Records, Volume 2: Liu Cong

Liu Cong, courtesy name Xuanming, also known as Zai, was the fourth son of Yuan Hai. His mother was Lady Zhang. When she was pregnant with him, Lady Zhang dreamed that the sun entered her bosom. Upon waking, she told this to Yuan Hai, who said, "This is an auspicious sign; speak of it to no one." After fifteen months of pregnancy, Cong was born, and on that night there appeared an unusual white light. He had an extraordinary physical appearance, with a white hair over two feet long growing from his left ear, which was remarkably lustrous.

From a young age, he was intelligent and studious, earning great admiration from the scholar Zhu Ji. By age fourteen, he had mastered the classics and histories, comprehensively studied the works of various schools of thought, and could recite all of Sun Tzu's and Wu Qi's military treatises. He was skilled in cursive and clerical scripts, excelled in composition, and authored over a hundred poems and more than fifty eulogies and odes.

At fifteen, he began practicing martial arts, possessed arm strength like that of an ape, and was an excellent archer who could draw a bow of three hundred jin. His physical strength and agility were unmatched in his time. When Wang Hun of Taiyuan met him, he was greatly impressed and said to Yuan Hai, "This child's potential is beyond my ability to measure."

At age twenty, he traveled to the capital where all notable scholars sought his friendship, particularly Le Guang and Zhang Hua. Guo Yi, the Governor of Xinxing, appointed him as Assistant Officer. He was recommended as a capable general and became the Cavalry Commander of a separate division, later promoted to Commander of the Right Division. He was skilled in managing relationships, and all the elite families of the Five Divisions pledged their loyalty to him. King Yong of Hejian recommended him as the General of Chisha.

When Liu Cong learned that Yuan Hai was in Ye, fearing harm from Wang Ying (Prince of Chengdu), he fled to join Wang Ying and was appointed General of the Right Crossbow Division, participating in frontline battles. When Yuan Hai became the Northern Chanyu, he appointed Cong as the Right Worthy Prince. After Yuan Hai assumed the position of Great Chanyu, he further appointed Cong as the Luli King.

After the death of his brother He, court officials urged him to take the throne. Cong initially yielded to his younger brother Yi, Prince of Beihai, but after Yi and other officials tearfully insisted, Cong eventually agreed, saying, "Yi and the ministers urge this because the realm is not yet unified and dangers still abound, and because I am older. This is a matter of state, how dare I not respectfully comply? I wished to follow the example of Duke Yin of Lu, waiting for Yi to mature, then returning the position to Ziming."

In 310, he assumed the title of Emperor, declared a general amnesty, and changed the era name to Guangxing. He honored Yuan Hai's wife Lady Shan as Empress Dowager, his mother Lady Zhang as Imperial Dowager, and made Yi the Imperial Brother and Great Chanyu and Grand Situ. He established his wife Lady Huyan as Empress and named his son Can as Prince of Henei, appointing him as Commander-in-Chief of military affairs. He also appointed Yi as Prince of Hejian, Yi as Prince of Pengcheng, and Kui as Prince of Gaoping.

He sent Can, along with his Conquering East Prince Mi and Liu Yao, leading 40,000 troops into Luochuan, advancing through Zhuanyuan and campaigning in the regions of Liang, Chen, Ru, and Ying, capturing over a hundred fortifications. He appointed Liu Jing as Grand Marshal, Liu Yin as Grand Situ, and Wang Yu as Grand Minister of Works.

The false Empress Dowager Lady Shan was exceptionally beautiful, and Cong had an illicit relationship with her. As she was Yi's mother, Yi repeatedly spoke about this matter. Lady Shan died of shame and anger, and Cong grieved inconsolably. Later, upon learning the reason, Yi's favor gradually declined, though due to Cong's continued attachment to Lady Shan's memory, he was not immediately dismissed. Cong then honored his own mother as Empress Dowager.

