

Biography of Di Renjie

Translated by Piet Rombouts from the Old Tang History

狄法官

JUDGE-DEE.INFO

In the *Old Tang History*, compiled on imperial orders of the short-lived Later Jin dynasty in 941–945, Di Renjie (or Dee Jen-djeh in different spelling) has been given quite a long biography. It is the biography of a successful statesman, rather than that of a sleuth. The early part of his career is given little attention; there is only one sentence that refers to Dee's competent handling of court cases. Half the text is taken up by three memorials Dee presented to the emperor, giving advice on matters of state.

Old Tang History 舊唐書, 卷89, p. 2885–2895: **Di Renjie** 狄仁傑

The literary name of Di Renjie was Huaiying ('Embracing Outstandingness'). He came from the town of Taiyuan, in the prefecture Bingzhou. His grandfather, Di Xiaoxu, had held the position of Aide of the Left to the Minister during the Zhenguan reign period (627–649). His father was Di Zhixun, who had held the position of Administrator in Kuizhou prefecture.

One day, when Renjie was in his childhood days, a gatekeeper of his family's mansion was murdered. District officials came to the mansion to conduct their investigation. Everyone in the household met the officials and replied to their inquiries, with the exception of Renjie who insisted on keeping to his studies. When the officials berated him for this, he replied: "I am not yet able to reply to the sages and worthy men that are in my books. Where would I have the free time to meet simple officials? And yet I am berated!"

Later on, he passed the Classicist examinations and was appointed Assistant Supervisor in Bianzhou. At that time, the Minister of the Board of Works, Yan Liben, held the post of Personnel Evaluation Commissioner in the Henan circuit. When Renjie was falsely charged by another official, Yan Liben investigated this case. When he saw Renjie, he said apologetically to him: "Confucius has said: 'In his errors a man is true to type. Observe the errors and you will know the man.' You can be called a bright pearl from a distant shore, a bequeathed treasure from the south-east!" Upon his recommendation, Renjie was appointed to the law section of the Area Command of Bingzhou.

At that time, his parents were living in a retreat in Heyang. When he was on his way to Bingzhou, Renjie traversed the Taihang Moun-



Di Renjie

tains. Looking towards the south, he saw a single white cloud floating. He spoke to his attendants: "The place under that cloud is where my parents live." He stood there calmly for a long time, gazing, and did not leave until the cloud had moved away.

Renjie surpassed all others in his devotion and care towards his friends. In Bingzhou there was a man called Zheng Chongzhi working in the law section, whose mother was old and sick. He was to take up a post in a distant region. Renjie spoke to him: "Your esteemed mother has a serious illness and now you have been sent on an assignment in a faraway place. How could one let a mother suffer the grief of a separation over thousands of miles!" He then went to visit the Administrator Lan Renji and requested to take up the position, in the place of Zheng Chongzhi. At that time, Lan Renji and Adjutant Li Xiaolian were not on speaking terms. After Dee had approached him with his request, Lan Renji said: "Shouldn't Li Xiaolian and I not feel ashamed about our disagreement?!" Hereafter, Lan Renji and Li Xiaolian restored their relationship.

In the Yifeng period (676–678) Renjie became Aide to the Chamberlain for Law Enforcement. In the space of one year, he brought settlement to suspended law cases that involved seven-thousand people, and not one of those involved filed a complaint of having been wronged.

At that time, the General of the Militant Guard, Quan Shancai, had been charged with the crime of having wrongfully cut down a cypress tree at the Zhaoling Imperial Mausoleum, the tomb of Emperor Li Shimin. Renjie presented a memorial in which he said that this crime should be punished with dismissal. Emperor Gaozong, however, ordered the immediate execution of the general. Renjie again presented a memorial in which he stated that punishment by death was not appropriate. The emperor became angry and said: “Quan Shancai has cut down a tree planted on the mausoleum, and by doing so he made me fail in my duties towards my ancestors. He definitely must be executed!” The court attendants gazed at Renjie, hinting he should leave court, but instead he said: “I know that since olden times it is difficult to stroke a dragon’s scales the wrong way and to defy one’s ruler. I modestly believe this is not so. When living during the times of the wicked kings Jie and Zhou, it would indeed be difficult to perform such acts; during the times of the wise kings Yao and Shun, such deeds would be easy to perform. This servant is now so fortunate to live in times like those of Yao and Shun, and does not have to fear to meet the punishment that befell Minister Bi Gan. In the past, during the time of Han emperor Wen, a jade ring was stolen from the ancestral temple. The official Zhang Shizhi forcefully presented his view at court that the punishment should be execution of the offender and that would be the end of it. And also, when king Wen of the Wei was about to resettle many families, the official Xin Pi took hold of the emperor’s sleeves and made his remonstrations, and also his advice was heeded. From these two examples one can see that an enlightened ruler can be won over with reason, and that a devoted minister cannot be made fearful of intimidation! If now Your Majesty would not heed my council then, after my demise, I would be ashamed to meet Zhang Shizhi and Xin Pi in the Netherworld. The emperor has made the laws and has these displayed on the tower outside the palace for all to know; these laws stipulate gradations for each of the punishments by imprisonment, banishment and death. How can one for an offence that is not a capital offence, issue an order to send someone to his death? When laws are not applied in a constant way, the populace will not know where to place their hands and feet! If Your Majesty persists in changing the law, please do so as of today. The ancients said: ‘If later someone would steal a clump of earth from the imperial Changling mausoleum, how could Your Majesty impose

