Murong Wei

Murong Wei, courtesy name Jingmao, was the third son of Jun. Initially enfeoffed as Prince of Zhongshan, he was soon established as Crown Prince. When Jun died, the court officials wished to install Murong Ke, but Ke declined, saying: "The state has an heir apparent; it would not be proper for me." Thus Wei was installed. In the fourth year of Shengping (360), he usurped the title of Emperor, declared a general amnesty within his borders, changed the era name to Jianxi, and established his mother Lady Kezuhun as Empress Dowager. He appointed Murong Ke as Grand Minister and Director of the Imperial Secretariat, executing duties in the manner of Duke of Zhou; Murong Ping as Grand Tutor, assisting in state affairs; Muyu Gen as Grand Preceptor; Murong Chui as Grand Commander of Henan, General Who Conquers the South, Shepherd of Yanzhou, Inspector of Jingzhou, Commander of Southern Barbarian Protection, stationed in Liang state; Sun Xi as General Who Pacifies the West and Inspector of Bingzhou; Fu Yan as General of the Guards; and the rest were enfeoffed and appointed according to their ranks.

As Wei was incompetent and weak, state affairs were delegated to Ke. Muyu Gen, relying on his old merits, became arrogant and harbored supreme ambitions. Jealous of Ke's control over court authority, he sought to create disorder at the first opportunity. He said to Ke: "The sovereign is young, and the Empress Dowager interferes in politics. Your Highness should consider the incidents of Yang Jun and Zhuge Yuanxun, and think of ways to protect yourself. Moreover, it was your achievement that pacified the realm. Brothers succeeding brothers was an established practice of former kings. After the imperial tomb is completed, you could demote the sovereign to a mere prince, ascend to the throne yourself, and establish endless prosperity for Great Yan."

Ke replied: "Are you drunk? How dare you speak such nonsense! In the past, Cao Zang and Wu Zha, even during family crises, said becoming ruler was not proper for them. How much more so now, when the heir has succeeded to the throne, the realm is at peace, and we ministers have received our charge? How can you propose such private schemes! Have you forgotten the former emperor's words?" Gen was greatly frightened and withdrew after apologizing.

Ke informed Murong Chui of this, and Chui urged Ke to execute Gen. Ke said: "We have just suffered a great loss, two barbarian forces watch for opportunity, and the imperial tomb is not yet built. If the ministers start executing each other, it would disappoint expectations both near and far. We must tolerate this for now."

Gen secretly plotted with Left Guard Muyu Qian to kill Ke and Ping and usurp the throne. He reported to Lady Kezuhun and Wei: "The Grand Minister and Grand Tutor are planning rebellion. I request to lead the imperial guards to execute them and secure the state."

Lady Kezuhun was about to agree, but Wei said: "These two are close relatives of the state whom the former emperor entrusted. They would never do such things. Perhaps it is the Grand Preceptor who plans rebellion." Thereupon, he ordered his Attendant Huangfu Zhen and Guard General Fu Yan to arrest Gen and others, who were executed in the palace. A general amnesty was declared throughout the realm.

Fu Yan was dispatched with twenty thousand cavalry to display military might in Henan. He returned after reaching the Huai River, having demonstrated impressive military power.

Earlier, Lü Hu, who had been appointed General Who Pacifies the South by Jun, held Yewang and secretly communicated with the [Jin] capital. Emperor Mu appointed him Front General and Inspector of Jizhou. After Jun's death, he plotted to lead imperial forces to attack Ye. When the plot was discovered, Wei ordered Murong Ke and others to lead fifty thousand troops against him. Fu Yan said to Ke: "Hu commands desperate bandits in loose alliance. When our royal army arrives, their morale will collapse. They dare not deploy troops midway, revealing their mantis-like ambitions. This shows their soldiers' spirits are already broken, a sign of their impending defeat. Previously, Your Highness relied on Guanggu's natural defenses, making it easy to defend and difficult to attack, which was a long-term strategy. Now the enemy's situation is different from before; we should attack swiftly to save considerable expense."

Ke replied: "Hu is an old rebel who has experienced many changes. Observing his defensive preparations, he will not be easily defeated. If we encircle this isolated city, cut off their foraging routes, with no supplies within and no strong support without, they will certainly fall within a hundred days. Why needlessly sacrifice our soldiers' lives for immediate gain? I shall establish a strict siege, rest our troops, and use generous rewards to create division among them. When time drags on and their situation becomes desperate, vulnerabilities will easily appear. We will prevail without exhaustion while the enemy collapses. This is victory without bloodshed, winning through inaction." He then established a complete siege.

Hu sent his general Zhang Xing with seven thousand elite troops to fight, but Fu Yan defeated and killed him. From the third to the eighth month, Yewang fell, and Hu fled south to Jin, surrendering all his forces. He soon rebelled again and returned to Wei, who treated him as before. Wei then sent Fu Yan and Hu to occupy Heyin. Yan raided the Chile to the north, returning with great spoils. Hu attacked Luoyang but died from a stray arrow. General Duan Chong withdrew the army north across the river and stationed at Yewang.

Wei sent his General Who Pacifies the East, Murong Zhong, to attack and capture Xingyang, and dispatched General Who Guards the South, Murong Chen, to raid Changping. At that time, Jin's Champion General, Chen You, was garrisoned at Luoyang. He sent envoys requesting assistance, and the Emperor dispatched Huan Wen to aid him.