He appointed his Palace Guard Huyan Yan as Commissioner, Commander-in-Chief of the Vanguard, and Grand General of the Front Army. Equipped with 27,000 elite troops, Yan entered Luochuan from Yiyang, while Wang Mi, Liu Yao, and Shi Le were ordered to advance their forces to join him. By the time Yan reached Henan, the imperial forces had suffered twelve defeats, with casualties exceeding 30,000 men.

Before Mi and others arrived, Yan left his supplies at Zhang Fang's old fort and attacked Luoyang, breaching the Pingchang Gate and burning the Dongyang and Xuanyang Gates along with various government offices. Emperor Huai sent Liu Mo, the Governor of Henan, to resist, but the imperial forces were defeated at the She Gate. When external reinforcements failed to arrive, Yan retreated through the Dongyang Gate, capturing over 200 children of nobles and officials before withdrawing.

At this time, the Emperor was preparing to flee east across the Yellow River and had boats prepared on the Luo River, but Yan burned them all before returning to Zhang Fang's fort. When Wang Mi and Liu Yao arrived, they joined Yan in besieging Luoyang. Within the city, famine was severe, with people resorting to cannibalism. Officials scattered, and none maintained their resolve.

After the Xuanyang Gate fell, Mi and Yan entered the Southern Palace, ascending to the Taiji Front Hall. They allowed their troops to plunder freely, seizing palace women and treasures. Liu Yao then executed over 30,000 people, including nobles, officials, and others, building a mound of their bodies north of the Luo River as a warning. The Emperor and Empress Yang (Emperor Hui's consort), along with the Six Imperial Seals, were relocated to Pingyang.

Liu Cong declared a general amnesty and changed the era name to Jiaping. He appointed the captured emperor to the positions of Special Advanced Official, Grand Master of the Left Palace and Prince of Ping'a.

He dispatched his General of the Western Pacification Zhao Ran and General of Western Peace Liu Ya with 20,000 cavalry to attack Wang Mo, the Prince of Nanyang, in Chang'an. Can and Yao led the main force to follow them. Ran defeated the imperial forces at Tong Pass, where General Lü Yi died in battle. When the army reached Xiahou, Wang Mo surrendered to Ran.

Ran sent Mo to Can, who then executed Mo and his son Li (Prince of Fanyang). Can sent Guard General Liang Fen, Mo's Chief Secretary Lu You, Palace Attendant Du Ao, Xin Mi, and Bei Gong Chun and others to Pingyang. Liu Cong was greatly angered by Can's execution of Mo.

Can explained, "I killed Mo not because he failed to recognize the Mandate of Heaven early enough, but because, as a core member of the Jin family, he failed to die honorably during the crisis at Luoyang. The world's contempt for such behavior is universal, thus I executed him."

Liu Cong replied, "Even so, I fear you will not escape the curse of executing those who surrendered. The Way of Heaven is most divine, and no action goes without consequence."

Liu Cong appointed Liu Yao as Grand General of Chariots and Cavalry, Official of Equal Status with the Three Ducal Ministers, and Governor of Yongzhou, changing his title to Prince of Zhongshan and stationing him in Chang'an. Wang Mi was made Grand General and enfeoffed as Duke of Qi.

Soon after, Shi Le and others killed Mi at Jiwu and absorbed his troops, reporting Mi's alleged treason. Liu Cong was furious and sent a messenger to rebuke Shi Le for arbitrarily killing a high official, suspecting him of harboring supreme ambitions and having divided loyalties. He then assigned Mi's former troops to Shi Le.

After Liu Yao occupied Chang'an, Jia Pi, the Governor of Anding, and various Di and Qiang peoples all sent hostages and submitted, except for Qu Te, the Inspector of Yongzhou, and Zhu Hui, the Governor of Xinping, who remained steadfastly resistant. Military Protector Qu Yun and Pingyang Magistrate Liang Su attempted to flee to Anding through the southern mountains of Jingzhao, but encountered Jia Pi's son at Yinmi. They returned to Linjing, promoting Jia Pi as General of Southern Pacification. Leading 50,000 troops, they attacked Yao in Chang'an. The Governor of Fufeng, Liang Zong, along with Qu Te, Zhu Hui, and others, also led 100,000 troops to join them.

