Murong Chui

Murong Chui, courtesy name Daoming, was the fifth son of Huang. From a young age, he displayed exceptional intelligence and bearing. He stood seven chi and seven cun tall, with arms so long his hands reached past his knees. Huang greatly favored him and often said to his other sons while looking at him: "This child is magnanimous and seeks the extraordinary. He will either destroy a dynasty or establish one." He was initially named Ba, courtesy name Daoye, and received more favor than the heir apparent Jun, which caused Jun to resent him. For his merit in defeating the Yuwen clan, he was enfeoffed as the Marquis of Duxiang. When Shi Jilong came to attack and later withdrew, he still harbored ambitions of conquest and sent General Deng Heng to station several tens of thousands of troops at Le'an, preparing for an invasion. Chui defended the river crossing and faced off against Heng, who was intimidated and dared not advance. In his youth, Chui was fond of hunting, and during one such expedition, he fell from his horse and broke his teeth. When Murong Jun usurped the throne as king, he changed [Chui's] name to Jue (垂夬) - outwardly claiming it was in admiration of Xi Jue, but inwardly it was out of spite. Soon after, due to prophetic texts, the character "jue (夬)" was removed and his name was changed to "Chui (垂)."

After the death of Shi Jilong, when Zhao and Wei fell into chaos, Chui said to Jun: "Opportunities are fleeting, and seizing them requires haste. Now is the time to conquer the weak and attack the unprepared." Jun, having recently suffered a great loss, refused. Muyu Gen then advised Jun: "The prince's words represent a once-in-a-millennium opportunity that should not be missed." Jun then agreed and appointed Chui as the vanguard commander. After Jun conquered Youzhou, he planned to execute the surrendered troops, but Chui remonstrated: "The righteousness of punitive expeditions has been a constant principle since ancient times. Now as we pacify the Central Plains, we should win people over with virtue. Executing prisoners should not be the opening act of the royal army." Jun heeded his advice.

When Jun usurped the imperial title, he enfeoffed Chui as the Prince of Wu and sent him to garrison Xindu, appointing him Palace Attendant, Right Guard General, and Recorder of the Affairs of the Secretariat, greatly profiting from the northeast. He was also made General Who Conquers the South and Governor of Jing and Yan Provinces, gaining fame south of Liang and Chu. Twice he served as Minister of Justice, and all the nobles of the false regime were subject to his scrutiny. At this time, Murong Wei succeeded to the false throne, with Murong Ke as Grand Chancellor. Ke greatly respected Chui and often told Wei: "The Prince of Wu has ten times the talent of a minister and general compared to me. The late emperor placed me before him due to seniority. After my death, I hope Your Majesty will entrust the government to the Prince of Wu, which would be both favoring relatives and promoting the worthy." After defeating Huan Wen at Fangtou, Chui's reputation soared. Murong Ping deeply resented him and plotted to execute him. Fearing for his life, Chui fled with the heir apparent Quan to Fu Jian.

After Ke's death, Fu Jian secretly planned to attack Wei but hesitated due to Chui's reputation. Upon hearing of Chui's arrival, Fu Jian was greatly pleased, welcomed him at the outskirts, clasped his hand, and treated him with utmost respect. Fu Jian's chancellor Wang Meng, detesting Chui's military prowess, urged Fu Jian to execute him. Fu Jian refused and instead made him Champion General, enfeoffed him as Marquis of Bindu, and granted him five hundred households in Huayin. When Wang Meng attacked Luoyang, he took Quan as an adjutant. Wang Meng then had someone falsely convey to Quan that Chui had said: "I have already returned east; you should make your plans accordingly." Quan believed this and fled to Wei. Wang Meng reported Quan's defection, and Chui, fearful, fled east but was captured by pursuing cavalry at Lantian. Fu Jian received him in the east hall and comforted him, saying: "Your state lost its harmony, and you came to seek refuge with me. Your worthy son's loyalty to his origins made him long for home. Does not the Book of Documents say: 'Let fathers be fathers and sons be sons, without affecting each other'? Why did you become so fearful and desperate?" Thereupon he restored Chui's titles and treated him with the same favor as before.

When Fu Jian captured Wei, Chui followed him into Ye, where he gathered his children and wept bitterly upon seeing them. When he encountered his former officials, he showed signs of displeasure. Former Director of the Gentlemen of the Palace, Gao Bi, privately said to Chui: "Your Highness, with your extraordinary talents, encountered misfortune and endured hardships in exile. Now Heaven has granted a favorable turn, though your destiny is temporarily altered. This is but the beginning of your ascent, the first transformation of the dragon. I deeply hope you will show benevolence and comfort them. Moreover, those with lofty ambitions must maintain broad perspectives. You should now let the small fish escape while catching the whale, embracing the principle of nurturing all; gather the descendants of former officials to build your foundation like a mountain. How can you discard them over a moment of anger? I humbly suggest Your Highness reconsider." Chui took this advice to heart. While at Fu Jian's court, he served as Governor of Jingzhao, was promoted to Marquis of Quanzhou, and achieved great merit in various military campaigns.