an even more severe punishment?’ If now Your Majesty would execute one general for having cut down one cypress tree on the Zhaoling mausoleum, how will Your Majesty be viewed upon as a ruler one thousand years from now? It is for this reason that I do not dare to receive your command and kill Zhang Shancai, because by doing so I would lead Your Majesty astray and onto a path that is not proper.” The emperor’s intention was somewhat softened, and because of this Zhang Shancai was spared death. A few days later Renjie was appointed to the position of Attendant Censor.

At that time, the Chief Minister of the Court of the National Granaries, Wei Ji, concurrently held positions in the Directorate for the Palace Buildings and the Directorate for Imperial Manufactories. Emperor Gaozong deemed that the pit of the Gongling imperial mausoleum was narrow and small, and could not accommodate the implements needed for burial. He sent Wei Ji to continue and complete this work. Wei Ji built four auxiliary structures to the left and right of the tomb-way. He also constructed the three palaces Suyu, Gaoshan and Shangyang, all of which were imposing and splendid. Renjie presented a memorial in which he stated that Wei Ji’s project expenditures were excessive. In the end, Wei was found guilty and relieved from his position.

The Bureau Director of the Left Office of the Department of State Affairs, Wang Benli, abused his favoured status to act wilfully, and he was feared at court. Renjie, however, presented a memorial against him and requested to have him handed over to the Judicial Office for investigation, but emperor Gaozong pardoned him by special decree. Renjie then memorialised: “The state lacks men of courage and talent, however, is there a shortage of the likes of Wang Benli? Why would Your Majesty be loath to part with a criminal and do injustice to the law of the land? If Your Majesty insists on pardoning Wang Benli on special grounds, then I request that I be discarded in an unpopulated border region, as a warning to future devoted and upright officials!” In the end, Wang Benli was found guilty, and from then onwards the court observed discipline rigorously.

Soon after, Renjie received an additional appointment as Grand Master for Closing Court, and then transferred to the position of Director of the Bureau of General Accounts. When Emperor Gaozong was about to grace the Fenyang Palace with a visit, he named Renjie the Commissioner of Arrangements. On this occasion, the Administrator Li Chongxuan of Bingzhou dispatched several ten thousand men to build a new imperial road, as otherwise the imperial entourage would pass by the Jealous Daughter Shrine, and according to the folk traditions, it was said that those who pass by this shrine wearing resplendent attire would cause natural disasters of storms and thunder. Renjie said:

“When the Son of Heaven travels, there are thousands of carriages and mounted men. The Earl of Wind shall sweep away the dust, the Master of Rain shall sprinkle water on the road. What harm would there be from this Jealous Daughter?” He quickly ordered to stop the building of the road. When Emperor Gaozong heard of this, he spoke in praise of Renjie: “Truly, he is a man of high principles!”

After a short time, he was appointed Prefect of Ningzhou. As he showed solicitude and promoted concord between the western minority people and the Chinese, the people were happy and they carved a stone slab to extol the virtue of Renjie. The censor Guo Han went on an inspection tour of Longshi, and wherever he went his investigations lead to the impeachment of many officials. When he crossed the border into Ningzhou, he saw elders filled the streets, singing the praises of the prefect. After Guo Han retired to his guesthouse, he summoned the regional officials and told them: “When I cross into an area, I quickly get to understand the quality of the government there. I want to help you, the Prefect, to rise to your full potential. You should not stay here too long.” The regional officials then dispersed. Subsequently, Guo Han recommended Renjie at the court, and he was appointed Vice Minister in the Ministry of Works, and Pacification Commissioner in the Jiangnan region. In the area of Wu and Chu there were many shrines of local, irregular cults and Renjie petitioned the destruction of one-thousand seven-hundred of these. He preserved only four shrines: one shrine dedicated to the mythical emperor Yu the Great, and three shrines dedicated to three paragons of virtue: the Earl of Wu, Li Zha and Wuyuan.

He was then transferred to the position of Aide to the Minister of the Right of the Department of State Affairs. Subsequently, he became Prefect of Yuzhou. At that time Zhen, king of Yue, raised an army in Runan, but he was defeated on the battlefield. Six or seven hundred men were implicated in the revolt, and five thousand people saw their property registered and confiscated. The Ministry of Justice put pressure on the implementation of the punishments. Renjie deplored these people had been duped to participate in the rebellion. He delayed their verdicts, and in a confidential memorial he petitioned: “If I were to openly present my memorial, then it would seem that I would try to speak reason on behalf of rebels; if I were in the know and yet would not speak up, then I probably would go against the purport of Your Majesty to show compassion where possible. If I would write my memorial and then tear it up, it would mean that I was not able to make up my mind. In my view, none of these people wanted at heart to rebel. I reverently hold the hopeful view that Your Majesty will deplore the fact they had been duped.” Subsequently, these people were par-

doned by special decree, and they were banished to Bingzhou. When on their way, these convicts from Yuzhou made a stop in Ningzhou. There, the local elders met with them and consoled them, saying: “It was our Prefect Dee who saved you!” Supporting each other, they cried in front of the stone inscription. After three days of abstention, they continued their journey. When the convicts from Yuzhou arrived at their place of banishment, they erected a stone slab with an inscription to extol Dee’s virtues.