Yao sent Liu Ya and Zhao Ran to resist but they were defeated and retreated. Yao then led Chang'an's elite troops to battle at Huangqiu, where his forces suffered a major defeat. He was hit by an arrow and retreated to defend Ganqu. Wang Tu and Ji Te of Du attacked Liu Can at Xinfeng, forcing Can to return to Pingyang. Yao captured Chiyang and took over 10,000 captives back to Chang'an.

At this time, Yan Ding and others supported the Prince of Qin as Crown Prince and entered Yongcheng, gaining support from both Chinese and non-Chinese peoples throughout the Guanzhong region.

After Liu Cong's Empress Huyan died, he planned to marry the daughter of his Grand Guardian Liu Yin. His brother Yi strongly advised against it. Cong then consulted Prime Minister Liu Niannian and Grand Tutor Liu Jing. They responded, "We have heard that the Grand Guardian claims descent from Duke Kang of Zhou's Liu lineage, which differs from Your Majesty's ancestral line, so the marriage would be appropriate."

Liu Cong was greatly pleased and ordered Li Hong, who also served as Grand Master of Ceremony, to appoint Yin's two daughters as Left and Right Noble Consorts, ranking above the Zhao Yi. He also took four granddaughters of Yin as Noble Ladies, ranking below the Noble Consorts.

He asked Hong, "These women are all exceptionally beautiful and virtuous, and the Grand Guardian's relationship to me is indeed different. What do you think?"

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

Liu Cong was delighted and rewarded Hong with sixty jin of gold, saying, "You should explain this reasoning to my sons and brothers." Subsequently, the six Liu women dominated the imperial harem, and Cong rarely ventured out. All affairs were presented through the palace eunuchs, with the Left Noble Consort making the decisions.

Liu Cong granted Emperor Huai the title of Official of Equal Status with the Three Ducal Ministers and enfeoffed him as Duke of Kuaiji, with the Yu clan receiving ranks accordingly. When Cong invited the emperor to a banquet, he said to him, "When you were Prince of Yuzhang, I once visited Wang Wuzi, who introduced me to you. You said you had long heard of my name. You showed me the music bureau songs you composed and said, 'I hear you are good at composing rhapsodies, please try writing one.' At that time, Wuzi and I both composed 'Odes to Great Virtue,' which you praised for a long time. You also invited me to shoot arrows at the imperial hall, where I scored twelve points while you and Wuzi both scored nine. You gave me a zhè bow and silver inkstone. Do you remember?"

The emperor replied, "How could I dare forget? I only regret not recognizing your dragon countenance earlier."

Cong asked, "Why was there such severe killing among your family members?"

The emperor responded, "This was perhaps beyond human affairs, but Heaven's will. The Great Han was destined to receive the mandate, so we eliminated ourselves for Your Majesty. Moreover, if my family had been able to maintain Emperor Wu's legacy and maintain harmony among the nine branches of relatives, how could Your Majesty have obtained the throne!"

When evening came, as the emperor was leaving, Cong bestowed upon him Noble Lady Liu, saying, "She is the granddaughter of a noble family. I specially give her to you as a wife. You should treat her well." Liu was appointed as the Lady of Kuaiji State.

He dispatched his Northern Commander Jin Chong to raid Taiyuan, and Northern Pacifier Bu Xu led troops to follow. Chong failed to capture Taiyuan but blamed Xu and executed him. When Cong heard of this, he was furious and said: "This man was not mine to execute - who does Chong think he is?" He sent Imperial Censor Hao Yan with credentials to execute Chong. The Left Director of Waterways, Prince of Xiangling Shu, was executed at the eastern market for failing to supply fish and crabs. The Master of Works, Duke of Wangdu Jin Ling, was executed for failing to complete the Wenming and Huiguang Palaces.

