Murong Chao

Murong Chao, courtesy name Zuming, was the son of Prince of Beihai Na, the elder brother of Murong De. When Fu Jian captured Ye, he appointed Na as the Governor of Guangwu. After several years, Na left his post and settled in Zhangye. When De went south on campaign, he left behind a golden dagger before departing. When Murong Chui raised an army in Shandong, Fu Chang captured and executed Na, De, and their sons. Na's mother, Lady Gongsun, was spared due to her advanced age. Na's wife, Lady Duan, who was pregnant at the time, was imprisoned in the county jail pending a decision. The jail warden, Huyan Ping, was a former subordinate of De who had once been pardoned from a capital offense by him. At this time, he helped Lady Gongsun and Lady Duan escape to the Qiang territory, where Chao was born.

When Chao was ten years old, Lady Gongsun passed away. On her deathbed, she gave Chao the golden dagger, saying, "If peace returns to the realm and you can return east, you should return this dagger to your uncle." Ping then took Chao and his mother to seek refuge with Lü Guang. When Lü Long surrendered to Yao Xing, Chao followed the people of Liang province to Chang'an. Chao's mother said to him, "Our survival is due to the Huyan family's efforts. Though Ping is now dead, I wish you to marry his daughter to repay their great kindness." Thus, he married her.

Chao, knowing his uncles were in the east, feared being detained by the Yao clan, so he feigned madness and begged in the streets. The Qin people looked down on him, but only Yao Shao saw something unusual in him and urged Xing to retain him with an official position. When summoned for an audience, Chao deliberately concealed his true nature. Xing greatly despised him and said to Shao, "The saying goes, 'A fair skin cannot wrap stupid bones' - that's nonsense." Thus, Chao was allowed to come and go freely. When De sent someone to fetch him, Chao left without informing his mother and wife. Upon reaching Guanggu, he presented the golden dagger and related his grandmother's dying words, moving De to tears.

Chao stood eight chi tall, with a waist measuring nine wei in circumference. He possessed a refined appearance and striking features, with a dignified bearing. De showed him great courtesy and formally named him Chao, enfeoffed him as Prince of Beihai, and appointed him Palace Attendant, Grand General of Cavalry, and Colonel Director of Retainers. He was granted the right to establish his own administrative office with staff. As De had no sons and wished to make Chao his heir, he built a residence for Chao inside the Wanchun Gate and would observe him morning and evening. Chao thoroughly understood De's intentions; when in attendance, he was completely devoted in his service, and when abroad, he was humble towards men of lower rank. Thus, he earned praise both within and without the court. Shortly thereafter, he was established as Crown Prince.

Upon De's death, Chao usurped the throne in the first year of Yixi (405) and issued a general amnesty throughout his domain, changing the era name to Taishang. He honored De's wife Lady Duan as Empress Dowager. He appointed Murong Zhong as Commander-in-Chief of All Forces Within and Without and Acting Director of the Imperial Secretariat; Murong Fa as Conquerer of the South and Military Commander of Xu, Yan, Yang, and South Yan provinces; Murong Zhen as Ceremonial Equal of the Three Excellencies and Director of the Imperial Secretariat. He appointed Feng as Grand Marshal, Ju Zhong as Minister of Works, Pan Cong as Senior Master of Ceremonies of the Left, and Feng Song as Vice Director of the Left of the Imperial Secretariat, with others receiving ranks according to their merit.

Later, he appointed Zhong as Governor of Qing Province, Duan Hong as Inspector of Xu Province, and Gongsun Wulou as General of the Military Guard and Colonel of Garrison Cavalry, participating in state affairs. Feng Fu said to Chao, "I have heard that the five great ones should not be at the borders, and the five minor ones should not be at court. Zhong is a noble minister of state upon whom the altars of state depend; Hong is an honored relative of imperial affinity whom all worthy men look to. They should assist in governing the hundred offices and should not be stationed in distant regions. Now Zhong and others are sent to frontier posts while Wulou advises from within - I am deeply troubled by this." Chao, newly enthroned and wary of Zhong's threatening power, consulted Wulou about this. Wulou, desiring to monopolize court politics and not wanting Zhong and others at court, repeatedly spoke against them, and Feng's advice was not heeded. Zhong and Hong both showed signs of discontent and said to each other, "The yellow dog's skin may yet patch the fox fur coat."[[1]](#footnote-0) When Wulou heard of this, tensions gradually increased.