When Fu Jian was defeated in Huainan, only Chui's army remained intact, and Fu Jian fled to him with over a thousand cavalry. Chui's heir, Bao, said to him: "Our state has fallen, and imperial authority has collapsed. The mandate of Heaven is recorded in the prophecies, and it is time to restore the dynasty and achieve the feat of Shao Kang. However, as the moment of destiny has not yet arrived, we have been biding our time. Now Heaven has grown weary of chaotic virtue, and the enemy forces are crumbling. This can be seen as Heaven opening a divine opportunity and bestowing it upon us. Such a chance comes but once in a thousand years, and now is the time. We should respectfully accept Heaven's will and seize this opportunity. Those who accomplish great deeds do not concern themselves with minor details, and those who practice great benevolence do not dwell on small favors. The Qin have ravaged both capitals and humiliated the imperial regalia. There is no deeper enmity than this. I hope you will not let personal sentiment or small kindnesses overshadow the importance of our ancestral altars. The auspicious sign of the five trees has now arrived."

Chui replied: "Your words are correct. However, he has come to us with sincere trust; how can we harm him? If Heaven has truly abandoned him, there will be many opportunities to act against him. Even if we let him return north, we can wait for another chance. This way, we will not betray our long-held aspirations and can still righteously claim the realm."

Chui's brother De then said: "Neighboring states devouring each other has long been the way of the world. When Qin was strong, they conquered Yan; now that Qin is weak, we plot against them. This is to avenge our grudge and wash away our humiliation. How can this be considered betraying our long-held aspirations? In the past, Duke Qi of Deng ignored the advice of his three nephews and was ultimately destroyed by Chu; King Fuchai of Wu disregarded Wu Zixu's remonstrance and met his doom at the hands of Goujian. Learning from past events serves as a guide for the future. I hope you will not abandon the successful path of Tang and Wu, nor follow the failed footsteps of Han Xin. We should take advantage of their collapse, respectfully carry out Heaven's punishment, execute the rebellious Di, restore our ancestral sacrifices, establish a restoration, and continue our great cause. This great opportunity for the realm should not be missed. If we release these tens of thousands of troops and hand over the sword of power, we would be rejecting Heaven's timing and waiting for future harm - this is not the wisest plan. As the saying goes: 'Hesitation when decisiveness is needed leads to chaos.' I hope, brother, you will not waver."

Chui replied: "In the past, when I was not tolerated by the Grand Tutor, I sought refuge with the ruler of Qin. Though Wang Meng slandered me, I was again shown understanding. The courtesy shown to me as a man of honor has been profound, yet I have not repaid even a fraction of this debt. If Qin's destiny is truly at an end and the mandate of Heaven returns to us, opportunities to take control will surely arise. The land west of the passes will not be ours anyway; there will naturally be others to disturb it, and we can peacefully secure the east. A gentleman neither takes advantage of chaos nor initiates calamity. Let us observe for now." He then placed his troops under Fu Jian's command.

Earlier, when Bao was in Chang'an, he was playing chupu (樗蒲) with Han Huang, Li Gen, and others. Bao sat upright with a dignified manner and made a vow, saying: "People say chupu has spirits - surely this is not empty talk! If prosperity and nobility await me, let me roll three lu in succession." He then rolled three lu in a row, and Bao bowed to receive this blessing. This is what was meant by "the auspicious sign of the five trees."

When Fu Jian reached Mianchi, Chui requested permission to go to Ye to pay respects at the ancestral tombs and to display national authority and laws to pacify the Rong and Di peoples. Fu Jian agreed, but Quan Yi remonstrated: "Chui is a renowned general, comparable to Han Xin and Bai Qi of our time. As a powerful figure of the eastern regions, he is not one to willingly serve others. Recently, he came seeking refuge to avoid disaster, not out of admiration for virtue. A regional command would not satisfy his ambitions, and the title of Champion General could hardly fulfill his aspirations! Moreover, Chui is like a hawk - when hungry it stays close to people, but once fed it soars high. When opportunity arises from chaos, he will surely harbor ambitions to reach the clouds. We should keep him tightly controlled and not allow him free rein." Fu Jian did not heed this advice and sent his generals Li Man, Min Liang, and Yin Guo with three thousand troops to escort Chui. He also dispatched Shi Yue to garrison Ye and Zhang Hao to garrison Bingzhou.