At the beginning of Xingning (363-365), Wei again sent Murong Ping to raid Xuchang, Xuanhu, and Chencheng, capturing them all. He then seized various commanderies in Runan and relocated over ten thousand households to You and Ji. Wei's Inspector of Yuzhou, Sun Xing, submitted a memorial requesting five thousand infantry to first target Luoyang. Wei accepted this and sent his Grand Minister Sima Yuexi to station troops at Mengjin, while Sun Xing separately garrisoned Chenggao to provide support. Soon after, Chen You led his forces to flee to Luhun, and all the fortifications in Henan fell to Yuexi. Murong Ke attacked and captured Jinyong, killing the General Who Displays Might, Shen Jin. He appointed his Left Palace Attendant Murong Zhu as Acting Commissioner, General Who Conquers the Barbarians, and Inspector of Luozhou, stationed at Jinyong. Murong Chui was appointed Commander of All Military Affairs in ten provinces including Jing, Yang, Luo, Xu, Yan, Yu, Yong, Yi, Liang, and Qin, as well as Grand General Who Conquers the South and Shepherd of Jingzhou. He was given command of ten thousand troops and stationed at Luyang.

At that time, Wei's territory suffered from floods and droughts. Both Murong Ke and Murong Ping submitted memorials to return their authority to the throne and requested to retire to their residences, saying: "We, your servants, are aged and dim-witted, lacking the ability to govern the state. We have received excessive favor from the late emperor's promotion, and Your Majesty's exceptional treatment. With our meager talents, we have unworthily occupied high positions, unable to harmonize with Heaven above or properly manage affairs below. This has led to floods and droughts disrupting natural harmony and moral order becoming disordered. The burden is heavy while our strength is weak, causing us constant anxiety.

We have heard that rulers establish their states in accordance with Heaven, distinguish directions and positions, appoint officials based on ability, and promote only the virtuous. The position of high minister is as weighty as the three celestial lights - if the wrong person holds it, even these lights will dim. Taking unearned salary brings calamity, and mishandling power leads to regret - this has always been true. Even with the Duke of Zhou's sacred merit, those near him were displeased and those far spread rumors through Guan and Cai. How much more so for us, who received favor through family ties rather than ability - how can we continue to occupy these heavenly offices and block the path of the worthy!

Thus in our middle years we submit this memorial to express our sincere feelings. Your sacred grace has respected our long service and been reluctant to dismiss us, allowing us to continue in glory while our failings grow heavier. We have served in high office for over a year and as ministers for seven years. Though we have tried our best in planning, our thoughts have not encompassed all duties. This has led to two regions becoming unruly and not submitting to court, bringing shame to the legacy of the great Han. This deeply violates the late emperor's entrustment and greatly contradicts Your Majesty's principle of peaceful rule. Though we are not clever, we have heard the words of superior men and dare not forget Yu Qiu's example of yielding to the worthy. We follow the precedent of the two Shu knowing when to stop. We respectfully return the seals and ribbons of Grand Minister, Grand Marshal, Grand Tutor, and Minister of Education, and hope for your clear permission."

Wei replied: "Due to my inadequacy, I lost my father early. The late emperor's trust rests only with you two ministers. You two ministers, with your noble kinship and great virtue, have achievements higher than those of Lu and Wei. You have supported the royal house and guided me, spreading kindness and harmony, waiting vigilantly day and night - your dedication has reached its height. Thus you have been able to sweep away external threats and purify the nine regions, bringing peace to all under heaven, with governance and times in harmony. Though this may be due to the spirits of the ancestral temples and state altars, it is also through your efforts. Now the Di people in the west have not yet submitted, and remnants of bandits remain in Jiang and Wu. We rely on your strategic planning to pacify all directions - how can you be so humble as to shirk such important responsibilities! You should abandon the minor virtue of the two Shu's self-cultivation and achieve the greater deed of the Duke of Zhou's return to service."

Ke and Ping firmly requested to resign their positions, but Wei said: "Those who establish virtue must make completing good works their reputation, while those who assist the mandate must take success as their measure. You and the late emperor laid grand foundations, receiving Heaven's bright mandate, intending to eliminate all enemies and follow the path of the great Zhou. Yet disasters flowed freely and heaven's light dimmed. I, with my humble self, unworthily inherited this great enterprise but could not fulfill the late emperor's wishes, allowing two groups of barbarians to roam freely. Thus the work remains unfinished - how can you withdraw? Moreover, ancient rulers did not take the world as glory but worried about the four seas as if carrying a heavy burden. Only then did benevolence and yielding prevail, making every household worthy of enfeoffment. Now the way of transformation is not yet complete and the threats not yet eliminated. The weight of the ancestral temples and state altars is not mine alone to bear, but your concern as well. You should think about how to bring peace to the multitudes, settle difficulties and promote customs, leaving beauty for the future to match Zhou and Han. You should not emphasize personal virtue to violate the greater public good." He then rejected their resignation memorials, and Ke and Ping finally desisted.

Wei's Bell and Pitch-pipe Official Guo Qin submitted a proposal stating that since Wei succeeded Shi Jilong's Water virtue, Wei should follow the Wood virtue. Wei accepted this proposal.

In the first year of Taihe, Wei sent the Pacifying General Murong Li to attack Jin's Grand Protector of Taishan, Zhuge You. You fled to Huainan, and Li captured all the commanderies of Yanzhou, installed governors and administrators, and then returned.

Murong Ke fell ill and deeply worried that Wei's governance would not remain in his control. Since Murong Ping was naturally suspicious and jealous, and the position of Grand Marshal could not satisfy public expectations, he summoned Wei's elder brother, the Prince of Le'an, Zang, and said to him: "Now the powerful Qin is unruly, and the strong Wu has not submitted. These two enemies both harbor ambitions of advancement, only waiting for an opportunity. The state's security depends on finding the right people, and its prosperity depends on worthy ministers. If we can promote talent and employ the loyal, harmonizing with our clan allies, then the four seas would not be difficult to conquer, and how could these two enemies pose any challenge! With my ordinary talents, I received the heavy trust of the late emperor. I always wanted to sweep clean Guan and Long, eliminate Wu, and hopefully fulfill the late emperor's wishes, relieving his worries in our time. But my illness persists, and I fear this ambition will not be achieved - this is why I will die with regret. The Prince of Wu has natural talent and excellence, with strategic vision beyond his time. The position of Marshal controls military power and cannot be given to the wrong person. After my death, it must be given to him. If following family relationships in order, if not given to you, it should be given to Chong. Although you both have clear and quick intelligence, you are not yet able to handle multiple difficulties. The state's security truly depends on this - you cannot be blinded by profit and forget worries, leading to great regret." He also told this to Ping. He died a month later, and everyone in the state deeply mourned him.