Initially, when Chao traveled from Chang'an to Liangfu, Murong Fa was governing Yan Province. Yue Shou, the Chief Secretary of Zhennan, returned and told Fa, "I have just seen the son of the Prince of Beihai. His natural disposition is magnanimous and refined, his spirit lofty and transcendent. Only now do I realize that the imperial clan is full of extraordinary individuals, and the jade forest is all treasure." Fa replied, "In the past, Cheng Fangshui falsely claimed to be the Crown Prince of Wei, and no one could discern the truth. Is this truly of the imperial clan?" When Chao heard of this, he was filled with resentment, which showed in his words and expression. Fa also became angry and housed him in an outer lodge, thus sowing the seeds of enmity.

When De died, Fa did not attend the mourning, and Chao sent an envoy to reprimand him. Fa, constantly fearing disaster would befall him, conspired with Murong Zhong, Duan Hong, and others to rebel. Chao learned of this and summoned him, but Zhong claimed illness and did not come. Consequently, Chao arrested and executed their conspirators: Palace Attendant Murong Tong, Right Guard Murong Gen, and Cavalier Attendant-in-Ordinary Duan Feng. He had Vice Director Feng Song dismembered at the East Gate. Western General of the Household Feng Rong fled to Wei.

Soon after, Chao sent Murong Zhen and others to attack Qing Province, Murong Yu and others to attack Xu Province, and Murong Ning and Han Fan to attack Liangfu. Yu and his forces attacked Ju City and captured it, causing Xu Province Inspector Duan Hong to flee to Wei. Feng Rong gathered bandits and raided Shisai City, killing the Grand General Who Guards the West Yu Yu. This caused great alarm throughout Qingtu, and people began harboring dissenting thoughts. Murong Ning plotted to kill Han Fan and intended to raid Guanggu. Fan discovered this and attacked him, causing Ning to flee to Liangfu. Fan absorbed Ning's troops, attacked and captured Liangfu, whereupon Ning fled to Yao Xing, and Murong Fa fled to Wei. Murong Zhen captured Qing Province, and Zhong, after killing his own wife and children, escaped through a tunnel he had dug and fled alone on horseback to Yao Xing.

At this time, Chao neglected state affairs and indulged in hunting and pleasure outings, causing suffering among the people. His Vice Director Han Yan earnestly remonstrated with him, but his advice was not heeded. Chao considered reinstating corporal punishment and the nine-rank system of selection. He then issued an edict throughout his domain, which read:

"The cycles of Yang and Nine have become entangled, and the era of Yongkang faces many difficulties. Since the fall of the northern capital, institutions and regulations have been destroyed, with laws and ordinances completely lost. Governing the realm must be based on these foundations - if we cannot guide through virtue, we must maintain order through punishment. Even the great sage Emperor Shun had to command Gaoyao to establish officials, showing how punishment cannot be abolished! The late emperor began his great enterprise during troubled times, and with military affairs pressing, had no leisure to establish regulations.

I, despite my unworthiness, have inherited the great succession and govern this small domain. Yet internal strife erupted, leading to warfare in the outskirts and the neglect of ceremonial institutions. Now that the four borders are peaceful, it is time to establish proper order. The Imperial Secretariat should summon the ministers and nobles.

As for the disloyal and unfilial like Feng Song, mere beheading is insufficient punishment - we should implement methods of boiling and dismemberment, adding these to the legal code under capital offenses. Corporal punishment was established by the ancient sages in their unchangeable classics. Emperor Wen of Han changed this, disrupting the proper balance of severity. Now crimes are increasingly numerous, and deaths too frequent. Corporal punishment's role in transformation is broad in its nurturing effect and deep in its deterrent power. Our two ancestors during the Guangshou and Jianxing eras had already discussed restoring it, but passed away before implementation.

Let those of rank of Academician and above examine past practices, referring to the 'Lü Xing' and the laws of Han, Wei, and Jin, adjusting and modifying them to establish Yan's legal code. Among the three thousand offenses under the Five Punishments, none is greater than unfilial conduct. Confucius said: 'Without sages there can be no law, without filial piety there can be no family relations - this is the way to great chaos.' Though dismemberment and boiling are not among the Five Punishments, they have been practiced since ancient times. The dismemberment of Quyi is recorded in the Spring and Autumn Annals, and the practice of boiling dates back to the Middle Ages."