At first, at the time of the rebellion in Yue, the Grand Councilor Zhang Guangfu led his army to put down the rebellion. Most commanders and soldiers, priding themselves on their success in battle, demanded to be allowed to engage in looting. However, Renjie did not agree. Zhang Guangfu angrily said: “Does the regional commander look down upon me, the marshal?” Dee replied: “It was only one person, Zhen, the king of Yue, who rebelled in Henan. Now, one Zhen has died and ten thousand new Zhens have risen up!” Zhang Guangfu questioned what he meant by this, and Dee explained: “Your Excellency is in charge of an army of three hundred thousand men. You have pacified one rebellious subject. If you do not lay down your arms, and instead give your troops a free hand to loot, then the entrails and brains of innocent people will be splattered on the ground. If these are not ten thousand Zhens then what else could we call this? Also, it is hard to keep a situation in hand when one threatens people with violence in order to make them become an accomplice. Thus, when the imperial troops came near, the city dwellers that climbed onto the city walls counted in their thousands. In their bid to surrender, they lowered themselves down from all sides with ropes that virtually became footpaths! Why would you, Sir, give a free hand to fame-seeking men to kill scores of people who wished nothing more but to return to the side of the government and surrender? I am afraid the cries of injustice will rise and boil over, reaching up to the skies! I would gladly die if I could apply the horse-hacking sword from the imperial kitchen tools storeroom to your neck!” Zhang Guangfu could not find the words to rebuke Dee, but he harboured strong feelings of resentment. When he returned to the capital, he sent a memorial stating that Dee was disrespectful. Dee was then demoted to the position of Prefect of Fuzhou. He was also made Adjutant of Luozhou.

In the second year of the reign period Tianshou (691) on the dingyou day of the ninth month, he was appointed Vice-Director of the Ministry of Revenue, Supervisor of the Ministry of Revenue and Grand Councilor. Empress Wu spoke to him: “When you were in Runan your administration was very good indeed. Do you want to know who has calumniated you?” Renjie declined: “When Your Majesty thinks I am



Empress Wu Zetian

at fault, I should make amends; when Your Majesty makes clear I am without fault that would give me cause to rejoice. I do not know who calumniated me and who I probably always regarded as a good friend. I request not to be in the know". The empress sighed in admiration.

Not long after, Lai Junchen framed Dee on false charges and had him put in prison. At that time, those who admitted to their crimes with the first interrogation, would, as a rule, see their death sentence lightened. Lai Junchen pressed and coerced Renjie, ordering him to admit at his first questioning to having plotted a rebellion. Renjie sighed: "The dynasty of the Great Zhou signifies a change in the Mandate of Heaven, and all things on earth are anew. Old officials of the Tang dynasty are willing to undergo punishment and execution. It is true, I have rebelled!" Lai Junchen then softened to some extent. The judge Wang Deshou spoke to Renjie: "Grand Councillor, you must try to obtain lightening of the death sentence. It is my intention to obtain for you a reduction of the severity of your sentence. I can do this on the strength of the Grand Councillor's implication of Yang Zhirou. Is that agreeable to you?" Renjie replied: "How should I implicate him?" Wang Shoude replied: "When you were in the Ministry of Rites, Yang Zhirou was vice-director at that bureau. You can report on him." Renjie replied: "That Heaven and Earth would let me do such a thing!" He then rammed his head against a pillar, blood poured forth and covered his face. Wang Shoude was terrified and apologised to him.

Since Dee had admitted to rebellion, the relevant government bureau just waited for the day to implement the death sentence, and no longer maintained strict precautions. Renjie requested from the jailer to obtain a brush and an ink slab. He tore a piece of cloth from the top of his blanket and used this to write down

the injustice he had suffered. He inserted this in a wadded piece of clothing and spoke to Wang Deshou: "It is now quite hot, please give this to my family, so they can remove the wadding." Wang Deshou did so, without checking the clothing. The son of Renjie, Di Guangyuan, obtained the letter in this way, and used the letter to inform of a coup d'état. Empress Wu summoned him for audience, and after perusing the letter she questioned Lai Junchen, who answered: "Di Renjie is still allowed to wear his hat and girdle; he lives and sleeps in comfort, why would he submit to his punishment?"

The empress sent someone to visit Dee, and Lai Junchen hastily ordered Renjie to put on his headscarf and girdle, and meet the visitor. He then ordered Wang Deshou to write a memorial of apology, in name of Renjie, for his crimes before his death sentence, and gave this to the visitor to present at court. Thereupon, the empress summoned Renjie: "Why did you admit to rebellion?" Dee replied: "If I had not admitted I would have been flogged to death a long time ago." "Why did you write a memorial of apology?" "I did not write such letter." She showed the letter, and then learned it had been written in his name. Thus, Dee was exempted from the death penalty and was demoted to a post of Magistrate in Pengze.