Previously, Jin's Commander of Nanyang, Zhao Hong, had surrendered Wan to Wei, and Wei sent their Southern Palace Attendant General Zhao Pan from Luyang to garrison Wan. At this time, Jin's Right General Huan Huo attacked Wan and captured it. Zhao Pan retreated and fled to Luyang. Huan Huo sent light cavalry to pursue Pan, catching up with him at Zhicheng. They fought a great battle and defeated him, capturing Pan. After garrisoning Wan, Huan Huo returned.

Fu Jian's general Fu Jian held Shan and surrendered to Wei. At that time, there was a prophecy saying "The Yan horses will drink from the Wei River." Fu Jian feared Wei would take advantage of this crisis to enter the passes, and was greatly afraid, so he deployed his elite forces to defend Huayin. Wei's officials discussed sending troops to rescue Fu Jian and potentially take control of the area west of the passes. However, Murong Ping, who lacked strategic vision and had accepted bribes from Fu Jian, discouraged this plan, saying: "Although Qin is in difficulty, it's not easy to conquer. Although our court is enlightened, it cannot compare to the late emperor, and our strategic abilities are not equal to the Grand Chancellor's. We ultimately cannot defeat Qin. We should just close our borders, rest our troops, and focus on protecting our frontiers."

Wei's Minister of Works Murong De submitted a memorial saying: "The late emperor received Heaven's mandate and succeeded in dynastic change, using civil virtue to attract those from afar and unite all under heaven. But before his divine work was complete, he suddenly passed away. After King Wen of Zhou died, King Wu succeeded and rose to power. I observe that Your Majesty follows Heaven's way and matches his virtue, measuring up to the sage's achievements, ready to expand on the foundation established by Heaven and complete the previous ambitions. The rebellious Di people have usurped Guan and Long, claiming the title of king. Their accumulated evil has reached its limit, and they suspect and kill each other. Internal strife has arisen, and their power has split into four states. Cities are surrendering and seeking aid one after another - isn't this a sign that their ill fortune is ending and destiny is returning to the righteous path? To attack the weak and confused, to take advantage of chaos and decline - this is the supreme opportunity. Now that Qin's territory is divided in four, they can be considered weak. The time and circumstances have come together - Heaven is helping us. If we don't take what Heaven offers, we will instead suffer misfortune. The lesson of Wu and Yue should be our teacher. We should respond to this convergence of Heaven and human affairs and raise the banners of Muye. We should order Huangfu Zhen to lead the forces of Bing and Ji directly to Puhan; I, Chen, will lead the troops of Xu and Luo to quickly relieve Fu Jian's siege; and the Grand Tutor should lead the capital's military forces as backup for these two armies."

"Send swift proclamations to the Three Adjuncts, let our benevolent reputation precede our forces. Grant titles of marquis for capturing cities, and reward even minor achievements. Then those heroic spirits who have been waiting for their time, those outstanding talents who haven't yet expressed their ambitions, will surely gather like mountains at Ba's banks and clouds below the Long Mountains. With Heaven's net spread and forces united both inside and out, these mere usurpers will either flee or surrender. This is the time for achieving great unity. I hope Your Majesty will make a decisive judgment without consulting others."

Wei was greatly pleased upon reading this memorial and was about to follow it. However, Ping firmly opposed it, so the plan was abandoned. Fu Jian, knowing that Ping and Wei lacked far-reaching strategy and fearing that rescue forces would not arrive, wrote to Murong Chui and Huangfu Zhen saying: "Fu Jian and Wang Meng are both outstanding talents who have long been planning to harm Yan. If you don't seize this opportunity now, I fear Yan's ruler and ministers will suffer the same regrets as at Yongdong."

When Chui received the letter, he privately said to Zhen: "The one who will surely become our enemy is Qin. Our ruler is young and hasn't yet focused on governmental affairs. Looking at the Grand Tutor's strategy, how could he possibly stand against Fu Jian and Wang Meng?" Zhen replied: "Indeed, but as Rao Chao said, what can we do if our proposals aren't followed!"

Wei's Vice Director Yue Wan said to Wei: "The Grand Chancellor's governance emphasized leniency and harmony, and many people secretly supported it. The Records say that only those with virtue can rule people with leniency, otherwise severity is better. Now the military households share three parts of the tax burden, but moral standards have declined and authority is not maintained. We should abolish all military fiefs to enrich the imperial treasury, and strictly enforce laws to bring order to all under heaven." Wei accepted this proposal. After Wan established these regulations, both court and common people were shocked, as it affected over 200,000 households. Murong Ping was greatly displeased and soon had Wan assassinated.

Jin's Grand Marshal Huan Wen, Governor of Jiangzhou Huan Chong, and Governor of Yuzhou Yuan Zhen led 50,000 troops to attack Wei. The former Governor of Yanzhou, Sun Yuan, raised troops to support them. Huan Wen's commander Tan Xuan attacked Hulu and captured Wei's Ning East Commander Murong Zhong. Wei sent his general Murong Li to fight Wen at Huangxu, but Li's forces were badly defeated, and he fled back alone on horseback. The Administrator of Gaoping, Xu Fan, surrendered his commandery. Wen's vanguard Zhu Xu also defeated Wei's general Fu Yan at Linzhu. Wen's army was greatly encouraged and advanced to Fangtou.