"When Emperor Shizong established his capital in Qi, he also lamented that punishments had lost their proper measure, and this troubled him day and night. A ruler's use of punishment and correction is like a person's left and right hands. Thus, Confucius said: 'If punishments are not properly balanced, people will not know where to put their hands and feet.' This is why Xiao He was enfeoffed for establishing laws and regulations, and Shusun Tong became Grand Master of Ceremonies for creating ritual protocols. Establishing merit and accomplishments was highly valued in ancient times. Therefore, discuss and deliberate on what should be added or removed to create a standard for our generation.

The Zhou and Han dynasties had systems for recommending worthy individuals, while Wei established the Nine-Rank system for selection. Which of these two is superior? This too should be thoroughly examined and reported."

The officials debated extensively, with many differing opinions, and as a result, the proposed changes were not implemented.

Chao's mother and wife were already in Chang'an, held by Yao Xing, who demanded that Chao acknowledge himself as a vassal and send the Imperial Music performers and various entertainers. If this was not possible, he requested a thousand Wu captives instead. Chao issued an edict asking his ministers to discuss this matter in detail.

Left Vice Director Duan Hui argued: "The highest principle is that when Chu was imprisoned, Emperor Gaozu did not turn back. Now Your Majesty has inherited the realm, and should not lower the dignity of the Son of Heaven for the sake of personal relations. Moreover, the Imperial Music performers and entertainers are all court performers from previous dynasties. We should not give them to the enemy, allowing them to change our customs. We should instead send Wu captives."

Secretary Zhang Hua said: "If we raid Wu's borders, we will surely create enmity with our neighbor. If we can attack them, they can also attack us, leading to continuous warfare and calamity, which is not fortunate for our state. In the past, Sun Quan valued the lives of his people and humbled himself to serve Wei; Hui Shi cherished his son's life and abandoned his ambitions to honor Qi. Your Majesty's filial love is in Qin, and your heart must be in turmoil. You should temporarily lower your great title to express your utmost filial piety. The way of expedient measures is permitted in the classics. Han Fan is intelligent and capable of changing situations, and his eloquence can persuade people. He was formerly a palace attendant to the Crown Prince of Qin along with Yao Xing. We can send him as an envoy to lower our title and seek peace. This is what is meant by 'bowing to one person to stand above ten thousand.'"

Chao was greatly pleased and said, "Secretary Zhang has understood my heart." He then sent Fan as an envoy to Xing.

When Fan arrived in Chang'an, Xing said to him, "When Feng Kai came before, the King of Yan treated me as an equal. But now that you have come, he submits readily. Is this following the principle of the small serving the great as in the Spring and Autumn Annals? Or is it purely out of filial piety and respect for his mother?"

Fan replied, "In the Zhou system, there were five ranks of nobility, with dukes and marquises having different statuses. The etiquette of small and great arose from this.

"Now Your Majesty has risen as a dragon in this age, gloriously ruling Western Qin, while the ruler of our dynasty has inherited the legacy of his ancestors, establishing his capital in Eastern Qi. The heavenly light is divided between us, with both facing south as emperors. In our diplomatic exchanges and alliances, we should value modesty and restraint. If we become arrogant and humiliate envoys, it would be like the rivalry between Wu and Jin, or the competition between Teng and Xue. This might tarnish the grandeur of Great Qin and diminish the majesty of Imperial Yan. Both sides would lose, which I find concerning."

Xing angrily said, "If what you say is true, then you didn't come here because of the principle of big and small states."

Fan replied, "Although it is based on the principle of big and small states, it's also because my lord's filial piety surpasses even that of Emperor Shun. I hope Your Majesty will embody the way of respecting parents and show abundant mercy."

Xing said, "I haven't seen Jia Yi for a long time and thought I had surpassed him, but now I see I fall short."

He then treated Fan with the courtesy due to an old friend and reminisced about their past. Xing said to Fan, "When the King of Yan was here, I saw him too. His demeanor was impressive, but he lacked in wit and eloquence."