At that time, Fu Jian's son Pi was already in Ye. When Chui arrived, Pi accommodated him in the western part of Ye, and Chui gave a detailed account of the defeat in Huainan. Meanwhile, Fu Jian's general Fu Hui reported that Dingling Zhai Bin was gathering forces to threaten Luoyang. Pi said to Chui, "Zhai Bin and his brothers, taking advantage of our army's minor setback, dare to act rebelliously. Our troops, like mothers and children, may find it difficult to match them. Only your military prowess, Champion, can defeat them. Would you be willing to undertake this mission?"

Chui replied, "As Your Highness's servant, I dare not disobey your orders."

Pi then bestowed generous gifts of gold and silk, but Chui accepted none, only requesting his old fields and gardens. Pi agreed and assigned 2,000 troops to Chui, also sending his general Fu Feilong with 1,000 Di cavalry as Chui's deputy. Pi instructed Feilong, "You are a close member of the royal family. Though young in years, you are in fact a commander. While Chui leads the army, you are to be his strategic advisor. The power to use troops and achieve victory, and the strategy to prevent subtle dangers and disloyalty, are entrusted to you. Do your best."

Chui requested to enter Ye city to pay respects at the ancestral temple, but Pi refused. Chui then secretly entered the city in disguise, but was stopped by a checkpoint guard. Enraged, Chui killed the guard and burned down the checkpoint before leaving. Shi Yue said to Pi, "When Chui was in Yan, he destroyed the country and brought chaos to the family. After seeking refuge in our court, he received extraordinary treatment. Now he dares to insult local authorities, kill officials, and burn checkpoints. His rebellious intentions are clear, and this will lead to chaos. While his troops are old and tired, we can ambush and capture him."

Pi replied, "During the defeat in Huainan, when our forces were scattered and separated, Chui protected the emperor. We cannot forget this loyalty."

Yue countered, "If Chui was not loyal to Yan, how can we expect him to be fully loyal to us? Moreover, when he was a fleeing captive, His Majesty treated him as an old friend and equal, yet he could not remain grateful and loyal, instead plotting rebellion. If we don't strike now, he will surely become a future threat." Pi did not accept this advice. After leaving, Yue told others, "The father and son (Fu Jian and Pi) prefer to show small acts of benevolence while ignoring the greater strategy for the empire. We will all end up as captives of the Xianbei."

When Chui reached Henei, he killed Fu Feilong and executed all the Di troops. He then recruited soldiers from far and near, amassing a force of 30,000. After crossing the Yellow River, he burned the bridges and issued a proclamation: "I originally pretended to serve Qin while secretly planning restoration. Those who violate military law will face standard punishment, while those who follow orders will be rewarded without delay. Once Under the Heaven is pacified, titles and nobility will be bestowed according to merit - I will not betray you."

When Zhai Bin heard that Chui was about to cross the Yellow River, he sent envoys to propose Chui as their leader. Chui rejected this, saying: "My father and I sought refuge in the Qin court when in danger and were saved. We are deeply indebted to His Majesty for his extraordinary kindness and the gift of a new life. Though we are in a lord-subject relationship, our bond is as deep as father and son. How could I betray him over minor disagreements? I came to save Yuzhou, not to join your cause. Why do you involve me in such discussions?" Chui's intention was to seize Luoyang, so he maintained a loyal stance towards Fu Hui, while also being unsure of Bin's sincerity, hence his response.

When Chui reached Luoyang, Hui closed the gates and refused to communicate with him. Bin then sent his Chief Clerk Guo Tong from Henan to persuade Chui, who finally agreed. Bin led his forces to meet with Chui and urged him to claim the imperial title. Chui replied, "The Marquis of Xinxing is the rightful heir and my lord. If we can pacify the east with your support, we should appeal to Qin with righteousness and welcome the restoration of proper rule. Self-proclamation as emperor is not my intention."

He then consulted his followers, saying, "Luoyang faces enemies on all sides and is blocked by the Yellow River to the north. It's not strategically advantageous for controlling Yan and Zhao. It would be better to capture the capital at Ye and use it to control Under the Heaven." Everyone agreed with this plan. So they led the army eastward, sending General Wang Teng to build a pontoon bridge at Shimen.

Initially, when Chui left Ye, his son Nong and his nephews Kai and Shao, as well as his brother's son Zhou, were detained by Fu Pi. After executing Fu Feilong, Chui secretly sent Tian Sheng to inform Nong and the others, instructing them to raise troops in Zhao and Wei to support him. Consequently, Nong and Zhou fled to Lieren, while Kai and Shao escaped to Biyang. People everywhere responded to their call. Nong recruited Kuru Guanwei in Shangdang to the west and attracted Qite Gui in Dong'a to the east. Each led tens of thousands of troops to join him, amassing a force of over 100,000. Fu Pi sent Shi Yue to suppress Nong, but Yue was defeated by Nong and beheaded at Chen.

