vengeance - how can one rest easy and spend days in refined conversation! Though I possess little virtue, I was granted command of several armies by the late emperor. Even with troops from just a few commanderies, I still aim to defeat powerful enemies. Thus, from then until now, we have engaged in constant battle. We farm for one season and fight for three, yet our troops remain strong and our granaries full. The enemy grows more fearful by the day while our territory expands. How much more could be achieved with imperial authority and magnificent power - the two situations cannot even be compared!

When Bing saw the memorial and letter, he became very frightened. Since Murong Huang was too far away to control, he and He Chong and others submitted a memorial recommending that Murong Huang be allowed to call himself the King of Yan.

That year, Murong Huang attacked Goguryeo, and [Goguryeo] King Zhao sued for peace, after which [Murong Huang] returned. The following year, Zhao sent his crown prince to pay tribute to Murong Huang.

Earlier, when Duan Liao was defeated, Jianwei Han fled to Yuwen Gui. Although he had long established his reputation and prestige, he could not maintain his position. So he pretended to be crazy, drinking excessively and singing with disheveled hair. Gui trusted him and did not restrict his movements, so he was able to freely roam around and familiarize himself with all the strategic terrain features and military routes. Murong Huang sent a merchant named Wang Che to secretly observe Han. When Han met Che, he said nothing but merely patted his chest. When Che returned and reported this, Huang said, "Han wants to return to us." He then sent Che to give Han a bow and arrows. Subsequently, Han secretly took some fine horses and brought his two sons back with him.

When Murong Huang was planning to attack the Shi clan, he casually said to his generals: "Shi Jilong believes that the defenses of Anle and other cities are impregnable, so he must not have set up defenses to the north and south of the cities. If we take an unexpected route, we should be able to conquer all the northern territories of Ji." He then led 20,000 cavalry through the Wenying Pass, advancing rapidly to Ji City, crossing the Wusui Ford, and entering Gaoyang. Along the way, they burned granaries and forcibly relocated more than 30,000 households from You and Ji regions.

He ordered Yang Yu, Tang Zhu and others to build Longcheng, construct palaces and temples, and renamed Liucheng County to Longcheng County. Then Emperor Cheng sent Guo Xi, who also held the position of Grand Honglu, with imperial credentials to appoint Murong Huang as Palace Attendant, Grand Commander of All Military Affairs North of the Yellow River, Grand General, and King of Yan, while maintaining his other official positions. He also enfeoffed more than a hundred meritorious officials.

In the seventh year of Xiankang, Murong Huang moved his capital to Longcheng. He led 40,000 elite troops, entering through the southern pass to attack the Yuwen and Goguryeo. He appointed Han and his son Chui as the vanguard, and sent Chief Clerk Wang Yu and others to command 15,000 troops to advance from Beizhi. The Goguryeo King Zhao, thinking Huang's army would come from the northern route, sent his brother Wu with 50,000 elite troops to defend Beizhi, while personally leading weaker troops to guard the southern pass. Han engaged Zhao's forces at Mudi and defeated them decisively. Taking advantage of the victory, they entered Wandu. Zhao fled alone on horseback. Huang excavated the tomb of Zhao's father Li, taking his corpse along with his mother, wife, and treasures. They captured more than 50,000 men and women, burned the palaces, destroyed Wandu, and returned. The following year, Zhao sent envoys to submit to Huang as a vassal, offering local tributes, and Huang then returned his father's corpse.

Yuwen Gui sent his state minister Mo Qianhun to attack Murong Huang. When his generals requested permission to engage in battle, Huang refused. Qianhun assumed Huang was afraid of him, so he indulged in drinking and hunting, neglecting his defenses. Huang then said, "Qianhun has become extremely arrogant and careless; now is the time to fight." He sent Han to lead the cavalry to attack them. Qianhun suffered a major defeat, barely escaping with his life, and all his troops were captured.

Murong Huang personally toured the commanderies and counties, encouraged agriculture and sericulture, and began construction of the palace complex in Longcheng.

Soon after, Murong Huang personally led 20,000 cavalry to attack Yuwen Gui, with Han and Chui serving as the vanguard. Gui sent his cavalry commander She Yiyu with all his forces to confront Han. Huang quickly sent a message to Han saying, "Yiyu is fierce and brave; we should avoid him for now and wait until the enemy becomes arrogant, then we can defeat them." Han replied, "All of Gui's elite forces are here. If we defeat them now, we can conquer Gui without further military effort. Yiyu only has an empty reputation; he is actually easy to deal with. We shouldn't let the enemy damage our troops' morale." Therefore, Han engaged in battle, beheaded Yiyu, and captured all his troops. Gui fled far north into the desert. Huang opened up more than a thousand li of territory and relocated over 50,000 households of their people to Changli. He renamed She Yiyu's city to Weide City (City of Awesome Virtue). He conducted victory celebration ceremonies and distributed rewards according to merit.