Wei was frightened and considered fleeing to Helong. Murong Chui said: "That's not right. Let me attack them. If we lose the battle, it won't be too late to flee." So Wei appointed Chui as Commissioner with Ceremonial Battle-Axe and Commander-in-Chief for Southern Campaigns, and Murong De as General Who Conquers the South. They led 50,000 troops to oppose Wen, and sent their Attendant Gentleman of the Imperial Guard Le Song to request aid from Fu Jian. Fu Jian dispatched General Gou Chi with 20,000 troops, who advanced from Luoyang and camped at Yingchuan - outwardly to provide assistance but actually to watch for opportunities, harboring ambitions of annexation.

Murong De camped at Shimen and cut off Wen's supply lines. The Governor of Yuzhou, Li Bang, led 5,000 provincial troops to intercept Wen's supplies. After Wen suffered several defeats and his supplies were cut off, and upon hearing of Fu Jian's army's arrival, he burned his ships, abandoned his armor, and retreated. De led 4,000 elite cavalry and reached east of Xiangyi before Wen, hiding in a valley. Together with Chui, they attacked from front and rear, severely defeating the imperial army, killing over 30,000 men. When Gou Chi heard of Wen's retreat, he intercepted and attacked him at Qiao. Wen's forces were defeated again, with casualties numbering in the tens of thousands.

After Murong Chui achieved this great victory, his prestige and influence grew even stronger, which Murong Ping had long resented. When Chui recommended that his generals, including Sun Gai and others, should be promoted for their bravery in battle, Ping ignored these recommendations. Chui repeatedly brought this up, leading to several public disputes with Ping. The Kezu Hun clan had always disliked Chui and disparaged his military achievements, eventually conspiring with Ping to kill him. Fearing for his life, Chui fled to Fu Jian.

Earlier, Wei had sent his Palace Attendant Liang Chen as an envoy to Fu Jian. Upon returning, Chen reported to Ping: "Qin is conducting military exercises and transporting grain east of the passes. From what I observed, there is no prospect of lasting peace. Moreover, with the Prince of Wu having fled west, they must be watching for opportunities to exploit. We should be deeply vigilant." Ping replied: "Not so. How could Qin accept our rebellious minister without maintaining friendly relations?"

Chen said: "Neighboring states annexing each other has always been the way. Moreover, with both claiming imperial titles, they cannot coexist. Fu Jian is intelligent and decisive, readily accepting good advice. Wang Meng has the talent to assist a king and is eager to expand territory. Observing how well matched this ruler and minister are, they consider themselves a once-in-a-millennium opportunity. Huan Wen is not worth worrying about - the one who will ultimately become our problem is none other than Wang Meng." However, Wei and Ping did not consider this a concern.

Huangfu Zhen also presented his views on the matter: "Although Fu Jian frequently sends envoys claiming to support us, he treats us as an equal rival, like the Warring States period. It's clear he seeks profit without genuine goodwill, and ultimately won't keep his word or maintain peace to preserve long-term relations. Recently, their envoys have been coming continuously, and their troops have entered Luochuan, surveying both easy and difficult terrain. This is the common strategy of enemies - to observe our strengths and weaknesses to plot against us, and to watch for opportunities to exploit our vulnerabilities. Moreover, with the Prince of Wu having fled there to become their strategist, we must be wary of a disaster like that caused by Wu Yuan. We should increase troops at Luoyang, Bingzhou, Huguan and other cities to prevent future problems."

Wei consulted with Ping about this. Ping said: "Qin is small and weak, relying on us for support. Besides, Fu Jian seems to follow the righteous path and won't listen to a rebellious minister. We shouldn't needlessly worry ourselves and provoke enemy intentions." Wei followed his advice.

Soon after, Fu Jian sent his general Wang Meng to lead troops to attack Wei, besieging Murong Zhu at Jinyong. Wei dispatched Murong Zang to lead forces to rescue him. When Zang reached Xingyang, Wang Meng's subordinate commander Liang Cheng and the Governor of Luozhou Deng Qiang engaged Zang in battle at Shimen. Zang's forces were defeated with over 10,000 casualties, and the armies then faced off at Shimen. Since reinforcements did not arrive, Zhu surrendered Jinyong to Wang Meng. Liang Cheng then defeated Murong Zang again, beheading over 3,000 soldiers and capturing his general Yang Qu. Zang subsequently retreated to fortify Xinle.

After Huan Wen's defeat, he placed the blame on Yuan Zhen, the Governor of Yuzhou. Angered by this, Zhen surrendered Shouyang to Wei. Wei sent his Grand Master of Ceremonies Wen Tong to appoint Zhen as Commissioner with Ceremonial Battle-Axe, Attendant Gentleman of the Imperial Guard, Commander-in-Chief of Military Affairs in Huainan, Grand General Who Conquers the South, Colonel Protector of the Southern Man, and Governor of Yangzhou, and enfeoffed him as Duke of Xuancheng. However, both Zhen and Tong died before Zhen could assume these positions. Zhen's partisan Zhu Fu installed Zhen's son Jin as General Who Establishes Might and Governor of Yuzhou to secure Shouyang.

At this time, externally, the Jin forces and Fu Jian were continuously invading, and warfare never ceased; internally, Wei's mother interfered in government affairs, while Ping and others were corrupt and greedy, with policies being determined by bribes and officials being appointed without regard to talent, causing great resentment among the officials. The Left Deputy Director of the Imperial Secretariat Shen Shao submitted a memorial stating:

Your servant has heard that Emperor Xuan of Han said: "Those who govern the empire with me are none other than the worthy regional governors!" Therefore, he placed special importance on their selection, seeking out the finest talents, all promoted from scholars, with experience in both internal and external affairs, capable of moving fierce beasts with benevolence and attracting good fortune with kindness.

Today, however, governors are either promoted from common soldiers and military commanders, or appointed through favoritism and taking advantage of circumstances. Not only are they unknown in their localities, but they have no experience in court affairs. Furthermore, there is no evaluation of their performance or clear system of promotion and demotion. The greedy and lazy commit evil without fear of punishment, while the honest and diligent who follow the law receive no rewards for their efforts. The common people are exhausted and impoverished, suffering endless extortion, while soldiers desert and become bandits. Social customs have declined, and no one maintains order.