Cong hunted without restraint, regularly departing at dawn and returning at dusk, watching fishing at the Fen River with torches continuing into the night. Central Army Commander Wang Zhang remonstrated: "Now when great difficulties remain unresolved and the remnant Jin forces are merely resting, Your Majesty does not fear the disaster of the white dragon in commoner's clothes, staying out late into the night. Your Majesty should consider how difficult it was for the late emperor to establish this enterprise, and how succession is not easy. The great endeavor has come this far with all looking to you - how can you let it fall when nearly complete! Observing Your Majesty's recent conduct has pained my heart deeply. Moreover, foolish people's loyalty to Han is not yet secure while their thoughts of Jin remain strong. Liu Kun is but a short distance away, and assassins could arrive at any moment. When an emperor ventures out carelessly, he is vulnerable to a single man. I hope Your Majesty will correct past errors - that would be most fortunate."

Cong was furious and ordered Zhang's execution. His principal wife Lady Wang knocked her head on the ground begging for mercy, so Zhang was imprisoned instead. Cong's mother went three days without eating in protest of his excessive punishments. His brother Yi and son Can both strongly remonstrated. Cong angrily said: "Am I Jie, Zhou, You, or Li that you all come crying about people!"

His Grand Chancellor Liu Yannian and over a hundred other officials removed their caps and wept while firmly remonstrating: "The Guangwen Emperor with his sacred martial virtue answered the mandate, establishing this great enterprise, but before unifying all under heaven, he ascended early. Your Majesty's wise virtue comes from Heaven, succeeding to the throne like a flying dragon. You pacified Luoyang in the east and stabilized Chang'an in the south - truly your achievements surpass King Cheng of Zhou and your virtue exceeds Yu and Qi of Xia. From ancient times of Tang and Yu to now Your Majesty, reviewing historical records shows no comparison. Yet recently you have executed nobles for small failures in duties, imprisoned generals for honest words that displeased you, hunted without restraint while neglecting state affairs - we truly cannot understand this. This is why we worry ourselves sick day and night." Cong then pardoned Zhang.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At that time, a meteor appeared from the Ox constellation, entered the Purple Forbidden Enclosure, moving in a serpentine dragon-like pattern. Its light illuminated the ground and fell ten li north of Pingyang. Upon inspection, there was flesh measuring thirty paces long and twenty-seven paces wide. Its stench reached Pingyang, and beside the flesh there were constant sounds of weeping, continuing day and night without cease. Cong greatly despised this and summoned his ministers and officials to ask: "My lack of virtue has caused this anomaly. Each of you should speak freely without reservation." Chen Yuanda and Scholar Zhang Shi responded: "The meteor's anomaly portends coming disaster. We fear there will be trouble with three empresses in the rear palace, leading to the loss of state and family. All stems from this. We urge Your Majesty to be cautious." Cong replied: "This is merely a matter of yin and yang - what has it to do with human affairs!" Soon after, Liu's household produced a snake and a fierce beast, each of which harmed people before fleeing. They could not be found, but shortly after were seen near the fallen flesh. Soon after, Lady Liu died, and the flesh disappeared, with the weeping sounds also ceasing. From then on, disorder arose in the rear palace, and imperial favors were bestowed without proper order.