Fan replied, "The greatest eloquence appears inarticulate, which is praised by sages. Moreover, at that time he was concealing his talents like a hidden dragon or phoenix, blending in with the common. If he had displayed his brilliance then, he wouldn't have achieved his current position of succeeding Heaven's work."

Xing laughed and said, "You can truly be called an envoy who extends praise."

Fan seized the opportunity to continue his persuasion, greatly pleasing Yao Xing, who rewarded him with a thousand gold pieces and agreed to return Chao's mother and wife.

Murong Ning, who had fled from Liangfu to Yao Xing, said to Xing, "The King of Yan's acknowledgment as a vassal is not out of respect, but merely a temporary measure for his mother's sake. In ancient times, emperors would raise armies to demand hostages. How can you simply return his mother? Once his mother is returned, he will surely no longer submit. You should first demand that he send the entertainers, and only then return her."

Xing's mind changed, and he sent an envoy to Chao.

Chao sent his Vice Director Zhang Hua and Palace Attendant Zong Zhengyuan to Chang'an, delivering 120 Imperial Music performers to Yao Xing. Xing was greatly pleased and invited Zhang Hua to a banquet.

As the wine flowed and music played, Xing's Gentleman of the Yellow Gate, Yin Ya, said to Zhang Hua, "In the past, when Yin was about to fall, its music masters went to Zhou. Now that Imperial Qin's way is flourishing, Yan's music has come to our court. This is surely a sign of rise and fall."

Zhang Hua replied, "Since ancient times, emperors have followed different paths. The principles of power and strategy converge in achieving success. As Laozi said, 'To take, one must first give.' Now that our musicians have gone west, they will surely return east in the future. This might be the omen of fortune and misfortune you speak of."

Xing angrily said, "In the past, when Qi and Chu competed in debate, both states mobilized their armies. You are a minister of a small state, how dare you contend with my court officials!"

Zhang Hua humbly replied, "When I began this mission, I truly wished to establish friendly relations with your great state. Since your great state has honored the minister of our small state, even extending to our lord's altars of state, how could I not respond in kind?"

Xing appreciated his response. Subsequently, he returned Chao's mother and wife.

In the third year of Yixi, Chao posthumously honored his father as Emperor Mu and installed his mother, Lady Duan, as Empress Dowager, and his wife, Lady Huyan, as Empress.

When he was about to ascend the altar to perform sacrifices at the southern suburbs, a beast as large as a horse, resembling a rat but red in color, appeared beside the circular mound. It suddenly vanished. Shortly after, a great wind arose violently, and the sky darkened in broad daylight. The temporary palace and ritual implements were all shaken and split.

Chao was frightened and secretly consulted his Grand Astrologer, Cheng Gongwei. Cheng replied, "This is caused by Your Majesty trusting and using treacherous ministers, executing worthy and good people, imposing numerous taxes, and burdening the people with excessive labor."

Alarmed, Chao issued a great amnesty and reprimanded officials like Gongsun Wulou. However, he soon reinstated them.

In that year, there was an earthquake in Guanggu. The water in Tianqi surged, wells overflowed, and the Nü River dried up. The Yellow River and Ji River froze over, but the Mian River did not freeze.

On New Year's Day, Chao held court for his officials in the Dongyang Hall. Upon hearing the music, he sighed that the musical instruments and dancers were incomplete, regretting that he had sent performers to Yao Xing. He then discussed plans to launch an invasion.

His General of the Guards, Han Yanzhuo, advised against it, saying, "The previous emperor, after the loss of the old capital, gathered forces in the Three Qi regions. When the time was not right, even those with great wisdom abandoned their plans. Now Your Majesty has inherited a stable regime. You should close the borders, nurture your troops, and wait for an opportunity. You should not create enmity with our southern neighbor and plant seeds of hostility."

Chao replied, "I have already made my decision. I will not discuss it further with you."

He then sent his generals Hugu Ti and Gongsun Gui to lead cavalry in raiding Suyu. They captured it, taking Liu Qianzai, the Governor of Yangping, and Xu Ruan, the Governor of Jiyin, prisoner. They plundered extensively before withdrawing.

Chao selected 2,500 men and women from among the captives and handed them over to the Imperial Music department for training.