Moreover, too many officials have always led to complicated governance. Today's registered households do not exceed those of a single large Han commandery, yet we maintain a full complement of officials, with newly established military titles even exceeding previous times. These empty titles waste agricultural labor, and both public and private affairs harass the people, leaving them unable to make a living. We should consolidate offices and reduce positions, focusing on encouraging agriculture and sericulture.

The two rebels of Qin and Wu, though temporarily usurping power in remote regions, can still follow proper principles and maintain order in their false domains. How much more should Great Yan, with its succession of sage rulers illuminating the world and ruling the four seas, avoid damaging good governance and allowing invasion by treacherous bandits! When our neighbors govern well, it is what the people hope for. If we do not improve ourselves, it is exactly what our enemies desire.

Qin and Wu are cunning and occupy strategic positions. They not only defend their territories but harbor ambitions of conquest. The Central Plains are rich and prosperous, with households exceeding both enemies combined. Our military strength is feared by both Qin and Jin, and swift cavalry has always been our nation's strength. Yet why do we respond slowly to enemies and fail to deploy troops quickly? This is all because taxation laws are inconsistent and labor duties are improperly assigned.

When local officials levy taxes and conscript labor, they invariably bypass the wealthy and strong, targeting the poor and weak first. Whether staying or traveling, people are in dire straits with no means of support. This leads to resentment and desertion, resulting in insufficient resources for the state and abandonment of essential silk production and farming.

Military strength lies not in numbers but in loyalty and discipline. We should establish strict military regulations, prioritizing tax exemptions for the wealthy, training troops in warfare, maintaining regular units, and allowing soldiers to maintain private businesses when not serving. This way, fathers and elder brothers will proudly watch their sons and younger brothers serve with devotion. When soldiers are treated this way, they will follow orders even into water and fire!

Frugality and reducing expenses were the principles of ancient kings; eliminating extravagance and promoting simplicity were the constant laws of wise rulers. Thus, the Duke of Zhou warned King Cheng to be thrifty with finances, Emperor Wen of Han changed customs with simple black curtains, Emperor Jing had no more than a thousand palace women, and Cao Cao of Wei limited his rewards to less than 100,000. They had modest burials without mounds and led by example in frugality, thereby reducing wasteful spending and preserving the people's strength.

However, I observe that the current imperial harem has over 4,000 women, with servants and attendants numbering ten times that. Daily expenses are enormous, reaching 10,000 gold pieces. Fine silks and gauzes increase yearly beyond regular quotas, while military equipment is neglected in favor of luxuries. Now the treasury is depleted, and soldiers lack proper equipment, yet ministers and princes compete in extravagance. These degraded customs have become ingrained habits, and mere verbal warnings are insufficient to correct them.

We should:  
- Eliminate unnecessary luxuries  
- Strictly regulate marriage and funeral ceremonies  
- Prohibit excessive and wasteful practices  
- Remove excess palace women  
- Equalize taxes on merchants and farmers

If officials from the highest ranks down consider the empire their home, if rewards and punishments are faithfully administered, and if discipline is strictly maintained, then the heads of Wen and Meng could be hung on white banners, and the rulers of Qin and Wu would submit respectfully. This would not merely prevent their invasions!

If Your Majesty does not follow the model of Han ancestors' simple clothing, nor emulate the recent emperor's virtue of mending clothes, I fear these declining customs will continue down a path of deterioration, and there will be nothing worthy to sing about in songs of restoration.

Furthermore, expanding territory does not depend on a single city, and controlling foreign tribes requires winning them over with virtue. Beyond the mountains of Luyang and Shangjun, north of Yunyin, there are more than 400 [settlements], yet we cannot use them to establish control over the frontier regions as a foundation for pacifying bandits. This only leads to isolation and vulnerability, causing those who would ally with us to be frightened away.

We should:  
- Consolidate control over Bing and Yu provinces to oversee the two rivers  
- Connect with transport routes, following the model of ancient rulers  
- Strengthen the garrison at Jinyang  
- Increase southern border troops  
- Prepare for both defense and offense  
- Entice them with valuable rewards  
- Build up strength while waiting for the right moment to strike decisively

If they send troops to their death like Qian Liu did, we can wait until they enter our territory and cut them off, ensuring not even a single horseman returns. This would not only prevent the two rebels from spying on us but is also key to their complete elimination. I submit this for Your Majesty's consideration.

Murong Wei did not accept [Shen Shao's advice]. Fu Jian then sent Wang Meng and Yang An to lead troops to attack Wei. Meng attacked Huguan while An attacked Jinyang. Wei dispatched Murong Ping and others to lead over 400,000 elite troops from both the capital and provinces to resist them. Meng and An advanced their forces to Luchuan.

Bandits rose up throughout the provinces and commanderies, and many strange phenomena appeared in Ye. Wei was anxious and uncertain what to do, so he summoned his advisors and asked: "What are the Qin forces like? Now that our great army has been deployed, can Meng and others fight?"

Some replied: "The state of Qin is small and its forces are weak. How could they be a match for the royal army? Wang Meng is merely of ordinary talent and no match for the Grand Tutor. There is nothing to worry about."

However, Palace Attendant Liang Chen and Palace Secretary Le Song stepped forward and said: "That is not correct. According to military texts, when assessing the enemy's fighting ability, one should rely on careful calculation. Hoping the enemy won't fight is not a foolproof strategy. Qing Zheng has said: 'Though Qin's numbers are few, their fighting men are twice as effective as ours.' The size of forces is not what should be asked about. Moreover, Qin has marched their army a thousand li - they certainly seek battle, so how could they not fight!"

Wei was displeased [with this assessment].

Meng and Ping's forces faced each other. Ping reasoned that since Meng had advanced deep into territory with an isolated force, he would seek quick battle, so Ping planned to wear him down through prolonged engagement. However, Meng sent his general Guo Qing with 5,000 cavalry to secretly set fire to the mountains at night through a hidden path, burning Ping's supplies - the flames were visible from Ye.