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

Yao stationed troops at Wei Ford, while Zhao Ran stationed at Xinfeng. Suo Chen came from Chang'an to attack Ran from the east. Ran, emboldened by previous victories, showed contempt for Chen. Chief Clerk Lu Hui said: "Sima Ye and his ministers, though encroaching on royal territory, differ greatly in strength. They will surely fight us to the death. General, you should arrange your troops in proper formation to attack them. Do not take them lightly. Even cornered beasts will fight - how much more so a state!" Ran replied: "Given Sima Mo's strength, I can defeat him as easily as pulling down rotten wood. As for Suo Chen, that mere boy, how could he even soil my horse's hooves or blade! I shall capture him before I eat." At dawn, he led several hundred elite cavalry to meet the enemy, engaging in battle west of the city. He was defeated and returned, lamenting: "I did not heed Lu Hui's words, leading to this outcome. How can I face him!" Thereupon he executed Hui. Before his execution, Hui said to Ran: "General, you reject counsel and defy strategy, bringing defeat through stupidity. Yet you harbor suspicion of previous successes and execute loyal advisors to vent your foolish anger. How can you show your face in this world? Yuan Shao did this before, and you follow his path. Destruction and defeat will surely follow. My only regret is not seeing the Grand Marshal before death. If the dead know nothing, so be it; but if they have awareness, I shall meet Tian Feng below and accuse you in the Yellow Springs, ensuring you will not die peacefully in your bed." He commanded the executioner: "Let me face east." When Grand Marshal Yao heard of this, he said: "A hoof-print puddle cannot contain a foot-long carp - this describes Ran perfectly."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cong's armory sank into the ground by one zhang and five chi (approximately 5 meters). At that time, his favored attendants included Palace Attendants Wang Shen, Xuan Huai, and Yu Rong, Palace Supervisor Guo Yi, and Inner Palace Guard Ling Xiu, who all wielded great influence. Cong would feast and revel in the inner palace, sometimes not emerging for a hundred days. Officials would only communicate through Shen and others, often not reaching Cong directly. Decisions were made based on their personal likes and dislikes, resulting in meritorious veterans being overlooked while corrupt flatterers could rise to high positions within days. Though military campaigns were launched every year, soldiers received no rewards of money or silk, while gifts to inner palace households, even to their servants, would amount to tens of millions. Shen and his associates' carriages, clothing, and residences exceeded those of princes. Over thirty of their relatives and connections, though commoners, were appointed as Interior Ministers and Chiefs. They were all extravagant, corrupt, and harmful to good people. Jin Zhun and his entire clan ingratiated themselves through flattery.

Guo Yi, harboring resentment against Liu Yi, said to Liu Can: "The Crown Prince still harbors treasonous ambitions during His Majesty's reign. This is a deep grievance for both you and your father, and a great injustice to all under heaven. Yet His Majesty shows excessive mercy, not removing them from their positions. Should upheaval occur, I fear for Your Highness's safety. You are the grandson of the High Ancestor and His Majesty's legitimate heir - who under heaven does not look to you? How can such important matters of state be shared with others! I recently heard the Crown Prince met with the Grand General, speaking at length. If their plan succeeds, they promise to make His Majesty the Emperor Emeritus and the Grand General the Crown Prince. Yi also promised Wei Jun the position of Grand Chanyu, and both princes have agreed. The two princes occupy secure positions and command strong forces - how could their plot not succeed! I say these princes' actions are worse than beasts. Those who betray their father - who would support them? They merely covet power now, but after succeeding, how could His Majesty survive! Your Highness's brothers are beyond words, and the Eastern Palace, Prime Minister, and Chanyu positions belong to the Wuling brothers - how could they give these to others! They plan to strike during the Shangsi Festival feast in the third month. As events may change, action should be taken early. The Spring and Autumn Annals say: 'If even weeds cannot be eliminated, how much more so the ruler's favored younger brother!' I have reported to His Majesty multiple times, but his nature values brotherly affection and believes my words false. Though I have suffered punishment, I have received grace from His Majesty and Your Highness, so I dare speak what I know, hoping you will heed it. I shall report this inside. I beg Your Highness to keep this secret and privately document these matters. If you doubt my words, you may summon the Grand General's Attendant Wang Pi and Wei Army Commander Liu Dun, show them favor, open a path for their loyalty, and question them - then you will know the truth." Can deeply believed this. Yi secretly told Pi and Dun: "The two princes' treasonous acts are already known to His Majesty and the Prime Minister. Were you part of this?" The two men exclaimed in shock: "There is no such thing!" Yi said: "This matter is certain. I only pity that your old associates will be implicated."