He provided cattle to poor households and allowed farming in the imperial parks. For those using the imperial cattle, the government took eight parts of the harvest while two parts went to the farmers. For those who had their own cattle but no land, they were also allowed to farm in the imperial parks, with the government taking seven parts and three parts going to the farmers. Feng Yu, who served as a Staff Officer in the Records Office, advised:

"I have heard that when sage kings governed their states, they kept taxes light and stored wealth among the common people. They distributed land in three grades and collected one-tenth in taxes. They clothed those who were cold and fed those who were hungry, ensuring every household had enough. Even during floods and droughts, why did these not become disasters? Because they carefully selected agricultural officials who thoroughly encouraged farming. People could cultivate 100 mu of land even without cattle power. Those who worked hard at farming received honors and rewards, while lazy farmers faced punishment and ostracism.

Furthermore, they established offices according to needs and appointed officials according to the offices, ensuring that positions were necessary and no post was empty. They calculated annual income and adjusted salaries accordingly. After providing for all officials, the surplus was stored in the great granaries, saving one year's worth of grain from every three years of farming. With such accumulation, how could there be any shortage in public funds? How could floods and droughts harm the common people!

Although orders to promote agriculture are frequently issued, none of the regional officials with 2,000-picul salaries show dedication to public service or enthusiasm for maximizing the land's productivity. Emperor Gaozu of Han understood this and executed dozens of such officials for failing to encourage farming effectively. As a result, during the reigns of Emperors Ming and Zhang, the era was called 'near-perfect peace.'"

"Since the chaos of the Yongjia era, people have fled their homes, leaving the Central Plains desolate with no smoke from cooking fires for thousands of li. People died of hunger and cold, their bodies filling the ditches. Our previous king, with his divine military wisdom, protected this region, using might to eliminate evil and virtue to embrace those from afar. Thus, people from all nine provinces and various tribes beyond the frontier came from thousands of li away, like children returning to a loving father. The number of immigrants is more than ten times that of the original inhabitants, making the population dense but land scarce, with four out of ten having no land.

Your Highness, with your sage-like wisdom, has expanded upon your predecessor's achievements, defeating powerful Zhao in the south and destroying Goguryeo in the east, expanding the territory by 3,000 li and increasing households by 100,000. Your military accomplishments rival those of the Earl of the West. You should abolish the imperial parks to provide land for immigrants. For those who arrive without resources, provide them with cattle. The people are yours, so how could the cattle be lost! The best way to store wealth is among the people - this is the principle.

Recently, this has deeply fulfilled the hopes of those seeking a better land, and people from the Central Plains are all preparing to come. How can Shi Jilong compete? Even during the declining years of Wei and Jin, they still didn't take seven or eight parts from the people. Those who farmed with government cattle got four parts while the government took six, and those using private cattle on government land split the harvest equally with the government. The people were content and happy with this. I would say even that wasn't the way of enlightened rulers, let alone taking more!

As for floods and droughts, even Yao and Tang couldn't avoid them. A ruler should dredge ditches and channels, following the irrigation methods of Zheng Bai, Ximen, and Shi Qi. In drought, release water from channels to create rain; in floods, direct water into ditches. This way, the ruler won't worry about [drought as in the poem] 'Cloudy Han,' and the people won't suffer from flooding."

"The people from Goguryeo, Baekje, and the Yuwen and Duan tribes were all relocated here through military force, unlike those from the Central Plains who came seeking righteousness. They all harbor thoughts of returning home. Now with nearly 100,000 households crowded around the capital, I fear they may become a serious threat to the state. We should separate their brothers and clan members, relocating them to various cities in the western territories. We should care for them with kindness while controlling them with laws, preventing them from living scattered among the local population and learning about the state's strengths and weaknesses."

"Currently, with the Central Plains not yet pacified, we should expand our resources and supplies. However, there are too many officials and numerous idle people who do not farm. When one person doesn't farm, they create a year's worth of hunger. They must take from those who farm to feed themselves - one idle person consumes the labor of one farmer. With tens of thousands of idle people, the loss is proportional. How can households be sufficient and people content? How can we achieve peace and prosperity this way!