At that time, Gongsun Wulou held the positions of Palace Attendant and Minister of the Imperial Secretariat, while also serving as General of the Left Guard. He had complete control over court affairs. His elder brother Gui was made General of the Vanguard and Duke of Changshan, while his uncle Tui became General of the Martial Guard and Duke of Xingle. Gongsun Wulou's relatives and clan members all held important positions at court, flanking the emperor on both sides. All the nobles and officials, both inside and outside the court, feared them.

Chao, in recognition of the success at Suyu, conferred the titles of Duke of various commanderies and counties upon Hugu Ti and others. Murong Zhen remonstrated, saying:

"I have heard that rewards should be given based on merit, and that the title of marquis is not bestowed without significant achievement. Now, Gongsun Gui has brought calamity by leading troops to ravage the common people. Is it not inappropriate for Your Majesty to ennoble him? Loyal words may be unpleasant to hear, and only those close to you will speak them. Although I am old and unworthy, I am honored to be a royal relative. I dare to express my honest opinion, and I hope Your Majesty will consider it."

Chao became angry and did not respond. From that point on, all the officials kept silent, not daring to speak up.

Wang Yan, the Chief Secretary of the Imperial Secretariat, flattered and served Gongsun Wulou. As a result, he was promoted to Gentleman of the Imperial Secretariat, then appointed as Governor of Jinan, and later became Left Assistant Minister of the Imperial Secretariat. People of that time had a saying: "If you want to become a marquis, serve Wulou."

Chao again sent Gongsun Gui and others to lead 3,000 cavalry to raid Jinan. They captured Governor Zhao Yuan and abducted over a thousand men and women before retreating. Liu Yu was preparing to lead troops to punish them.

Chao summoned his officials to the Jieyang Hall to discuss how to resist Liu Yu's forces. Gongsun Wulou said:

"The Wu troops are light and swift, excelling in battle. Their initial assault will be fierce and cannot be matched. We should hold the Daxian Pass to prevent their entry, prolonging the conflict to wear down their morale. We can then select 2,000 elite cavalry to move south along the coast, cutting off their supplies. Separately, order Duan Hui to lead troops from Yanzhou to come down from the eastern mountains. Attacking from both front and rear would be the best strategy.

Alternatively, we could order local officials to fortify themselves in strategic positions, burn everything except essential supplies, and destroy crops to deprive the enemy of resources. This scorched earth policy would be the second-best strategy.

The worst strategy would be to allow the enemy to pass Daxian and then engage them in open battle outside the city."

Chao replied: "The capital is prosperous with a large population; we cannot suddenly move everyone inside for defense. The crops are spread across the fields and cannot be quickly destroyed. Even if we did destroy the crops and defend the city to preserve lives, I cannot do that. We have the strength of five provinces and the natural defenses of mountains and rivers. With 10,000 war chariots and 10,000 armored cavalry, even if they pass Daxian and reach the plains, we can gradually engage them with our elite cavalry. This will surely lead to their capture."

He Lailu strongly advised against this but was not heeded. He later told Wulou, "If the emperor doesn't follow our plan, our defeat is imminent."

Murong Zhen said, "If we follow Your Majesty's wishes, we must use cavalry on the plains for effectiveness. We should go out to meet the enemy in battle before Daxian. If we lose, we can still retreat to defend. We should not allow the enemy to enter Daxian, which would put us in a difficult position."

"In the past, Lord Cheng'an did not defend the Jingxing Pass and was ultimately defeated by Han Xin. Zhuge Zhan did not take advantage of the Shuma Pass and was eventually captured by Deng Ai. I believe that geographical advantage is more important than timing. Defending the Daxian Pass would be the best strategy."

Chao did not follow this advice. As Murong Zhen left, he said to Han Yanzhuo, "Since His Majesty neither wants to destroy the crops and defend strategic positions, nor is willing to evacuate the people to escape the invaders, he greatly resembles Liu Zhang. This year our state will be destroyed, and I will surely die. You and other Han Chinese officials will once again have to submit to barbarian rule."

When Chao heard about this, he became furious and had Murong Zhen arrested and imprisoned.

Chao then took control of the two garrisons at Ju and Liangfu, reinforced the city walls and moats, selected soldiers and horses, and prepared his forces to await the enemy.