When Chui led his army to Xingyang, in the eighth year of Taiyuan (383), he declared himself Grand General, Grand Commander-in-Chief, and King of Yan, issuing edicts with imperial authority, and established his reign title as Yan Yuan. He ordered the establishment of a central administrative office with four assistants, and all princes and nobles were to address themselves as his subjects. All his appointments and enfeoffments followed royal protocol.

He appointed:  
- Zhai Bin as Grand General of Establishing Righteousness and Prince of Henan  
- Zhai Tan as Pillar of State Grand General and King of Hongnong  
- His brother De as Grand General of Cavalry and Chariot and Prince of Fanyang  
- His nephew Kai as Grand General Who Conquers the West and Prince of Taiyuan

His forces grew to over 200,000. They crossed at Shimen and launched a direct attack on Ye. Nong, Kai, Shao, Zhou, and others led their forces to join Chui. He established his son Bao as Crown Prince of Yan and enfeoffed over a hundred meritorious officials as dukes, marquises, earls, viscounts, and barons.

Fu Pi sent Court Attendant Jiang Rang to tell Chui: "In previous years when the imperial throne was in crisis, you protected the imperial carriage, showing true loyalty in defending the king, surpassing historical precedents. You should continue following the previous principles and maintain your loyal integrity. How can you abandon your meritorious service and commit such transgressions! Being able to correct one's mistakes is praised by ancient worthies. You should carefully consider this - it's not too late to realize your error."

Chui replied to Rang: "I received extraordinary kindness from His Majesty, so I wanted to ensure the Prince of Changle's safety and lead all forces to the capital, then restore my family's state and maintain permanent peaceful relations with Qin. Why are you blind to the changing circumstances and refuse to surrender Ye? Even family ties can be severed for great righteousness, let alone mere personal feelings! If you remain misguided and refuse to change, I will have to rely on military force. Now that things have come to this point, I fear even begging for mercy alone on horseback won't be possible."

Jiang Rang sternly rebuked Chui: "When you, General, had nowhere else to go, you sought refuge at the sacred court. What right do you have to any land of Yan! His Majesty and you are completely different types of people, yet he favored you at first sight and trusted you like tempered gold. Your privileges exceeded those of royal relatives, and you were entrusted with authority equal to Yi of Qi. Has there ever been such a profound bond between ruler and subject since ancient times? He entrusted you with the young prince and authority over distant territories. How can you harbor alternative ambitions just because the royal army suffered a small defeat! An army raised without righteous cause will never succeed - what Heaven abandons, no man can sustain. You've raised an army without just cause and wish to restore what Heaven has abandoned - I don't see how this can succeed. The Prince of Changle is His Majesty's eldest son, whose virtue surpasses Tang and Wei. He holds authority east of the passes and serves as a pillar of the court. How could he simply surrender hundreds of cities to you! A minister dies for his king's cause, a ruler dies for his state. If you wish to tear apart the crown and destroy the royal lineage, you may rely on your military might - what more is there to say? I only lament that you, at seventy years of age, having shown exemplary loyalty that stood above your contemporaries, would suddenly become a traitor. I feel deep pain for you."

Chui remained silent.

Those around him urged Chui to execute Jiang Rang, but Chui said: "In ancient times, when armies clashed, envoys moved between them. Dogs will each bark at those not their master - what is there to question?" He then sent Rang back.

Chui sent a memorial to Fu Jian saying: "I, your subject, am not comparable to the ancients, and disaster arose within our ranks. When I faced difficulties, I sought refuge at your sacred court. Your Majesty showed kindness surpassing that of the Zhou and Han, undeservedly favoring me with appointments as a general and marquis. I vowed to devote my efforts and loyalty, always fearing inadequacy. Last summer, when Huan Chong met his end, it was as if clouds dispersed. Returning to attack Yuncheng, we captured and killed thousands - truly a result of Your Majesty's divine strategy and your humble servant's willingness to risk death.

Just as we were about to water our horses at Guizhou and raise banners at Minhui, unexpectedly heaven aided chaos and the imperial carriage retreated. When Your Majesty came to me alone on horseback, I provided protection without second thoughts. Your Majesty's sacred wisdom recognized my singular loyalty, and Heaven and Earth surely knew this too.

Following orders to patrol the north, I received commands from the Prince of Changle. However, Pi has lost public support externally and harbors much suspicion internally. Now I camp outside the court, not permitted to pay respects at the temple. When Dingling rebels threatened Yuzhou, Pi forced me to go alone, restricting my timeframe and providing only 2,000 worn-out soldiers without weapons, while secretly sending Feilong as an assassin. Upon reaching Luoyang, the Duke of Pingyuan Hui also refused to trust and admit me.