Your Highness has studied many historical events; among political problems, none is more serious than this. Those who have extraordinary strategic abilities and talents matching the needs of the time can be appointed to appropriate positions. As for the rest, they should farm for food and raise silkworms for clothing - this is the natural way of heaven."

"Your Highness has a wise and enlightened nature, thirsting for honest counsel, so people offer their humble opinions without concealing anything. Previously, Staff Officer Wang Xian and Grand Master Liu Ming both exhausted their loyalty in offering sincere advice and presenting frank words. Although some of their words might have offended, their intention was not to cause offense. Yet the officials in charge reported them for treasonous speech against the throne and sought to prosecute them. Your Highness, with great compassion, pardoned them from capital punishment, but still demoted and restricted them, excluding them from court.

If their words were correct, Your Highness should have accepted them; if incorrect, you should have forgiven their straightforward nature. To punish those who offer remonstrance while seeking honest counsel is like heading north to reach the south - how can this succeed! The Right Chief Clerk Song Gai and others flatter and compromise, frivolously accusing those who offer honest advice. Having no backbone themselves, they resent those who do, blocking your ears and eyes - this is the height of disloyalty."

"The four occupations are what the state relies on, and education is a great matter of the state. Military training and farming are particularly fundamental. Craftsmen and merchants are merely secondary. We should assess what the military and state require, establish the necessary positions, and return the rest to farming. We should teach them military methods, but if after three years of study they show no achievement, they too should return to farming. We must not let them merely fill positions and block the path for the truly talented and capable."

"If what I have said is correct, I hope it will be implemented quickly; if incorrect, I am willing to accept punishment, so that all under heaven will know that the court embraces good counsel like flowing water and punishes evil without delay. Wang Xian and Liu Ming are loyal ministers - I hope you will pardon their offense of going against your wishes and make use of their beneficial advice."

Murong Huang issued an edict, saying:

"Having read the remonstrance from Record Officer Feng, I am truly alarmed. A ruler governs through the common people, and the people's lives depend on grain. Therefore, farming is the foundation of the state. Yet the officials and magistrates do not follow the spring farming orders and fail to encourage agriculture. Those who seriously neglect these duties should face legal punishment, and their subordinate cities should be strictly disciplined. Officials should investigate thoroughly and report the details.

All imperial gardens and parks can be abolished to provide land to those without fields. For the poor who have no assets and cannot sustain themselves, each shall be given one ox. If any have extra strength and wish to farm official lands with government oxen, they may follow the old laws of Wei and Jin. Officials should assess and construct irrigation systems to benefit both public and private interests, making full use of water and land resources.

With the Central Plains not yet pacified and military conflicts continuing, there are many who deserve merit, so official positions cannot be reduced now. We shall discuss this again after defeating our enemies. The Four Assistants and generals should quickly determine the proper number of craftsmen and merchants, with the rest returning to farming. Students who cannot handle training and education should also be removed from the rolls.

It is most difficult for ministers to speak frankly to their ruler. Absurd and baseless matters should be dismissed without question, while good suggestions should be adopted. Although Wang Xian and Liu Ming's offenses warranted restriction and demotion, this also showed my lack of magnanimity. They shall be restored to their original positions and remain in the remonstrance office. Feng Sheng has shown true ministerial integrity. Does not the Book of Poetry say: 'No word should go unanswered'? Grant him 50,000 cash. Make it known both inside and outside the court that anyone wishing to point out my faults, regardless of status, should do so without reservation."

"At that time, a black dragon and a white dragon appeared at Dragon Mountain. Murong Huang personally led his officials to observe them, staying about two hundred paces away from the dragons, and made offerings with a grand sacrifice. The two dragons intertwined their heads playfully, then separated and departed. Murong Huang was greatly delighted. Upon returning to the palace, he granted amnesty throughout his domain, renamed the new palace 'Harmonious Dragon' (He Long), and established the Dragon Soaring Buddhist Temple (Long Xiang Si) on the mountain."

"He granted the title of 'Elevated Students' (Gao Men Sheng) to the sons of high officials who were studying at the imperial academy. He established the Eastern School (Dong Xiang) in the old palace to conduct traditional archery ceremonies. Every month, he would personally observe and evaluate the students' performance. Murong Huang had a refined appreciation for literature and was diligent in teaching. The number of students flourished, reaching over a thousand. He personally created the 'Supreme Chapters' (Tai Shang Zhang) to replace the 'Quick Mastery' (Ji Jiu), and also wrote fifteen chapters of 'Classical Admonitions' (Dian Jie) to educate the young nobles."