That summer, Liu Yu's forces reached Dongguan. Chao sent his left army under six commanders including Duan Hui and He Lailu, totaling 50,000 infantry and cavalry, to occupy Linqu. When Liu Yu's forces crossed Daxian Pass, Chao became fearful and led 40,000 troops to join Duan Hui and others at Linqu. He said to Gongsun Wulou, "We should advance to occupy Chuanyuan. If the Jin army arrives and loses access to water, they won't be able to fight." Wulou rode with cavalry to secure the position.

However, Liu Yu's vanguard general Meng Longfu had already reached Chuanyuan, and Wulou was defeated and forced to retreat. Liu Yu then sent Tan Shao, Consultant and Administrative Officer, to lead elite troops to attack and break through Linqu. Chao, greatly frightened, fled alone on horseback to Duan Hui's position south of the city. Hui's forces were also defeated in battle, and Hui was beheaded by Liu Yu's troops. Chao fled again to Guanggu, moved the people inside the outer city walls into the inner city for protection, and sent his Secretary Zhang Gang to request aid from Yao Xing.

He pardoned Murong Zhen and promoted him to Minister of the Imperial Secretariat and Commander-in-Chief of All Military Affairs. He summoned his officials and apologized to them, saying: "I inherited this established enterprise but failed to employ the worthy and entrust the capable, instead stubbornly following my own way. Like spilled water that cannot be recovered, what use is regret now? Wise men show their strategies in times of danger, and loyal ministers prove their integrity in times of difficulty. I hope you all will consider the six extraordinary strategies and help overcome this crisis."

Murong Zhen stepped forward and said: "The hearts of the people depend on one person. Your Majesty personally led the six armies but was the first to flee in defeat. The officials have lost their resolve, and the soldiers and people have lost their spirit. We can no longer rely on support from within or without. I hear that Western Qin has internal troubles and likely cannot spare troops to help us. We should fight one more decisive battle to contest Heaven's mandate. We still have several tens of thousands of returning soldiers. We can use gold, silk, and palace women as incentives to encourage them to fight one last battle. If Heaven favors us, we can still defeat the enemy."

Murong Zhen continued, "If we fail, death would still be honorable. We cannot simply close our gates and passively await siege and attack."

However, Minister of Education Murong Hui disagreed, saying:

"That's not right. The Jin army is now riding high on their victory and has an overwhelming spirit. How can defeated generals resist them? Although Qin is engaged with Boba, they are not a significant threat. Moreover, our two states are allied like lips and teeth. Now that we face invasion, Qin will surely come to our aid.

But historically, when seeking aid, if a high-ranking official is not sent, significant forces will not be dispatched. This is why when Zhao sent three requests, Chu did not send troops; but when Pingyuan sent one envoy, aid arrived and succeeded.

Han Fan, the Minister of the Imperial Secretariat, is highly respected and esteemed by both Yan and Qin. We should send him to request aid to overcome this crisis."

Thus, Chao sent Han Fan along with Wang Pu to request military assistance from Yao Xing.

Soon after, Liu Yu's forces surrounded the city from all sides. Someone secretly informed Liu Yu's army, "If you can get Zhang Gang to help with siege equipment, the city can be taken." That month, Gang returned from Chang'an and defected to Liu Yu. Liu Yu ordered Gang to circle the city shouting, "Helian Bobo has severely defeated the Qin army; no reinforcements are coming!"

Chao was enraged and tried to shoot Gang with a crossbow, forcing him to retreat. Right Vice Director Zhang Hua and Palace Attendant Feng Kai were both captured by Liu Yu's forces. Liu Yu had them write letters to Chao urging his surrender.

Chao then wrote to Liu Yu requesting to become a vassal state, with Daxian Pass as the boundary, and offering a thousand horses to establish peaceful relations, but Liu Yu refused. More troops continued to arrive from Jiangnan.

Secretary Zhang Jun returned from Chang'an and also surrendered to Liu Yu. He advised Liu Yu: "The reason Yan continues to resist is that they rely externally on Han Fan, hoping for Qin reinforcements. Fan has prestige and is close to Yao Xing. If Bobo is defeated, Qin will surely aid Yan. We should secretly entice Fan with great rewards. If Fan comes over, Yan will lose hope and naturally surrender."