I reflect that I neither advanced with Huaiyin's concerns of too much merit, nor retreated with Li Guang's guilt of failure. Fearing slander might confuse right and wrong, and seeing how the Dingling and Chinese doubted my loyalty, they pushed me to become their leader. I accepted this responsibility but could not complete it properly, weeping as I gazed toward the western capital. When our army reached Shimen, people came from everywhere to join - even surpassing the gatherings of King Wu of Zhou at Mengjin or Han Gaozu at Gaixia.

I wanted the Duke of Changle to bring all his forces to address the crisis, planning to send him off with proper ceremony, but Pi stubbornly maintained his petty mindset, failing to understand the principle of adapting to change. My son Nong gathered our former troops to prepare for contingencies, and when Shi Yue led the forces of Ye City in a rash attack, Yue lost his head before the armies even engaged. After I arrived alone, supporters gathered like clouds - this was truly Heaven's will, not my own power.

Moreover, Ye is my state's former capital and should receive my benevolence. Afterwards, I would face west to receive orders and forever guard the eastern frontier, fulfilling Your Majesty's trust in me above and completing my sincere gratitude below. Now as I lead troops to surround Ye, I have explained to Pi both heaven's timing and human affairs.

Yet Pi fails to recognize the changing circumstances, shutting his gates in self-defense. He frequently comes out to provoke battle, and our forces have clashed many times. I constantly fear that a stray arrow might strike him, which would wound Your Majesty's natural feelings. As my sincerity in this matter has not yet reached Your divine hearing, I have held back my troops and stopped advances, not daring to launch an attack.

The course of events has its own momentum, and change is a constant matter - I hope Your Majesty will understand this."

Fu Jian replied: "Despite my unworthiness, I have received Heaven's mandate and ruled over myriad states for thirty years. Even distant regions have come to pay court, with only the southeastern corner daring to defy royal authority. I mobilized the army to respectfully carry out Heaven's punishment, yet divine mechanisms were unfavorable and the royal army was defeated. Thanks to your utmost loyalty, you protected my person, and it was your strength that prevented the state's collapse. The Poetry says: 'I hold it in my heart, how could I ever forget?' I was about to appoint you as Chancellor and ennoble you as a commandery marquis, hoping to overcome difficulties together and properly reward your meritorious service. How could I have imagined that Bo Yi's ice-like integrity would suddenly be destroyed, and Liu Hui would abruptly become a libertine! Reading your memorial fills me with regret and shame before my court officials.

When you were not accepted at your original court and came to us alone on horseback, I honored you with a general's position and treated you as an honored guest, trusting you like an old minister and granting you rank equal to meritorious advisors. We shared blood oaths and golden bonds, opening our hearts in mutual trust. I thought you would remember this kindness and maintain loyalty until old age. Who would have thought that the water we stored would overturn the boat, and the beast we raised would turn harmful - regret now comes too late!

Your boastful words shock the masses, your comparisons are extraordinary - how dare a common person like you discuss the affairs of King Wu of Zhou! A bird escaped from its cage cannot be caught by a net; a whale freed from a trap cannot be controlled by a fishing net! Why should I listen to your lofty ambitions?

I think of how you are approaching old age, yet become a traitor in your old age - living as a rebellious minister, dying as a treasonous ghost, spreading poison in both this world and the next. What could pain the people of the Central Plains more than this! The rise and fall of my dynasty no longer depends on you! I only regret that the Prince of Changle and Duke of Pingyuan, in their youth, met you in both capitals, and their governance may not have met my expectations - this is my only regret!"

Chui attacked and captured the outer walls of Ye. Pi firmly defended the inner city. Chui then dug trenches to surround it. He sent the elderly and weak to Weijun and Feixiang, built Xinxing City to store supplies and equipment, and diverted the Zhang River to flood the city.

Zhai Bin secretly suggested to the Dingling and western people that he be appointed as Director of the Imperial Secretariat. When Chui consulted his officials about this, General who Pacifies the East Feng Heng angrily said: "Even a thousand-li horse cannot escape its bridle - this shows that even animals cannot be controlled by humans. Bin is a barbarian commoner who, taking advantage of circumstances, saw his brothers become kings - since Huan Dou,[[1]](#footnote-0) there has never been such fortune. Now he's become greedy and forgotten his limits, making such demands. His spirit is confused, and he won't survive the year."

Though Chui remained patient and tolerant, he decreed: "The King Zhai's merits deserve a high position, but as the government offices are not yet established, this position cannot be created now. We shall discuss this after the realm is unified." Enraged, Bin secretly allied with Fu Pi and had the Dingling breach the dikes to release the floodwaters. When discovered, Chui executed him.

Bin's nephew Zhen led his forces north to Handan, then moved toward Ye to create a pincer attack with Pi. Chui ordered his crown prince Bao and Champion Murong Long to defeat them. When Zhen fled north from Handan, Chui sent Murong Kai to pursue with cavalry. They fought at Xiayi, where Kai was defeated, and Zhen established camp at Chengying.