Ping was by nature greedy and mean-spirited. He blocked access to mountain springs and sold firewood and water, accumulating money and silk in amounts as high as hills. As a result, his army had no fighting spirit. Wei sent his attendant Lan Yi to reprimand Ping, saying: "You are the son of our great founder and should be concerned about the ancestral temples and state altars. Why do you not focus on caring for those who have rendered meritorious service, but instead think only of hoarding wealth? Does Your Majesty think I cherish the treasures in the storehouse? If the enemy advances boldly, where will you put your money and silk? When the skin is gone, where will the fur attach? The money and silk should be distributed to the army - defeating the enemy and returning in triumph should be the priority!"

Frightened, Ping engaged Meng in battle at Luchuan. Ping's forces suffered a major defeat with over 50,000 casualties, and Ping fled back with just a handful of riders. Meng then advanced straight to Ye, and Fu Jian led another 100,000 troops to join Meng in attacking Wei.

Previously, Murong Huan had stationed over 10,000 troops at Shating as reinforcements for Ping and others. Upon hearing of Ping's defeat, he withdrew to Neihuang. Fu Jian sent General Deng Qiang to attack Xindu, causing Huan to retreat to Helong with 5,000 Xianbei troops. Palace Attendant Xu Wei and others, along with over 500 hostages from Fuyu, Goguryeo, and Shangdang, opened the city gates at night to let in Fu Jian's army.

Wei and Ping fled with several dozen riders toward Changli. Fu Jian sent Guo Qing to pursue Wei, and Fu Jian's general Ju Wu captured Wei at Gaoyang. When Wu attempted to bind him, Wei said, "How dare a petty person like you bind an emperor!" Wu replied, "I am Ju Wu from Liangshan, following orders to capture a rebel. What emperor are you talking about!" He then delivered Wei to Fu Jian.

When Fu Jian questioned him about his flight, Wei said, "As a fox dies facing its hill, I merely wished to die at my ancestors' graves!" Fu Jian took pity on him and released him, ordering him to return to the palace and lead his officials to surrender. Guo Qing then pursued Ping and Huan to Helong. Huan killed his Garrison Commander of the East, Murong Liang, and absorbed his troops, then attacked the Governor of Liaodong, Han Chou, at Pingchuan. Guo Qing sent General Zhu Yi to attack Huan, who was captured and sent back.

Fu Jian relocated Wei, his nobles, and over 40,000 Xianbei households to Chang'an. He enfeoffed Wei as the Marquis of Xinxing and appointed him as Minister of the Imperial Secretariat. When Fu Jian campaigned against Shouchun, he appointed Wei as General Who Pacifies the South and Regional Commander. After the defeat in Huainan, Wei returned to Chang'an with Fu Jian.

Later, when Murong Chui attacked Fu Pi at Ye and Murong Chong raised troops in Guanzhong, Wei plotted to kill Fu Jian in coordination with them. However, the plot was discovered, and Fu Jian executed him. Wei was thirty-five years old at the time of his death. When [Murong] De later usurped imperial authority, he posthumously honored Wei as Emperor You.

Starting with Murong Hui declaring himself Duke in the sixth year of Emperor Wu's Taikang reign, until Wei was the fourth generation. Wei ruled for eleven years and was destroyed in the fifth year of Duke Haixi's Taihe reign. From Hui to Wei, the total duration [of Former Yan] was eighty-five years.

Biography of Murong Ke

Murong Ke, courtesy name Xuangong, was the fourth son of [Murong] Huang. From a young age, he was prudent, honest, profound, and magnanimous. His mother, Lady Gao, was not favored, so Huang initially did not think him remarkable. At age fifteen, he was eight chi and seven cun tall, with an imposing appearance, showing strength and gravity. Whenever he spoke, he discussed matters of state governance, which began to make Huang take notice of him. Huang then put him in charge of military affairs.

He frequently accompanied Huang on military campaigns and often devised brilliant strategies in critical situations. When assigned to govern Liaodong, he ruled with both authority and benevolence. Goguryeo feared him and dared not raid the territory. When Huang ordered Ke and [Murong] Jun to attack Fuyu, Jun merely gave commands from the center, while Ke personally faced arrows and stones, advancing at the forefront. Wherever he directed his forces, the enemy would collapse.

When Huang was near death, he said to Jun: "The Central Plains are not yet unified, and great endeavors lie ahead. Ke possesses both wisdom and courage in equal measure - you should entrust matters to him." After Jun succeeded to the throne, he increasingly relied on and trusted Ke. After numerous battles with great achievements, Ke was enfeoffed as Prince of Taiyuan and appointed Palace Attendant, Bearer of the Imperial Staff, Grand Commander, and Supervisor of the Imperial Secretariat.

When Jun fell ill, he called upon Ke and Murong Ping to handle affairs after his death. During Wei's reign, Ke held overall control of court affairs. Earlier, when news of Jun's death reached Jianye, people there said, "Now is the time to make plans for the Central Plains." However, Huan Wen remarked, "Murong Ke is still alive, and our greatest concerns are yet to come."

When Muyu Gen was executed, both those inside and outside the court were fearful and anxious. However, Ke maintained his usual composure and demeanor, appearing completely at ease. He would come and go with only a single attendant on foot. When some advised him against this, Ke said, "When people are fearful, one should remain calm to help settle them. If I myself show unease, what example would that set for others to look up to!" As a result, people's minds gradually became at ease.

Ke was open-minded in dealing with others, sought counsel on good governance, assigned positions according to talent, and ensured people did not exceed their proper stations. The court was maintained with strict dignity and proper protocol. Although he held power over government affairs, he always consulted with [Murong] Ping on every matter. After court sessions, when he returned home, he devoted himself to study, never putting down his books. When officials made mistakes, he never publicly exposed them. As a result, officials were transformed by his virtue, and there were few who dared to commit offenses.