Liu Yu followed this advice, appointing Fan as Imperial Attendant and sending him a letter to recruit him. At this time, Yao Xing had sent his general Yao Qiang with 10,000 troops to join his other general Yao Shao in Luoyang to come to Yan's aid. However, when Helian Bobo severely defeated the Qin army, Xing recalled Qiang to Chang'an.

Fan sighed, "Heaven must intend to destroy Yan!" When he received Liu Yu's letter, he surrendered to Liu Yu. Liu Yu said to Fan, "You wanted to achieve merits like Shen Baoxu, why did you return empty-handed?" Fan replied, "Since my late grandfather, the Minister of Works, received favors from Yan, I went weeping to the Qin court hoping to save Yan from disaster."

Fan continued: "But the Western Court (Qin) had many troubles, and my sincere efforts were in vain. It can be said that Heaven is destroying this declining state while supporting your enlightened leadership. A wise person acts when he sees the opportunity - how could I not come?"

The next day, Liu Yu had Fan circle the city walls, which caused people's hearts to waver and lose their determination to resist. Liu Yu said to Fan, "You should go to the city walls and tell them about the consequences of resistance versus surrender." Fan replied, "Although I have received special favor from you, I still cannot bring myself to plot against Yan." Liu Yu appreciated this loyalty and did not force him.

Some advisers urged Chao to execute Fan's family to prevent further defections. However, Chao, knowing defeat was imminent and considering that Fan's brother Yanzhuo had shown complete loyalty without second thoughts, did not punish them.

That year, there was a rain of blood in Donglai, and ghosts were heard crying at night by the gates of Guanggu city.

The following year, on the first day of the first month, Chao ascended the Tianmen gate and held court with his officials atop the city walls. He slaughtered horses to feast the troops and promoted many civil and military officials. Chao's favored consort, Lady Wei, accompanied him on the city walls. Seeing the might of Liu Yu's army, she grasped Chao's hand and they wept together. Han Yanzhuo admonished, "Your Majesty is facing a critical moment of adversity. This is the time to show strength, yet you weep with a woman. How unseemly!" Chao wiped his eyes and apologized.

His Minister of the Imperial Secretariat, Dong Rui, advised Chao to surrender, but Chao became furious and had him imprisoned. Then He Lailu and Gongsun Wulou attempted to use tunnels to attack Liu Yu's forces but were unsuccessful.

A man from Hejian named Xuan Wen advised Liu Yu: "In the past, when Zhao attacked Cao Yi, a diviner said the city was protected by the Mian River and couldn't be taken. But if the Five Dragon's Mouth was blocked, the city would fall. Shi Jilong followed this advice, and Yi surrendered. Later, when Murong Ke besieged Duan Kan, he did the same, and Kan surrendered. Not long after, an earthquake reopened it. The old foundation is still there; we can block it again." Liu Yu followed his suggestion.

By this time, more than half of the men and women in the city were suffering from weakness in their legs. Chao had to be carried in a sedan chair to ascend the walls. Secretary Yue Shou said to Chao: "Heaven and Earth are not benevolent; they assist the invaders in their cruelty. Our soldiers are weak and ill, diminishing day by day. We are trapped in this besieged city with no hope of outside aid. The will of Heaven and the state of human affairs are clear. Even if dynasties must end, even Yao and Shun abdicated their thrones. Turning disaster into fortune is the mark of a wise ruler. We should follow the examples of Xu and Zheng to preserve the ancestral temples."

Chao sighed and said, "Rise and fall are matters of fate. I would rather die fighting with my sword than live by offering a jade tablet in surrender."

Zhang Gang then built battering rams for Liu Yu, covered with wooden shelters and leather, along with various ingenious devices that rendered the fire, stones, and arrows from the city walls useless. He also constructed siege towers, hanging ladders, and wooden screens that could reach the top of the walls. Chao was furious and had Gang's mother hanged and dismembered. People from within the city continued to surrender one after another.

Liu Yu launched attacks from all four sides, inflicting heavy casualties on the defenders. Eventually, Yue Shou opened the gates to let in Liu Yu's forces. Chao attempted to flee with several dozen mounted guards but was captured by Liu Yu's army.