Chui told his generals: "Fu Pi is a desperate enemy who will defend to the death rather than surrender. The Dingling rebellion is a threat to our core. I want to move our army to Xin City, leaving them an escape route - advancing to repay the Qin ruler's past kindness, while retreating to prepare against Zhen." He then withdrew from Ye and camped north at Xin City. Murong Nong attacked and defeated Zhai Song at Huangni.

Chui told his Prince of Fanyang, De: "Though I let Fu Pi go, he won't leave. He will surely bring Jin forces to secure Ye - we cannot ignore this." He advanced again to attack Ye, leaving open a western escape route.

Chui was considering moving to the northern capital of Zhongshan, and Nong led tens of thousands to welcome him. When his officials heard that Murong Wei had been killed by Fu Jian, they urged Chui to assume the imperial title. However, Chui refused, noting that Murong Chong had already claimed the title in Guanzhong.

Liu Laozhi, the Dragon-Soaring General of Jin, led forces to rescue Fu Pi and arrived at Ye. Chui met him in battle but was defeated, forcing him to lift the siege of Ye and retreat to garrison at Xin City. When Chui fled north from Xin City, Laozhi pursued him but was repeatedly defeated in several battles. In another battle at Wuqiao Marsh, the imperial army was defeated. De and Long led troops to intercept Laozhi at Wuzhang Bridge. Laozhi escaped by having his horse leap across the five-zhang ravine, and was saved when Fu Pi's rescue forces arrived.

Zhai Zhen left Chengying and moved his camp to Xingtang. Zhen's Marshal Xianyu Qi killed Zhen and executed all members of the Zhai clan, then proclaimed himself King of Zhao. However, the camp people attacked and killed Qi, and welcomed Zhen's cousin Cheng as their leader. Zhen's son Liao fled to Liyang.

Goguryeo invaded Liaodong. Chui’s General who Pacifies the North Murong Zuo sent his Marshal Hao Jing to lead troops to defend against them, but they were defeated by Goguryeo. As a result, both Liaodong and Xuantu fell to Goguryeo.

The General Who Establishes Authority Xu Yan rebelled in Wuyi, forcing more than 4,000 people to flee with him north to Youzhou. Chui sent urgent orders to his general Ping Gui, saying: "Just defend firmly and do not engage in battle. After I defeat the Dingling, I will personally deal with him." However, Gui disobeyed the order and fought against Yan, resulting in defeat. Taking advantage of this victory, Yan entered Ji, plundered over 1,000 households and left, committing acts of banditry wherever he went, and eventually occupied Lingzhi.

Zhai Cheng's Chief Clerk Xianyu De beheaded Cheng and surrendered. Chui entered Xingtang and had all of Cheng's followers buried alive.

Fu Pi abandoned Ye city and fled to Bingzhou.

Murong Nong attacked and captured Lingzhi, executing Xu Yan and his brothers. At this time, they also attacked Goguryeo and recaptured the two commanderies of Liaodong and Xuantu, then returned to garrison at Longcheng.

Chui established his capital at Zhongshan. His officials urged him to assume the imperial title and prepare the proper ceremonies and rites of suburban sacrifice. Chui agreed and usurped the throne in the 11th year of Taiyuan (386). He declared an amnesty within his territory, changed the era name to Jianxing, established government offices, repaired the ancestral temples and altars of soil and grain, and appointed Bao as Crown Prince.

He appointed:  
- Left Chief Clerk Kuruguan Wei  
- Right Chief Clerk Duan Chong  
- Longxiang Zhang Chong  
- Governor of Zhongshan Feng Heng as Minister of Personnel  
- Murong De as Palace Attendant, Commander-in-Chief of All Military Affairs, and Chief Commandant of Police  
- Pacification General Murong Lin as Great General of the Guards  
- Others were appointed to various positions according to their merits

He posthumously honored his mother Lady Lan as Empress Wenzhao, moved Huang's empress Lady Duan, and had Lady Lan join in the sacrificial rites. The Erudites Liu Xiang and Dong Mi argued that since Emperor Yao's mother was ranked third and did not elevate Jiang Yuan, this showed that the way of sage kings put public interest first. However, Chui did not accept this advice.

He sent Murong Kai (Commander of the Western Expedition), Murong Lin (Guard General), Murong Shao (Protector of the South), Murong Zhou (Conqueror of the Barbarians) and others to attack Fu Jian's officials: Fu Ding (Governor of Jizhou), Fu Shao (Protector of the East), Fu Mo (Governor of Youzhou), and Fu Liang (Protector of the North). Kai sent letters to Fu Ding and the others, explaining the consequences of submission versus resistance, and they all surrendered.