On several occasions a nephew of the empress, Wu Chengsi, presented memorials in which he requested to have Dee put to death. The empress said: "I love to let live and abhor killing. It is my ambition to show solicitude when it comes to punishing. The imperial decree has already been issued, I cannot come back on my earlier decision."

During the reign period Wansui Tongtian (696), the Khitan bandits conquered Jizhou. The region to the north of the Yellow River was in turmoil, and Renjie was appointed Prefect of Weizhou. The previous prefect, Dugu Sizhuang, had been afraid the bandits would advance, and he had driven the whole population inside the city walls. He had many defence weapons built. After his arrival, Renjie released all these people and let them return to their lands, saying: "The traitors are still far, what need was there to do this? If they would come, I would hold them off by myself. This definitely does not concern the common people." When the traitors heard of this, they pulled back their forces of their own accord. The common folks extolled Dee in their songs, and set up a stone tablet to record the caring Dee had bestowed upon them.

Shortly after, Dee was transferred to the post of Commander-in-chief of Youzhou. In the first year of the Shengong reign period (697), Dee was appointed Vice Director of the Chancellery, Grand Councilor, Grand Master of Imperial Entertainments with Silver and Blue Ribbon, and Head of the Chancellery.

When common people had been sent westwards on garrison duties in Shule and three

other towns, where they lived in utter destitution, Dee presented his memorial:



Memorial 1

I know that Heaven created the Four Barbarians, and they all reside beyond the borders of our ancient kings. Therefore, to the east, the blue seas ward off the barbarians; to the west, the barbarians are separated from us by fleeting sands; to the north, they are waylaid by vast deserts; to the south, they are impeded by Five Mountain Ranges. In this way Heaven has imposed demarcations on the barbarians, and separated the Middle Kingdom from the lands beyond. From our canonical books we can see that our nation has now fully extended the spread of our renown and cultivation to regions that the Three Dynasties could not reach. This means that all our present borders go beyond those of the Xia and Yin dynasties.

Our poets have boasted about punitive expeditions to Taiyuan; they praised that our civilising work was taking place in the regions of the Yangtze and the Han rivers. This indicates that minority peoples who lived far away in previous dynasties are now within the territory of our state.

At the time of the Former Han dynasty, no year went by without the Xiongnu tribes breaching the border and killing or holding for ransom our officials. At the time of the Later Han dynasty, the Xiqiang invaded or ambushed in the Hanzhong area; going eastwards, they pillaged the Sanfu region, they entered into Hedong and Shangdang, almost reaching Luoyang. We can see from this that the realm Your Majesty holds today far exceeds that of the Han dynasties. If we would conduct military campaigns stretching to regions that are beyond the barbarian wilderness that border our state, and seek unjust achievements in extreme, distant regions, and exhaust the national treasury in order to conquer barren lands where nothing grows, we only would obtain a population not worthwhile to levy taxes on, and acquire land that cannot be used for farming or spinning.

If we would, irrespective of anything else, seek a name for bringing culture to barbarian tribes far away, and not apply ourselves to the arts of strengthening the foundation of the empire and giving peace to the people, then this is the same conduct as that of the emperor of Qin (ruled 230–213 BC) and of emperor Wu of the Han (ruled 141–87 BC), but such conduct does not conform to the undertakings of the Five Rulers and the Three Sovereigns. If we traverse the wilderness beyond our borders and establish there our new boundary, and we, in order to give full reign to our desires, exhaust our financial resources, not only does this show that we do not care about the human manpower at our disposal, but this will also cause us to lose the good intention of Heaven towards us.

In the past, the first emperor of Qin employed his troops to the utmost in extreme military campaigns, and he did so in his quest to enlarge his territory. And as a result, sons could not till the lands and daughters could not work in-house on their looms. Below the Great Wall the dead laid about hither and thither. Then, the world fell apart and rose in rebellion. Emperor Wu of the Han recalled the old resentments of Emperor Gaozu and Emperor Wendi, and availing himself of the reserves built up by four emperors, he brought under control the Korean region, sent punitive expeditions to the western regions, pacified Nanyue, and attacked the Xiongnu. As a result, the national treasury was emptied; swarms of bandits and traitors rose up. The common people married off their wives and sold their sons, the roads were filled with thousands who had left their homes and wandered about. In his later years Emperor Wu realized what he had done. He laid the arms to rest and halted his expeditions, he enfeoffed his prime minister as Marquis of Enriching the People, and it is for these reasons that he was protected by Heaven. In the old days people had a saying: “A carriage that follows the track of an overturned carriage is never safe.” Despite its few words, this saying expounds something truly great!

Recently, the state has sent out its armies year after year, and expenditures have increased and increased. To the west we have set up garrisons in four towns, to the east we have set up garrison in Andong. Levies are increased daily, the common people are destitute and without means. Opening up and holding the Western Regions is just as useless as plowing in a field of stones. The expenditure is unsustainable; there will be no benefits, only losses. Without interruption, supplies are transported to these regions, and as a result the weaving looms are nearly left idle. Traversing deserts and crossing seas, the troops have to be split in order to take up defensive positions. As the duration of the expeditions gets longer, the period of separation of husband and wife is also prolonged. In the Book of Odes is written: “I serve the country without end, no time to return home and till the land.” “I long to return home, but dread the law. When I think of these conscripted soldiers my tears fall like raindrops.” These are words of resentment from past dynasties.