At this, he sobbed with flowing tears. Pi and Dun became greatly frightened and kowtowed, begging for mercy. Yi said: "I will make a plan for you - will you follow it?" Both men said: "We will respectfully follow your instructions." Yi said: "When the Prime Minister questions you, just say it is true. If he asks why you did not report earlier, answer: 'Though I deserve death for this crime, I considered His Majesty's merciful nature and Your Highness's devotion to family ties, and feared my words would be seen as slander.'" Pi and Dun agreed. Soon after, Can summoned and questioned the two men separately, and though they arrived at different times, their testimonies matched perfectly. Can believed it to be true.

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

From winter solstice until this time, Cong no longer received court audiences, and all military and state affairs were decided by Can, with only imperial edicts for executions and appointments being issued, while Wang Shen, Guo Yi, and others had their wishes granted. He also established a market in the rear court, feasting and playing with palace women, sometimes remaining intoxicated for three days. Cong, from the Autumn Pavilion, executed Special Advanced Official Qiwu Da, Grand Master of the Palace Gongshi Yu, Ministers Wang Yan and Tian Xin, Minor Treasury Official Chen Xiu, Left Guard Bu Chong, and Grand Minister of Agriculture Zhu Dan - all were those whom the eunuchs despised. Palace Attendant Bu Gan wept and remonstrated with Cong: "Your Majesty is promoting martial and enlightened rule, wishing to eliminate injustice even in remote valleys. How can you suddenly execute loyal and worthy officials? What legacy will this leave? In the past, Qin loved the Three Good Men yet killed them, and wise men knew they would not achieve hegemony. Even the tyrannical Duke Li of Jin, who killed three ministers, showed some reluctance. How can Your Majesty suddenly trust the prejudices of your attendants and execute seven ministers in one day! The edict is still among officials and not yet announced. I beg you to show heaven's mercy and withdraw this thunderous wrath. Moreover, if Your Majesty simply wishes to execute them without stating their crimes, how will this be explained to all under heaven? Is this the imperial way of three investigations?" He kowtowed until his head bled. Wang Shen berated Gan: "Does Palace Attendant Bu wish to oppose the imperial edict?" Cong angrily departed, demoting Gan to commoner status.

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

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

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

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

In Hedong there was a great locust plague, but strangely they did not eat millet or beans. Jin Zhun led his people to collect and bury them, with crying heard for over ten li. Later, the locusts burrowed out of the soil and began eating millet and beans. Pingyang suffered severe famine, causing 200,000 households from the Metropolitan Region to flee to Jizhou, drawn there by Shi Yue's recruitment. Dogs and pigs mated at the Prime Minister's gate, then at the palace gate, and also at the gates of the Metropolitan Commandant and Censorate. A pig wearing a Jinxian official's cap climbed onto Cong's throne. A dog wearing a military cap and official ribbon climbed up together with the pig. Shortly after, they fought and died in the palace hall. None of the palace guards had seen them enter. Yet Cong became even more tyrannical and cruel, showing no signs of fear or caution. When feasting officials in the Front Hall of Guangji Palace, he summoned his younger brother Yi, whose appearance was haggard and whose hair had turned gray. Yi wept and apologized. Cong also wept bitterly at seeing him, then drank to extreme pleasure and treated him as before.