Chui left his Crown Prince Bao to guard Zhongshan, while he led his generals south to attack Zhai Liao, with Kai serving as the vanguard commander. Liao's followers were all people from Yan and Zhao, and they all said: "The son of the Prince of Taiyuan is our father and mother." They then went over to Chui's side in groups. Liao became frightened and sent envoys to request surrender. When Chui reached Liyang, Liao stripped off his upper garments (as a sign of submission) and apologized for his crimes. Chui treated him with great generosity.

He built the Chenghua Pavilion for his Crown Prince Bao and entrusted him with managing the affairs of the Imperial Secretariat, delegating both major and minor matters to him while only overseeing the general direction himself. He installed his wife, Lady Duan, as Empress.

He also appointed Bao to the following positions:  
- Palace Attendant  
- Grand Chanyu  
- Grand General of Agile Cavalry  
- Governor of Youzhou

He established a secondary government office in Longcheng and appointed Murong Long, Prince of Gaoyang, to manage its affairs.

At this time, he also conducted soul-summoning rituals and burials for Murong Wei and other members of the royal clan who had been killed by Fu Jian.

Hao Geng, the Governor of Qinghe, gathered followers at Dingling and rebelled, aligning himself with Zhai Liao in the south. Murong Nong attacked and executed him, and destroyed the city of Dingling. After advancing into Ye, considering that Ye city was too large to defend effectively, they built a partition wall east of the main road at Fengyang Gate.

Lou Hui, a Gentleman of the Imperial Secretariat, submitted a memorial saying:

"The three-year mourning period is a universal rule throughout under the Heaven. However, due to warfare and chaos, ritual practices have been killed off, and officials are now recruited without regard for these customs. People's hearts are anxious and they merely seek glory and advancement, to the point where they wear mourning clothes while pursuing official duties. This is not necessarily out of loyalty to the state, but rather due to their confusion about what is beneficial.

When sage kings established their teachings, they did not abandon proper ways even in times of upheaval, nor did they change their transformative influence even in times of chaos. Thus they were able to block the gate of competition and close the path of rushing advancement.

Your Majesty has emerged at the end of many dynasties to undertake the work of restoration. As Under the Heaven gradually becomes peaceful and warfare begins to cease, we should truly cleanse away impurities and return to following the old statutes. Officials who encounter major bereavements should be allowed to complete the three-year mourning ritual. Then the four directions will know transformation and people will submit to ritual propriety."

Chui did not follow this advice.

After Zhai Liao's death, his son Zhao succeeded him and attacked Ye city, but was driven away by Murong Nong. Chui then led his army to attack Zhao at Huatai, stopping at Liyang Ford. Zhao defended on the southern bank, and the generals, wary of his well-trained troops, all advised against crossing the river. Chui laughed and said, "What can this fool do? I will kill him for you all today." He then moved his camp to the western ford and made over a hundred boats from cowhide, loading them with decoy troops and weapons, and sent them upstream.

Zhao had initially positioned his main force to defend Liyang, but upon seeing Chui move towards the western ford, he abandoned his camp and moved west to resist. Chui secretly sent his Prince of Guilin, Murong Zhen, and the Cavalry General Murong Guo to cross the river at night at Liyang Ford, establishing a camp south of the river. When Zhao heard of this, he hurried back, but his troops were exhausted and thirsty. They retreated to Huatai, and Zhao fled north towards Bailu Mountain with his wife, children, and several hundred horsemen.

Nong gave chase, capturing all of Zhao's remaining troops. Zhao escaped alone on horseback to Changzi. The seven commanderies and 38,000 households under Zhao's control were left undisturbed. Chui then relocated over 7,000 households of displaced people from Xuzhou to Liyang.

Then there was discussion about attacking Changzi. All the generals advised against it, saying that Murong Yong had not shown any hostility, and that after years of campaigns, the soldiers were exhausted. They suggested waiting for another year. Chui was about to agree, but after hearing Murong De's strategy, he laughed and said, "My mind is made up. Besides, in my old age, I have enough wisdom left to defeat him. I won't leave this rebel to trouble my descendants."

He mobilized 70,000 infantry and cavalry, sending Prince of Danyang Murong Zan and Zhang Chong to attack Yong's brother Zhi at Jinyang. Yong sent his generals Diao Yun and Murong Zhong with 50,000 troops to camp at Luchuan. Chui sent Murong Kai through Fukou and Murong Nong through Huguan, while he himself camped southwest of Ye, not advancing for over a month.

Yong, thinking Chui would attack through an unexpected route, withdrew his forces to defend Zhi Pass in the Taihang Mountains. Chui then advanced through Tianjing Pass to Hubi. Yong led 50,000 elite troops to resist, securing his position at a river bend, and sent messengers challenging battle. Chui arranged his troops south of Hubi, with Nong and Kai as two wings, while Murong Guo hid 1,000 soldiers in a deep valley. They engaged Yong in battle.