When a ruler shows no compassion towards this, government policies cannot be carried out and evil influences will rise. When evil influences rise, harmful insects will be bred and floods or draughts will occur. By that time, even sending prayers and offerings to the Gods will not change the course of Yin and Yang. At this very moment, we face a famine in Guangdong; people in Shu and Han are fleeing, and there is no end to the requests for aid from the areas to the south of the Huai River and the Yangtze River. When people cannot resume their occupation, they will lead one another

into banditry. When root and trunk start to shake, we have sufficient ground to fear calamities. All this has come about because we established garrisons in distant places; because our quest for barren lands of the barbarian tribes in the south and north has exhausted the central plains; and because we contravened the correct way of taking care of the common people as if they were our own son.

In the past, emperor Yuan of the Han (ruled B.C.48–33) accepted the plans of Jia Juanzhi and he put an end to the Zhuyan commandery on Hainan island; emperor Xuan of the Han (ruled B.C.73–49) adopted the scheme of Wei Xiang and discarded the fields of Jushi near Turfan in Xinjiang region. Did these emperors have no desire to attain a vain reputation? Of course they did, but that they acted as they did was probably because they were fearful of demanding too much of the people.

Recently, in the Zhenguan reign period (627–649), the nine states in the western regions were subdued and Li Simo was named as Khan. That he was made to rule over the various tribes was probably done with the aim to send punitive expeditions against the northern and western tribes, were they to rebel; whereas if they would submit, they would be fostered. In this way, the court achieved a reputation of being righteous by following the principle of eradicating states that do not follow the right path, and preserving those that do. This was achieved without burdening the common people with garrison duty in distant places. These then are the decrees and regulations of recent times. They form a precedent for how to handle frontier matters.

Ashina Huseluo is a nobleman from Yinshan. For generations his family has been master of the deserts. In my humble view, if we were to entrust him with the area of the four cities, make him ruler over the various barbarian tribes, make him Khan and send him to check the peril of banditry, then the state would acquire the good reputation of continuing ancestral offerings that had earlier been broken off, while there would be no corvée labor related to transportation duties to places beyond the barbarian lands. In the view of your servant, I request Your Majesty to discard the four cities in order to enrich the lands of the Central Plains, to relinquish Andong in order to put Liaoxi on a solid footing, to reduce military expenditure in the far regions, and to concentrate the armies in our passes. Then we will have double garrisons in the areas around Heng and Dai, while there will be full preparedness for situations in our border regions. Even more so, when stabilising the barbarians, it will suffice to guard against them becoming more unrestrained and ensuring there is no peril of incursions or other affronts. Why must we go all the way to their holes and caves, and bicker with ants about rights and wrongs, gains and losses!

Kings believed that when the lands beyond their borders were quiet, there was bound to be cause for worry about the situation within their own borders. They thought this was probably so because they had not ruled in a diligent way. I humbly beseech Your Majesty to disregard such thoughts, and not to ponder about not having pacified the extreme distant regions. Your Majesty only has to issue a decree to the frontier armies to be vigilant in their guarding and in maintaining their preparedness, to keep weaponry in store to await the enemy, and wait until the enemy comes of their own accord, and then attack them. In this way, general Li Mu (B.C. 3rd century) restrained the Xiongnu. At present, there is nothing more important than issuing an order to the border towns to be alert, to fulfil their guard duties and be fully prepared. They are to make reconnaissance over long distances, collect military provisions, and store up on military prowess. While being at ease, we wait for the fatigued enemy to approach; by doing so, the strength of our soldiers will be doubled. While acting as the host, we will withstand the visiting enemy's army; by doing so, our position will be advantageous. We shall use solid walls and clear the harvest from the fields; by doing so, the marauding bandits can gain nothing. If we do it this way, then if the traitors make a deep incursion, they certainly will be apprehensive of becoming worn out; if they make a shallow incursion, they certainly will not have the benefit of plundering and looting. If we maintain this for a few years, the two barbarian peoples shall submit themselves and refrain from carrying out attacks.



In addition, Renjie requested to abolish the region of Andong, to reinstate the Gao family as tribal leader, to discontinue the transshipments from the Jiangnan region, and to provide relief for the exhausted people in the Hebei region. If this would be done, then after a few years the people would live in comfort and the nation would be prosperous. Though these measures were not adopted, those who understood such matters accorded them.

Hereafter, Renjie was appointed Inspecting Advisor, concurrently Censor-in-chief of the Right Censorate.

In the beginning of the Shengli reign period (698), the Tujue invaded and plundered the regions of Zhao and Ding, and Renjie was ordered to take up the position of Marshall of the Hebei region, so he could act as he deemed fit. The Tujue murdered all the men and women they had captured, more than ten thousand, and then retreated by way of Wuhui. Renjie led an army of one hundred thousand men but could not overtake them.