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

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

At that time, ghostly cries were heard in the Eastern Palace; a red rainbow stretched across the sky with a branch to the south; three suns appeared simultaneously, each with two rings, brilliant in five colors; and a guest star passed through the Purple Palace and disappeared into the Celestial Prison. The Grand Astrologer Kang Xiang said to Cong: "The snake-like rainbow fills the sky with a southern branch; three suns shine together; a guest star enters the Purple Palace. These are all major anomalies, and their omens are not far off. The rainbow stretching east to west indicates that the regions south of Xu and Luo cannot be conquered. The southern branch suggests that the Li clan will continue to straddle Ba and Shu, while Sima Rui will ultimately control all of Wu - the realm may split into three! The moon represents the Hu king. Though the Han holds both capitals and claims imperial authority, power will flourish in Yan and Dai, establishing foundations in the northern regions. The lunar changes must relate to Han territory! With Han occupying the Central Plains, the Purple Palace anomaly concerns this domain - its gravity cannot be fully expressed. Shi Le eyes Zhao and Wei like an owl, Cao Yi watches eastern Qi like a wolf, and the Xianbei's multitude of stars spread across Yan and Dai. Qi, Dai, Yan, and Zhao all show signs of growing power. I urge Your Majesty to focus on the eastern regions and not be concerned with the southwest. Wu and Shu's inability to invade northward is like the Great Han's inability to advance southward. Now the capital is weak, while Le's forces are strong. If he deploys Zhao and Wei's elite troops, and Yan's cavalry comes from Shangdang, with Cao Yi leading the forces of the Three Qi to follow, how will Your Majesty resist? Could this not be what the Purple Palace anomaly portends? I urge Your Majesty to take early action and prevent the people from becoming restless. If Your Majesty issues an edict, externally following the coastal expeditions of Qin Shi Huang and Han Wu Di, while internally adopting Gao Di's strategy against Chu, all will be successful." Cong read this with displeasure.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We have heard that when rulers establish an empress, it is to complement Heaven and Earth's nature, symbolize the nurturing principles of the two forces, continue the ancestral line, and mother the realm. She should be worthy to pair with Earth, serve the imperial ancestors, and must come from a family of generational virtue and fame, be dignified and virtuous, meeting the expectations of all under heaven and pleasing the spirits. Thus when King Wen of Zhou built his boat, the Si clan prospered, and when the influence of 'Guan Ju' spread, blessings lasted for hundreds of generations. Emperor Cheng of Han followed his desires and made a servant girl empress, causing the imperial line to end and the state to decline. The prosperity of Zhou was like that, and the disaster of Han was like this. Since the Qilin era, there has been disorder from indulgence in beauty. Even Shen's sister, a criminal's daughter, should not sully the imperial chambers and sacred temples, let alone a household servant! The imperial consorts are all daughters of dukes and princes, how can a servant suddenly be put in charge of them? How is this different from placing rotting wood next to decorated beams and jade mats? We fear this will bring no fortune to the state."

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

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

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

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

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

In the first year of Taixing, Cong died, having ruled for nine years. He was posthumously given the title "Emperor Zhaowu" (昭武皇帝) and the temple name "Liezong" (烈宗). [Note: The use of "wei" (伪/僭) before the posthumous title indicates that this was considered an illegitimate regime by the official historians.]

Can's courtesy name was Shiguang. From a young age he was exceptional, possessing both literary and military talents. After becoming Chancellor, he wielded power according to his whims, distanced himself from loyal and worthy officials while keeping company with villains and flatterers. He was harsh and severe in nature, showing no kindness, and rejected remonstrance while covering up wrongdoing. He was fond of building palaces, with his Chancellor's residence modeled after the Purple Palace. Though in power for only a short time, he had construction work continuing day and night, causing people to suffer from hunger and exhaustion, leading to deaths and rebellion, but Can showed no concern for this.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jin Zhun declared himself Grand General and Heavenly King of Han, established government offices, and sent envoys to declare himself a vassal of Jin. Left Grandee Liu Ya fled to Xiping. Palace Secretaries Beigong Chun, Hu Song, and others gathered Jin loyalists and fortified themselves in the Eastern Palace, but Jin Kang attacked and destroyed them.

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

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

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

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

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

"Your Majesty has emerged as a great sage for this era, possessing extraordinary capacity. If you can avoid the failings that led to the fall of the Shang and Zhou dynasties, and instead emulate the glory of Emperor Wu of Han, it would be a great fortune for the world, and your ministers would be spared from danger." When he died, everyone mourned him as having suffered an unjust fate.