"Murong Ke attacked Nansu of Goguryeo and conquered it, establishing a garrison before returning. Three years later, [Murong Huang] sent his heir apparent Jun along with Ke to lead seventeen thousand cavalry in a surprise attack on Buyeo to the east. They conquered it, capturing their king and bringing back more than fifty thousand of their people."

"Murong Huang personally visited the Eastern School to examine the students, and those who showed exceptional understanding of the classics were promoted to serve as his close attendants. Due to a prolonged drought, he exempted the common people from land taxes. He abolished the commanderies of Chengzhou, Jiyang, Yingqiu and others. He established Xingji County for people from Bohai, Ningji County for people from Hejian, Xingping County for people from Guangping and Wei Commandery, Yuli County for people from Donglai and Beihai, and Wu County for people from Wu. All these were placed under the jurisdiction of the state of Yan."

"Once when Murong Huang was hunting in the western borderlands and about to cross the river, he saw an elderly man wearing vermillion clothes and riding a white horse. The man raised his hand and gestured to Huang, saying, 'This is not a place for hunting; Your Majesty should return.' Huang kept this encounter secret and proceeded to cross the river, making great catches for several days. Later, when he saw a white rabbit and chased to shoot it, his horse fell and he was injured. Only then did he speak of what he had seen. He returned to the palace by carriage and instructed Jun about future matters. He died in the fourth year of Yonghe, having ruled for fifteen years, at the age of fifty-two. Jun usurped the imperial title and posthumously honored him as Emperor Wenming."

"Murong Han, courtesy name Yuanyong, was the eldest son among Wei's concubine-born sons. He had a heroic and ambitious nature, was skilled in strategy, had long arms like an ape that made him excellent at archery, and possessed extraordinary physical strength. Wei greatly admired him and entrusted him with military responsibilities. Wherever he led troops in battle, he achieved victories, and his reputation for military might spread far and wide, making him feared by all. When he was stationed in Liaodong, Goguryeo dared not raid the territory. He was good at managing relationships and loved Confucian learning, winning the willing allegiance of everyone from officials and scholars to common soldiers."

"When he fled to Duan Liao, he was deeply respected and loved by Liao. After the defeat at Liu City, when Duan Lan wanted to press the advantage and advance deeper, Han, concerned about harm to his home country, deceived Lan with clever words, and consequently Lan did not advance. Later, when Shi Jilong attacked Liao, and Huang personally led three armies north of Linzhi, Liao considered pursuing them. Han, knowing that with Huang personally commanding the troops victory would be certain, advised Liao: 'Now that the Shi forces are approaching, we face a major enemy and should not be distracted by minor matters. The King of Yan has come personally with elite troops and horses. War is a dangerous instrument, and battle carries risks. If we suffer a defeat, how will we defend against the south?' Lan angrily replied, 'I listened to your deceptive words before, which led to our current troubles. I will not fall for your schemes again.' He then led troops to pursue Huang and was indeed badly defeated. Although Han was in an enemy state, he remained loyal to his homeland when opportunities arose, and there were many such instances like this."

"When Liao fled, Han went north to surrender to Yuwen Gui. Later when he tried to escape, Gui sent over a hundred strong cavalry to pursue him. Han called out to his pursuers from a distance: 'Since I am returning out of homesickness, I have no reason to turn back. You all know well my skill with bow and arrow. Don't force me and bring death upon yourselves. I have stayed in your country for long and regret not killing you. You may set up a knife at a hundred paces - if I hit it, you should turn back; if I miss, you may advance.' The pursuing cavalry set up a knife, and Han hit its blade with his first shot. The pursuing cavalry then dispersed."

"When he returned, Huang treated him with great favor and respect. In the second year of Jianyuan, he accompanied Huang in attacking Yuwen Gui, but was hit by a stray arrow in battle and was bedridden for a long time. After his illness gradually improved, he tried riding a horse at his home. Someone reported that Han was secretly practicing horsemanship, raising suspicions of unusual intentions. Huang, who had always been wary of him, ordered his death. Before dying, Han said to the messenger: 'When I fled abroad harboring doubts, my crime was unforgivable. Unable to leave my bones in the enemy's court, I returned to face punishment. Heaven has shown mercy by not executing me in public - today's death is my life. However, the barbaric Hu occupy the divine land, and the Central Plains are not yet pacified. I had always sworn in my heart to swallow up these savage captives, to fulfill the late king's wishes above and to answer to the responsibility of the mountains and seas below. I never thought this aspiration would remain unfulfilled, leaving me with lasting regret - but what can one do against fate!' He then took the poison and died."