Subsequently Renjie was made Pacification Commissioner-in-Chief of the Hebei region. At

that time, many of the common people of Heshuo had been coerced by the Tujue into joining them, and after the Tujue had retreated, they were in fear of being punished, and many of them fled and hid. Renjie then presented a memorial:



Memorial 2

Your servant knows that in the discussions at court it is believed that only after the Khitans created this disaster, it has become clear who is rebellious and who is obedient. Some people joined the Khitans because they were forced to; some did so willingly; others were given a bogus official position. Some had been granted amnesty, and their support was enlisted; some of them were bandits from other regions, and some were locals. Although their paths were different, their intention was the same. It is truly so that the people east of the mountains are courageous and fierce; since ancient times they have highly valued the virtue of fortitude. Once they have formed a certain view on a situation, they will not come back on this till death.

Recently, because of warfare, requisitions for personnel and supplies have caused these people great harm. Households have lost all their property, and some have been driven to flee from their lands or dismantle their homes and sell their fields. There was no one to buy from them, and when they turned their gaze to their home to look for a means of livelihood, they only found emptiness all around them. Their plight was only worsened when lower officials harassed and fleeced them. These officials sprang into action on the occasion of military requisitioning, they sucked the marrow from the people's bones and never felt ashamed about this. They had the people build city moats and walls, they had weapons and armour repaired or manufactured. These corvée assignments from prefecture and district were ten times the requisitions for warfare. These officials showed no compassion, what they expected to take they inevitably took, and under their cangue or cudgel the people's skin and muscles hurt terribly. Living under compulsion and in danger, the people did not adhere to rules of propriety and righteousness. Saddened by the harsh land they live on, the people knew no joy in their lives.

In general, the people will turn to where there is gain to be expected, and they seek to cling to life. This is the normal behaviour of the common herd, although a man of noble character would feel ashamed of doing so. Man is like water: when it is blocked, it will form a spring; when obstructions are cleared away, it will form a stream. Whether being let go or being blocked, in both situations water will flow wherever it can go, but how can one call this a state of normalcy? In the past, the warlord

Dong Zhuo of the Later Han dynasty rebelled, and the emperor had to wander from place to place homeless. When Dongzhuo was killed, his armies were not given amnesty; when matters grew hopeless, they rose in rebellion. Many of the common people were brutally killed; the imperial tombs turned into grain fields. All this can be attributed to the dearth of the universal application of grace; the chance to extend grace was lost at the very beginning. Whenever your servant reads these chronicles, I always have to lay the book aside and sigh.

In the present time, those who are guilty are definitely not staying at their homes; they sleep in the open and they walk in the wild. They hide and flee to mountains or marshes. When given amnesty, they will come out again; when not given amnesty, they will run wild. It is because of this that the multitudes of bandits to the east of the mountains have come together and joined hands. Your servant holds the opinion there is no reason to be worried when the dust at the borders suddenly stirs up. But I do see it is a matter of concern when there is disquiet in our central lands. I have heard that the ruler of a great nation shall not follow small roads, and that he who handles issues in a comprehensive way will not occupy himself with minute side matters. The Sovereign is broad-minded and is not hampered by conventional methods. If the crowd in the rebel area is found guilty, it will be terrified; if these people are forgiven, they will calm down and they will stop anxiously tossing and turning in their beds at night. I humbly beseech Your Majesty to extend a special pardon to the people in the prefectures to the west of the Yellow River, and not pursue further investigations. If done so, the Way of man and gods shall flourish, all the land's people shall have joy in their hearts. The armies shall victoriously return, and there will be no more incursions and harassments.



It was decreed to do as presented in the memorial. The army returned, and Dee was appointed Secretariat Director.

In the third year of the Shengli reign period (700), Empress Wu graced the Sanyang Palace with a visit. Princes, nobles and officials followed and served her on the road. Only Renjie had the privilege of being accorded his own small lodge, such was the unrivalled favoured treatment bestowed upon Dee. In the sixth month of the same year the senior commander Li Kaigu of the Left Guard of the Jade Strategy and commander Luo Wuzheng of the Right Militant Guard campaigned against the remnants of the Khitans and took them captive. The captives were presented at the Hanqu Palace. Empress Wu was delighted and accorded Li Kaigu the privilege of being bestowed the surname Wu.

Li Kaigu and Luo Wenzheng had both been adjunct-marshals of the Khitan ruler Li Jinzhong. Originally, when Li Jinzhong rebelled, Li Kaigu and others had led their troops in several attacks to trap the government's army. Afterwards, Kaigu's troops were defeated and they surrendered. The authorities condemned the men to the ultimate punishment. Renjie held the opinion that Li Kaigu and the others were endowed with the capabilities that make a valiant general; when spared the death penalty, they certainly would, out of gratitude, pledge their loyalty to the state. He subsequently sent in a memorial requesting to accord these men an official post and a rank of nobility, and to entrust them with discretionary powers when going on military expeditions. A decree was issued to this effect. Later, when Li Kaigu and the others returned in triumph, Empress Wu summoned Renjie to attend the banquet. She lifted her wine goblet and toasted to Dee personally, exhorting him to drink, praising him highly. She conferred on Li Kaigu the title of Senior General of the Left Guard of the Jade Strategy, and gave him the rank of Duke of Yan.