Liu Yu listed Chao's offenses in refusing to surrender, but Chao remained composed and said nothing, only entrusting his mother's care to Liu Jingxuan. He was sent to Jiankang and executed in the marketplace. He was twenty-six years old and had ruled for six years.

The Yan dynasty began when Feng De usurped the throne in the fourth year of Emperor An's Longan reign period, lasted through two rulers over eleven years, and was finally destroyed in the sixth year of the Yixi reign period.

Murong Zhong

Murong Zhong, courtesy name Daoming, was De's cousin. From a young age, he showed great wisdom and composure, never revealing his emotions of joy or anger on his face. He possessed both intelligence and eloquence, and was skilled in clear argumentation.

When facing difficulties or confronting enemies, he demonstrated both wisdom and courage, repeatedly offering brilliant strategies that De often successfully implemented. As a result, De entrusted him with both major and minor governmental affairs, and he became an important minister in establishing the regime.

Later, Gongsun Wulou, seeking to wield power and authority, worried that Zhong would restrain him. He therefore persuaded Chao to execute Zhong. This led Zhong to plot rebellion. When his plot was discovered, he fled to Yao Xing, who appointed him as the Governor of Shiping and made him the Marquis of Guiyi.

Feng Fu

Feng Fu, courtesy name Chudao, was from Chu in Bo'hai. His grandfather Xuan was a Zhenwei General, and his father Fang served as Minister of Personnel during Murong Wei's reign. From a young age, Fu was intelligent, gentle, and generous, earning the reputation of a gentleman scholar.

When Bao usurped the throne, Fu was promoted to Minister of Personnel. When Lan Han seized power, Fu fled south to Bi Luhun, who recommended him as Governor of Bohai. When Feng De reached Ju city, Fu surrendered to him. De said, "My conquest of Qing Province brings me less joy than gaining your service."

Fu managed external affairs while participating in internal secret councils. Despite his high position, he remained humble and open to advice, truly embodying the dignity of a great minister. When Chao succeeded to the throne, power fell into the hands of favorites, old regulations were violated, governance deteriorated daily, and cruelty increased. Fu repeatedly tried to correct these issues, but Chao would not accept his advice.

Later, from his throne, Chao asked Fu, "Among all the kings of history, whom do I resemble?" Fu replied, "The tyrants Jie and Zhou." Chao was greatly ashamed and angry. Fu walked out slowly, his expression unchanged. Minister of Works Ju Zhong, alarmed, said to Fu, "How could you speak so harshly to the emperor? You should go back and apologize." Fu replied, "I am seventy years old, and the wood for my coffin has already grown thick. I only seek a place to die." He never apologized.

Fu died at home in Chao's third year at the age of seventy-one. Many of his writings were passed down through the generations.

The historian comments:

Murong De, as a younger uncle, held an important position in Ye. When the court was in danger, we did not hear of his loyalty; when the ruler was still alive, he hastily usurped the throne. How can this be in accordance with human principles?

However, he possessed a heroic and unrestrained demeanor, and harbored far-reaching strategies. In a time of disintegration, he became a contender for power. He took control of all of Qi, seized the imperial regalia, and wielded his sword to compete with Qin and Wei. He trained his troops with the ambition to pacify Jing and Wu. He promoted Confucian learning to spread culture, and welcomed honest advice to improve himself. Looking at how he ruled the country, there are indeed praiseworthy aspects.

Chao inherited an already established foundation and occupied a position of great power. However, he neglected governance and law, preferring only hunting and pleasure. He shut out loyal and virtuous advisors while promoting sycophants, listened to slander and alienated meritorious relatives. The legacy he inherited soon declined, and the family's reputation could not be maintained.

He lost Suyu, bringing disaster upon himself, and opened up Daxian, inviting enemies. Both ruler and ministers were captured, and the ancestral temples were reduced to ruins. Examining his actions and strategies, this was not mere misfortune.

Eulogy:

De was truly a cunning hero,  
Turning defeat into achievement.  
He suddenly possessed the land of Qing,  
His fame spread throughout the realm.

Chao inherited a false mandate,  
And disrupted the nation's progress.  
The ancestral temple lost its wise plans,  
The court mourned, drenched in dew.

1. A metaphor suggesting that someone of lower status might eventually usurp the position of their superior. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)