Chui feigned retreat with his army, and when Yong pursued for several li, Guo's hidden forces cut off his retreat while Kai and Nong attacked from both sides. Yong's army suffered a major defeat, with over 8,000 beheaded. Yong fled back to Changzi. Meanwhile, Murong Zan captured Jinyang.

Chui then besieged Changzi, where Yong's general Jia Tao secretly collaborated from within. When Chui's army entered the city, Yong fled to the north gate but was captured by the vanguard. He was then executed along with over 30 of his appointed officials including Diao Yun. All of Yong's possessions were captured, including the 76,800 households from eight commanderies under his control, as well as imperial carriages, ceremonial attire, entertainers, and treasures. Thus all necessary imperial items were obtained.

He sent Murong Nong to conquer territories south of the Yellow River. Nong attacked and captured Linqiu and Yangcheng. The commanderies of Taishan and Langya all abandoned their cities and fled in disorder. Nong advanced his forces to Linhai, installed local administrators, and then returned. Chui reported these victories at the temple in Longcheng.

He sent his Crown Prince Bao along with Nong and Murong Lin to lead an army of 80,000 to attack Wei. Murong De and Murong Shao followed with 18,000 infantry and cavalry as Bao's backup. When Wei heard of Bao's approach, they retreated west of the Yellow River. Bao advanced his army to the river but was too afraid to cross it.

While camping at Canhe, there suddenly appeared strong winds and dark clouds, appearing like embankments, rising and falling, looming over the army. A Buddhist monk, Zhi Tanmeng, warned Bao: "These violent winds and clouds are signs that Wei forces are approaching. We should deploy troops to defend against them." Bao laughed and dismissed the warning. Tanmeng insisted, so Bao finally sent Lin with 30,000 cavalry as a rear guard to defend against any unusual occurrences. Lin, believing Tanmeng's words to be nonsense, let his cavalry go hunting instead.

Soon after, yellow fog sealed off all directions, and the sun and moon were obscured in darkness. That night, Wei forces launched a major attack. The three armies scattered in chaos. Bao, De, and a few thousand cavalry managed to escape, but only one or two out of ten soldiers made it back. Shao died in the battle.

Earlier, when Bao had arrived in Youzhou, the axle of his chariot had broken for no apparent reason. The diviner Jin An had interpreted this as a terrible omen and strongly urged Bao to return, but Bao angrily refused to listen, which led to this defeat.

Bao, resentful of the defeat at Canhe, repeatedly spoke of opportunities to take advantage of Wei. Murong De also said: "The Wei people have grown arrogant after the battle at Canhe and have developed a contemptuous attitude toward the Crown Prince. We should use Your Majesty's strategic wisdom to crush their aggressive spirit." Chui agreed with this.

He left De to guard Zhongshan while personally leading a large force out through Canhe, cutting paths through mountains, and stopping at Lieling. He sent Bao and Nong through Tianmen Pass, while Murong Long (Commander of the North) and Murong Sheng (Commander of the West) crossed over Qingshan to launch a surprise attack on Wei's Duke of Chenliu, Ni, at Pingcheng. They captured the city and took over 30,000 of his troops before returning.

When Chui reached Canhe and saw the battlefield from the previous year with piles of bones like mountains, he held memorial ceremonies. The fathers and brothers of the dead broke into wailing, and the entire army was overcome with grief. Chui was so ashamed and angry that he coughed up blood, which led to illness. He had to continue traveling in a horse-drawn carriage.

After passing thirty li north of Pingcheng, his condition worsened. He built Yanchang city and then turned back. When Bao and others reached Yunzhong and heard of Chui's illness, they all returned. When Chui reached Pingcheng, some deserters fled to Wei reporting, "Chui has already died, and they're carrying his corpse with the army." Wei, having also heard about the mass crying at Canhe, believed this to be true and advanced their troops in pursuit. Upon learning that Pingcheng had fallen, they retreated and returned to Yinshan.

Chui reached Juyang in Shangu and died there in the 21st year of Taiyuan (396) at age 71, having ruled for 13 years. His final edict stated: "Currently, troubles still abound, so funeral rites should be kept simple. Complete the mourning in one day, finish the burial by evening, complete the mourning garments afterward, and return to government affairs after three days. As powerful enemies are watching for weakness, keep my death secret and only announce mourning and don mourning clothes after reaching the capital." Bao and others followed these instructions.

He was posthumously titled Emperor Chengwu, with the temple name Shizu, and his tomb was called Xuanping Mausoleum.

1. Huan Dou (驩兜) , one of the Four Fiends, was Gun (鲧)'s grandson and the leader of the Sanmiao tribe in ancient Chinese legends. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)