And furthermore, Empress Wu was planning to have a big statue built, which would cost a million ounces of silver. An order was given that monks and nuns all over the empire were to donate one copper coin every day, in order to assist in the completion of this project. Renjie presented a memorial to remonstrate:



Memorial 3

Your servant knows that at the root of governing lies the principle that the ruler shall first of all attend to human affairs. Your Majesty shows concern that the common people may become lost or be led astray, that they will fall into difficult circumstances and will have no place to turn to in order to rest their soul. And hence, it is your desire that the building of the statue will go hand in hand with the spreading of the Buddhist teachings, and that the common people shall look at the image which then will induce them to perform good deeds. It is not Your Majesty's view that revering extravagance is a requirement for building this pagoda and a temple. How could it be Your Majesty's intention to order all monks and nuns to give alms? When someone has attained enlightenment, one no longer needs the Buddhist tools through which one attained enlightenment, very much like one will abandon a raft once one has crossed the river with this raft. How much more will this hold true for matters that are superfluous! Now, the scale of the living quarters of the monks to be built near the statue is even larger than that of a palace building. There is no end to its extravagance, its grandeur is extreme, and the artistry of its paintings is exhaustive. Precious stones and

pearls have been used up in the decoration and embellishment, valuable timber has been exhausted in these grand buildings. Labor is not performed by spirits, but only by corvée labor; materials do not fall from the sky, but must all be taken out of the earth. How can labor and materials be obtained without causing harm to the people? It takes time to produce and grow all these materials, but they are being used in a wasteful way.

What registered tax households submit in payment of taxes often seems to be insufficient. The people's skin and muscles hurt terribly when they cannot escape from a beating with sticks. But when a travelling monk starts his persuasion, and makes deceitful statements about misfortune and good fortune, the people are willing to cut their hair and take off their clothing, and still they feel ashamed that what they donate is too little. There are also cases of families that split apart because of this.

When it pertains to public affairs, these monks ask everyone to share the burden equally. When it pertains to themselves, they may even take a wife for themselves, saying there is no distinction between another person and themselves. All this is done on the pretext of following the Buddhist laws, but in reality it drags the common people into trouble.

In neighbourhoods and on many streets one frequently walks past Buddhist scriptures shops, on many markets one may find a Buddhist place of worship. The collection of alms and seductive preaching has doubled in intensity, and are even more pressing than the collection of government taxes. What is needed for Buddhist matters is considered to be even more rigorous than what is demanded by imperial edicts.

With regard to their assets, the Buddhist clergy holds the majority of rich farmlands and prosperous businesses. They also own a not so small number of mills and countryside manors. People who have fled from corvée labour, and fugitives who fled from punishment, flock to the temple gates. As a result, there are tens of thousands of non-registered monks; when making an investigation in the capital only, one shall find several thousands of them. When one able-bodied man does not till the land, we will still feel its harm; now, those who eat without tilling the land are numerous, and they take from the wealth of others. Every time your servant thinks of this, it really grieves me.

In the past, in the area south of the Yangtze River, the Buddhist creed flourished and Emperor Wu of Liang (464–549) and Emperor Jianwen (549–550) gave unlimited donations. When the area of Sanhuai seethed in rebellion and the smoke billowed up from the Wuling Mountains, Buddhist monasteries lined the streets, but these were of no use to ward off the disaster of perishing. Then, the streets were full of those in Buddhist garb, but was there an army to exert itself for its ruler?

In recent years, our state has seen the turmoil of war several times; there have been floods and draughts outside the season. Taxes and corvée duties are very frequent. Family assets are still depleted; families have not yet recovered from their difficulties. Their strength cannot cope with it if we would now raise our corvée duties. I humbly hold this opinion: What need would there be for this sagacious court of immeasurable achievements and virtue, to persevere in constructing a big statue, and thereby making for itself a name of putting the people under strain and spending lavishly? Even levying a tax on the Buddhist monks would yield less than one percent of what is needed.

The exulted countenance of the statue is vast indeed, and cannot be left exposed. Even when it is covered by a building of a hundred stories, one will still worry that it could not be fully covered. And apart from this, the building cannot be without any covered walks. It has also been said that the statue should not come at the expense of the state's finances, and that the common people would not be harmed. Can it be said one shows complete devotion when one serves his Sovereign with this statue?

Your servant has thought about this, and has also collected a great many remarks on this topic. Everyone holds the view that when the Buddha established his teachings, its main tenets were to display merciful care and compassion, and to give succour to the masses. This should be the basic intention, so why does one desire to force the people to labour, in order to uphold an empty embellishment?

At this moment there are matters on our hand. The frontiers are not peaceful, and we should lighten the compulsory service in the areas under command by the senior generals. We should reduce non-urgent expenditures. If we would order to begin a system of paid labor then the people will hasten towards those places where they can make a gain and they will miss the right time to till the fields. This, of course, entails discarding what is basic to our existence. If there is no planting and sowing now, there is bound to be famine in the coming year. When the people are in the midst of conscription, it will be impossible to get provisions from them for the army. Furthermore, in all reasonableness, it will be impossible to complete the statue without government support. If government funds are used, and in addition human labor is exhausted, then, if in one corner of the empire a calamity would unfold, where would one find the means to alleviate this!