When Ke planned to attack Luoyang, there was great alarm in Qin territory. Fu Jian personally led troops to defend Tong Pass, and only after the army retreated did the situation stabilize. As a military commander, Ke did not emphasize strict authority, but rather governed through benevolence and trust. He focused on broader strategy and did not burden his troops with trivial orders. When soldiers violated military law, he would quietly let them off, while executing enemy leaders to maintain discipline. Although his camp appeared disorderly and vulnerable, its defenses were actually very strict, and he never suffered any defeats.

On his deathbed, Wei personally visited to ask about future affairs. Ke said: "I have heard that there is no greater way to repay kindness than to recommend worthy men. If even a common wall-builder can be worthy of recommendation, how much more so for an eminent member of the royal clan! The Prince of Wu possesses both civil and military talents, second only to Guan [Zhong] and Xiao [He]. If Your Majesty entrusts him with government affairs, the state may find some peace. If not, I fear that two enemies will surely devise plans to invade." After speaking these words, he died.

Yang Wu, courtesy name Shiqiu, was from Wuzhong in Right Beiping. His father Tan served under [Murong] Hui and rose to the position of Colonel of the Eastern Barbarians.

From a young age, Wu was pure in character and fond of learning, with profound insight and vision. He began his career as Assistant Governor of Pingzhou. He frequently offered strategies for securing peace and strengthening the state, many of which were adopted. Hui greatly admired him. When Huang ascended to the throne, Wu was promoted to Left Chief Clerk. He participated in military campaigns both east and west, offering strategic counsel from within the command tent.

When Huang was near death, he told Jun: "Yang Shiqiu is loyal, capable, and steadfast. He can be entrusted with important matters - treat him well." When Jun planned to conquer the Central Plains, Wu's contributions to military victory were second only to Murong Ke.

After Wei inherited the throne, he treated Wu with the respect due to a teacher and mentor, and showed him increasing favor day by day. When Wu became Grand Commander, he sighed and said: "In the past, Chang Lin and Xu Miao were famous ministers of previous dynasties, yet they declined the Three Excellencies because they felt the responsibility was too great. Given my inadequacy, what virtue do I have to deserve this position!" He firmly requested to resign, speaking with great sincerity, but Wei graciously refused.

Wu was pure, upright, humble and cautious, becoming even more so in his old age. Due to his reputation and seniority, everyone from Murong Ke down would bow to him in full ceremony. He was frugal by nature, always riding in a worn-out carriage pulled by thin horses. When he died, he had not accumulated any wealth.

Huangfu Zhen, courtesy name Chuji, was from Chaona in Anding. In his youth, due to his great talent, Hui appointed him as Vice Director of the State of Liaodong. When Huang succeeded to the throne, he was transferred to be Assistant Governor of Pingzhou.

At that time, there had been internal troubles for many years, and the common people were exhausted. Zhen proposed reducing annual taxes and giving relief from labor service. This did not accord with imperial wishes, and he was dismissed from office. Later, due to his merit in defeating Ma Qiu, he was appointed Superintendent of the Imperial Carriages and served as Governor of both Liaodong and Yingqiu commanderies, where he implemented good policies in both places.

When Jun usurped the throne, Zhen was appointed as Director of Documents. Later, he followed Murong Ping in capturing the capital of Ye. Though the city was filled with treasures, Zhen took nothing for himself, only concerning himself with helping people and collecting books and records. When Jun was near death, Zhen, along with Murong Ke and others, was entrusted with important responsibilities.

When Muyu Gen was plotting rebellion, Zhen secretly discovered this and informed Ke, requesting that Gen be eliminated. Ke was initially reluctant to expose the matter. Soon after, when Gen's plot was revealed and he was executed, Ke apologized to Zhen, saying, "By not following your advice, we nearly faced disaster."

When Lü Hu rebelled, Ke consulted his court, saying, "When distant people are not submissive, we should use civil virtue to win them over. Shouldn't we now use gracious edicts to make Hu surrender, rather than using military force?" Zhen replied, "In nine years, Hu has defied royal orders three times. Judging by his treacherous heart, his violent nature has not ceased. Your Excellency is planning to water your horses at the Yangtze and Xiang Rivers and inscribe your achievements at Sword Gate Pass - how much more should we execute this minor nearby threat? We should use military strategy to capture him, and not try to persuade him with civil documents." Ke followed this advice.

Zhen was appointed General of the Vanguard and Commander of a Separate Division. After the campaign, he was appointed General Who Guards the West, Governor of Bingzhou, and Commander of the Gentlemen of the Palace in charge of the Xiongnu. When recalled to court, he was appointed Palace Attendant and Grandee of the Palace Gate, and was eventually promoted to Grand Commander and Palace Attendant.

When Fu Jian was secretly planning to annex [Yan], he wanted to observe their vulnerabilities. He sent his Western Rong Secretary Guo Bian to secretly connect with Cao Gu, the Left Worthy Prince of the Xiongnu, arranging for Gu to send envoys to Ye, with Bian accompanying them. Zhen's elder brother Dian served Fu Jian as Imperial Attendant, and his nephews Fen and Fu were both prominent in Guanxi.

When Bian arrived in Ye, he visited various ministers and said to Zhen, "Bian's family was executed by Qin, so I have placed my life in the hands of Prince Cao. Your elder brother the Imperial Attendant and your nephews Fen and Fu are all old acquaintances of mine." Zhen angrily replied, "As a minister, I have no connections beyond our borders. How dare you speak to me of such things! You seem to be a traitor - aren't you just making up excuses?" He then requested Wei to thoroughly investigate Bian, but Wei and Ping did not agree.

When Bian returned, he told Fu Jian, "The Yan court lacks discipline and can indeed be conquered. However, only Huangfu Zhen can perceive opportunities and recognize changes." Fu Jian said, "How could a territory of six provinces not have even one wise man? Zhen is actually a Qin person, yet Yan employs him - this truly shows that Guanxi has many gentlemen."