Yang Yu

Yang Yu, courtesy name Shilun, was from Wuzhong in You Beiping. He was orphaned at a young age, and his brothers all died early, leaving him alone and isolated. Although none of his clan members knew him well, only his uncle Tan recognized his exceptional qualities when he was young, saying: 'This child is not only the outstanding talent of our family but also will be an excellent instrument in serving the times.' The Regional Inspector He Yan appointed him as Assistant Magistrate. When Wang Jun took charge of the province, Yu was transferred to become an Administrative Assistant, but Jun was suspicious of him and couldn't properly employ him.

After Shi Le captured Ji City, he asked Zao Song: 'Among the gentlemen of Youzhou, who is the most capable?' Song replied: 'Liu Han of Yan is a person of virtue and seniority. Yang Yu of Beiping has talent for handling affairs.' Le said: 'If they are as you say, why didn't the princes employ them?' Song responded: 'It was precisely because the princes couldn't properly employ them that they were captured by you, my lord.' As Le was about to appoint him, Yu secretly fled in disguise.

At that time, the Xianbei Chanyu Duan Juan served as the Jin Dynasty's General of Cavalry and Duke of Liaoxi. He appreciated talented people and humbly invited Yu to serve him. Yu said to his friend Cheng Pan: 'Confucius was pleased to be summoned by Fu Xi, comparing himself to a gourd. Yi Yin also said there was no service to the ruler and no mission to the people that was beneath him. If even the sages were like this, what about us! Isn't there meaning in Juan's summons?' Pan replied: 'Now China is divided, the nine provinces are split apart, and our influence only extends to the Yi River. To remain aloof waiting for great unity would be like waiting for the Yellow River to clear. How long is human life? The ancients lamented it was as brief as a white colt's passing. Shaoyou once said that being a county assistant was enough to provide for one's descendants, let alone being a state minister! Your following in the footsteps of Yi and Confucius shows you truly understand the moment.' Yu then accepted the position. He was appointed as Director of the Gentlemen of the Palace and General of the Central Army, holding a high ministerial position. He served five successive rulers of the Duan clan and was greatly respected.

When Duan Liao and Murong Huang fought each other, Yu advised: 'I have heard that being friendly with neighbors is a national treasure. The Murong clan has had marriage ties with our state for generations, and Huang is a virtuous ruler. We should not wage war and create enmity, causing suffering to the common people. I fear that disaster will arise from this. I hope both sides can reflect on past mistakes and restore friendly relations as before, so that our state can have the stability of Mount Tai and the common people can enjoy the blessing of peace.' Liao did not follow this advice. Yu was then appointed as Governor of Yan Commandery. When Shi Jilong captured Lingzhi, Yu surrendered his commandery and was appointed as Governor of Beiping and later summoned to serve as Left Assistant Minister of the Imperial Secretariat.

When Duan Liao requested to welcome Shi Jilong, Yu served as the Military Commander of Maqiu under the Left Assistant Minister. After Qiu's defeat, Yu was captured by soldiers who intended to take him to Murong Huang. Huang, who had long known of Yu's reputation, immediately ordered his release and appointed him Director of the Gentlemen of the Palace, later promoting him to Left Commander under the Grand General. Yu participated in the planning of both the eastern campaign against Goguryeo and the northern defeat of Yuwen Gui, and Huang greatly valued him. When the capital was moved to Helong, Yu demonstrated his architectural talent - the design of the city walls and palaces that Huang commissioned were all based on Yu's plans. Although Yu served close to Huang and received more honors than older officials, he remained humble, frugal, upright, and compassionate. Despite his high position at court, he conducted himself like a commoner. He helped arrange burials for displaced officials and scholars, cared for orphans and widows, and treated all scholars with respect regardless of their status. As a result, he was widely admired wherever he went.

Earlier, Lu Chen of Fanyang often spoke of him, saying: "Throughout the peaceful times of Jin, I have observed many court officials, but those who possessed loyalty, integrity, simplicity, righteousness, sincerity, and honor like Yang Shilun were indeed rare." Upon his death at age sixty-two, Huang deeply mourned him.