Upon this, Empress Wu put an end to this project.

In the ninth month of that year, Dee died after an illness. The empress proclaimed mourning

for Dee, and for three days no court audience was held. She accorded him the title Minister of the Right of the Department of State Affairs. He was given the posthumous name of "Cultured and Considerate".

Renjie had always been keen to elevate men of talent and those who were introduced and promoted by him included Huan Yanfan, Jing Hui, and Yao Chong. Several dozens of these men attained a senior rank at court. Once, Empress Wu asked Renjie: "We want a competent man to whom We want to entrust an assignment, is there such a person?" "What kind of assignment does Your Majesty want to entrust to such a man?" replied Renjie. The empress replied: "We want to him to become commander or prime minister." Dee replied: "I surmise that if Your Majesty requires someone of good literary accomplishments, the current councillors Li Qiao and Su Weidao are amply qualified to act as civil officials. However, is it not so that Your Majesty thinks civil officials are mediocre, and is it not Your wish to obtain an exceptional talent and put him to good use, so that great imperial tasks can be fulfilled?" Pleased, Empress Wu replied: "This is my intention!" Renjie said: "The Administrator of Jingzhou, Zhang Jianzhi, really has the talent of a prime minister, even though he is advanced in years. In addition, since a long time he did not get the opportunity to put his ability to good use. If he is employed, he will certainly be very devoted to the country." Thereupon, Empress Wu summoned him and appointed him Adjutant in Luozhou. One day, Empress Wu again asked for men of talent, and Renjie spoke: "Zhang Jianzhi who I had mentioned some time ago, has not yet been properly employed." The empress replied: "I had him already transferred to another position." Dee replied: "I recommended him to be prime minister, now he is Adjutant in Luozhou. This is not a proper employment for him." Zhang Jianzhi was then transferred to the position of Vice-Director of the Ministry of Justice. Hereafter, he was finally summoned to the imperial court and made prime-minister. Zhang Jianzhi was later indeed able to reinstate Emperor Zhongzong; this was due to his recommendation by Renjie.

Renjie was once Prefect of Weizhou and the officials and populace erected a shrine for him. After he had left his tenure, his son Di Jinghui was made Administrator in the Personnel Section of Weizhou. As he was very greedy and violent, he was detested by the local people, who then destroyed the shrine to Di Renjie.

Di's eldest son, Di Guangsi, acted as Subaltern at the Court of Imperial Treasury at the beginning of the Shengli period (698). When Empress Wu ordered that each Grand Councillor had to recommend a Secretarial Court Gentleman, Renjie recommended his son Di Guangsi. His son was then appointed as Vice-Director of the Ministry of Revenue. He executed his du-

ties in a competent way and, delighted, Empress Wu said: "Qixi (6th century BC) made a recommendation from within his family and indeed the state got a good official!" In the seventh year of the Kaiyuan period (719), he was transferred from the position of Prefect of Bianzhou to the position of Aide to the Commander-in-Chief of the Superior Area Command of Yangzhou. Later, he was condemned because of bribery and demoted to the position of Administrative Aide in Xizhou, where he died.

Once, the deposed Emperor Zhongzong resided in Fangling and Ji Xu and Li Zhaode talked in candid language about restoring the emperor to the throne. Empress Wu had no intention of doing so. Only Renjie would each time in a calm way present his memorials, and answer her queries. Every time he would talk about the affectionate ties between mother and son. Gradually, Empress Wu came to comprehend his view, and in the end she did summon Zhongzong to return, and reinstalled him as crown prince. When Zhongzong returned from Fangling into the palace, Empress Wu had him hide behind a curtain. She then summoned Renjie to talk about the Prince of Luling, Zhongzong's title while in banishment. Renjie impassionedly presented his memorial, with tears streaming down his face as he spoke.

Suddenly the empress made Zhongzong appear from behind the curtain and she spoke to Renjie: "I return to you the crown prince!" Renjie then stepped down from the steps and, in tears, he offered his congratulations. After this he presented his memorial: "No one knows the heir apparent has returned, but everyone shall talk about this, how can they verify whether the news of the crown prince's return is true or untrue?" Empress Wu thought this was indeed so, and she placed Zhongzong in Longmen, and subsequently he was received and accompanied with full ritual into the capital. The populace was very pleased at this.

The memorials and replies from Renjie on the restoration of Emperor Zhongzong over a period of time amounted to several ten-thousand words. In the Kaiyuan period (713–741) the Prefect of Beihai, Li Yong, wrote the Anecdotal Biography of the Duke of Liang, in which Dee's wordings have been included to the fullest extent.

When Emperor Zhongzong returned to rule, he posthumously gave Di the honorary title 'Minister of Works'; emperor Ruizong posthumously gave Renjie the title 'Duke of Liang'.

Di Jianmo was a great-grandson of Renjie.



高羅佩

The monument at the ancestral temple to Judge Dee is located north of Kongzhuang Village, Daming County, Hebei Province. It was originally built in the first year of Shengli of Wu Zetian's Zhou Dynasty (AD 698).

<http://history.cultural-china.com/en/47H3486H9588.html>