Zhen was by nature pure and frugal, with few desires, and did not pursue wealth or property. He could drink more than ten sheng of wine without becoming intoxicated. He was refined and fond of composing literature, having written more than forty poems and rhapsodies.

When Wang Meng entered Ye, Zhen bowed to him from the direction of his horse's head. The next day when they met again, he addressed Meng as "Minister Meng." Meng said, "Yesterday you bowed, today you address me as minister - why such a difference between respect and casualness?" Zhen replied, "Yesterday you were a rebel, today you are a statesman of the nation. I bowed to a rebel but address a statesman as minister - what is there to be puzzled about?" Meng greatly admired this and said to Quan Yi, "Huangfu Zhen is indeed a man of great capacity."

He followed Fu Jian into Guanzhong and was appointed Commandant of the Imperial Carriages. He died several years later.

Commentary by the Official Historian:

Observing how the northern dark qi gave rise to barbaric tribes, they were separated from the Central Plains and untouched by civilized education. Occupying different territories, their customs were shaped by greed and ferocity. Rebellion followed by submission was their constant nature. When the proper order was disrupted and Dianwu held power, their achievements in conquest extended to Min and Wu and are worth recording, yet their strategies for controlling distant peoples and pacifying the barbarians still had shortcomings.

Murong Hui, with his heroic bearing and great capacity, was called a frontier leader, but his suspicious actions and treacherous plans truly marked the beginning of chaos. Why? To take up arms without just cause draws deep criticism in the Lu Chronicles; Gong's punishment serves as a great lesson in the Yao Canon. Moreover, he acted recklessly bringing disaster, revealing his wolf-like heart in battle; plundering towns and massacring cities, exercising his bandit nature in seizing territory.

Subsequently, when two emperors met with disaster at Pingyang, he watched the situation while holding his forces; when the Five Bells established fortune at Jinling, he maintained proper etiquette as a vassal. His sincerity in supporting the king was not established when the ruler was in danger; his principles of assisting the sovereign would only be followed once the state was peaceful. This was what is called acting according to the times - how could it be considered genuine loyalty!

However, he was resourceful in dealing with enemies, benevolent towards subordinates, encouraged agriculture and sericulture, developed natural resources, employed worthy scholars, and recruited talented people of the time. Thus he was able to establish his domain and lay the foundation for generations to come.

Commentary continues:

Yuan Zhen's appearance was extraordinary, mysteriously matching heavenly signs. He was profound and resolute in his conduct, harboring unusual strategies. At that time, various warlords stood in opposition, competing for power. The Emperor ascended the throne at a young age, and Yu Liang usurped power as the maternal uncle. Court discipline was weak and the times were extremely difficult, allowing him to take advantage of established resources and seize the opportunity amid collapse.

When he raised armies to campaign southward, the Wuhuan rolled up their armor in retreat; when he raised banners to march east, the Yuwen's formations were crushed. Yet he relied on natural defenses to entrench himself, and became arrogant with victory. He sat in state calling himself king without imperial approval. In the past, Duke Wu of Zheng held three important positions but his rank remained that of an earl; Duke Huan of Qi achieved unity among the nine regions but his position stayed at that of a marquis. Looking at these previous examples, his achievements were minor, yet examining the ancient classics, his ceremonial pretensions were excessive. Is this not what they call "a ravine impossible to fill"?

Commentary continues:

Xuan excelled in both civil and military affairs, and was additionally gifted with decisiveness. Taking advantage of the Shi clan's vulnerability, he was the first to plan the conquest of the Central Plains. The Yan scholars coordinated his strategies, and Ji's horses served his purposes. In one battle he defeated a mighty foe, in two campaigns he captured strong cities, his influence intimidated neighboring states, and his authority extended to the frontier regions.

He then considered his profound achievements as affecting all things, believing heaven's mandate resided in himself. He hastily usurped the grand title and wrongfully claimed the imperial records. He still intended to sweep through the capital regions, unleashing his ant-like hordes; to carve up the common people, extending his whale-like appetite for conquest. This is why the Jiangzuo region was exhausted from constantly responding to emergencies.

If it were not for Heaven tiring of the proper order and enabling these aberrant types, how could their military power have become so formidable!

Commentary continues:

Jing Mao was of mediocre talent and did not attend to his duties personally. He relied on worthy ministers, while treacherous officials frustrated his plans. Subsequently, he breached Jinyong and submitted to Henan, surrounded Tongcheng and approached the northern desert. The elite troops of Western Qin halted at Hanguan without advancing, while the remnants of Eastern Xia looked to the Ye Palace and surrendered.

At this time, their fierce power continued to intensify. When Xuan Gong passed away, the cruel empress dowager threw the court into chaos. Chui, despite his meritorious service, was not tolerated, and was criticized for corrupting government with greed. Loyal officials were cut off from serving faithfully, while slanderers adopted ways of creating disorder. Their light regard for neighbors quickly brought calamity, and their defenses against enemies were rarely maintained. With divided forces, they faced an army ready to fight to the death. Before weapons could even clash, the White Canal territories were lost; after brief resistance, the Purple Path became ruins.

Thus we know that when Youyu emerged, the Rong perished; when Zi Chang rose, Ying fell. In the end, dying in foreign lands showed that wisdom could not preserve oneself. Fortune and misfortune truly depend on human factors - this is well said indeed.

Concluding Eulogy:

The blue mountains shifted their formations,  
The dark frontier divided its borders.  
These various barbaric tribes emerged,  
Flourishing through generations.  
Their horn tips obscured the moon,  
Their swaying steps scattered frost.  
Taking advantage of danger, they rose improperly,  
Relying on treachery, they spread like predatory birds.  
Wrongfully seizing the divine instruments of rule,  
They encroached upon the imperial domains.  
Not maintaining power through virtue,  
They ultimately brought disaster upon themselves.