Talons and Fangs of the Eastern Han Warlords

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Abstract

Warriors are a less visible topic in the study of imperial China. They did not write history, but they made new history by destroying the old. The fall of the first enduring Chinese empire, the Han, collides with the rise of its last warriors known as the “talons and fangs.” Despite some classical or deceptive myths like the Chinese ideal of bloodless victories and a culture without soldiers, the talons and fangs of the Eastern Han warlords demonstrated the full potential of military prestige in a Confucian hierarchy, the bloodcurdling reality of dynastic rivalry, as well as a romantic tradition infatuated with individual heroism.
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Abbreviations:

For standard dynastic histories and other core texts, I use recent editions within the last fifteen years if available. For the single most essential work, the *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 by Chen Shou 陳壽(233-297) with commentary by Pei Songzhi 裴松之(372-451), I use two 1990’s editions: *Sanguo zhi jinzhu jinyi* 三國志今注今譯 by Su Yuanlei 蘇淵雷(1909-1995) and *Sanguo zhi yizhu* 三國志譯注 by Fang Beichen 方北辰. These represent more current scholarship than the older editions of the Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 at Beijing.

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<td><em>Hou Han shu</em> 後漢書</td>
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<td>HS</td>
<td><em>Han shu</em> 漢書</td>
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<td>QTS</td>
<td><em>Quan tangshi</em> 全唐詩</td>
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**Introduction**

Imperial China was a culture and an empire. It commands scholarly interest mostly for its early political sophistication and continuous cultural splendor. Despite a well-known Chinese dynastic cycle which involves as much peace as war, the fruits of Western scholarship have long been heavy on the brighter sides of traditional China: a high civilization teeming with humane philosophers, a united empire run by a sophisticated civil bureaucracy, and a refined people with sagelike poets of a bamboo grove and romantic dreamers in a red chamber. What has too often escaped from the general perception of traditional China as home to a glorious culture and storied continuity is the blood-soaked recurrence of civil wars and foreign conquests.

Ralph Sawyer once observed in his *Unorthodox Strategies for the Everyday Warrior*, that "virtually every year witnessed a major battle somewhere in China, significant conflicts erupted nearly every decade, and the nation was consumed by inescapable warfare at least once a century."\(^1\) While there has been no negligence of the many Chinese military classics and the minds behind them, more often than not, they have been interpreted as a kind of nonviolent triumph over violence, and tend to suggest that the ancient Chinese

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deceived with good brain rather than fought with strong arms, and therefore realized their ideal of winning without fighting. Moreover, many named warriors in official histories, who actually engaged yet frequently contradicted the ideal rules of engagement, remain less noticed in the West.

Warriors may be subject to a broad classification of three levels: lords, kings, or emperors of an entire state at war, their generals, and the nameless mass soldiers. The latter two were naturally more visible during troubled times such as dynastic transitions. Almost all Chinese dynasties rose and fell in violence, but the ultimate fall of the Han 漢 (206 BC-8; 25-220) empire probably gives the first glimpse of the patterns and varieties of military opportunists who were to exploit future changes throughout imperial China. These I call “warlords,” roughly equivalent to junfa 軍閥 in Chinese: province-based leaders, often in the guise of local governors, who actively sought political independence and military expansion. They were rampant during the eclipse of the Han and Tang 唐 (618-907), arguably the two greatest Chinese empires ever, as well as the early republican era. Actual fighting, however, was more directly done by an array of military officers subordinate to the warlords while commanding their own rank-and-file soldiers.

The current thesis will limit itself to a reassessment of the second-level warriors.

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between the Eastern Han (25-220) and the Three Kingdoms (220-280). It has two observations: 1. this professional group, in defiance of “a culture without soldiers,” dominated an adaptive wartime government; 2. Contrary to the concept of bloodless victory, the way of warfare in early imperial China was no less physical than elsewhere in the world. It is also noteworthy that the Han-Three Kingdoms military saga inspired a romantic tradition far greater than its historical proportions.

Some problems this essay aims to explore are: 1. What was the military's place during the eclipse of the Eastern Han? 2. What were the opportunities for the military in imperial China’s first wave of provincial warlordism? 3. How did warriors contribute to the rise and fall of the warlords? 4. What were the general characters of the Eastern Han – Three Kingdoms warriors?

One of the oldest metaphors that have survived into the modern Chinese vocabulary is "talons and fangs," or zhaoya 爪牙. Essentially it applies to all men of action, but exactly who they were and whether they were considered good or bad varies with the

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3 Lei Haizong 雷海宗 (1902-1962) proposed the notion of wubing wenhua 無兵文化 or “a culture without soldiers” as an extreme protest against the military incompetence of post-Han China. Lei Haizong, Zhongguo de wenhua yu zhongguo de bing 中國的文化與中國的兵, (Shanghai 2001) p. 125.

4 Political and military opportunists of the Eastern Han – Three Kingdoms transition differed from their Warring States predecessors mainly in the center of power struggles: technically centralized administrative geography rather than feudal domains. In this regard, they bore greater similarity to the warlords of early republican China.
three distinct eras in Chinese history: ancient, imperial, and modern. The term was introduced in the *Book of Songs*, or *Shijing*, China's earliest anthology of lyrics dating from the Western Zhou Dynasty (ca.11th century-771 BC) down to Confucius' time (551-479 BC). In a song titled “Qifu”祈父, noble warriors were likened to the talons and fangs of the Zhou king, obviously in recognition of their usefulness in defending and expanding the kingdom. For imperial China, the first recorded “talons and fangs” were two lieutenants of the Eastern Han General-in-Chief, Dou Xian 竇憲 (died. 92). However, the meaning of “talons and fangs” continued to take on an increasingly derogative undertone. This coincides with a gradual decline of military primacy in traditional Chinese culture, especially after the Tang, and since the modern era at the latest, "talons and fangs" has become an exclusive metaphor for henchmen of an evildoer. Its earlier meanings are almost forgotten.

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5 *Cihai*, (Shanghai 1990) p. 3910.

6 *Shi*, 127, Shen Zeyi沈澤宜 ed., *Shijing xinjie*詩經新解, (Shanghai 2000). The original line is *yu wang zhi zhaoya*予王之爪牙, or “I am the talons and fangs of my king.” The title *qifu*, with another occurrence in the *Shang shu*尚書, 46, has commonly been translated as “Minister of War” although its exact nature remains questionable between military or policing. Creel, H, *The Origins of Statecraft in China*, vol. 1, (Chicago 1970) p. 303–4.

7 The earliest known “talons and fangs” of imperial China were Geng Kui耿夔 and Ren Shang任尚(died. 118), both lieutenant generals to Dou Xian by whom the Xiongnu nomads suffered a crushing defeat in 89. Fan Ye范曄(398-445), *HHS*, (Hangzhou 2000) ch. 23: 812–21.
Synonymous with "talons and fangs" is the term "falcon and hound", or yingquan. It first appears in the Sanguo zhi 三國志 (henceforth SGZ), one of the standard dynastic histories that chronicles the Eastern Han civil war and the Three Kingdoms period (220-280). In an official call to arms against him, the warlord Cao Cao曹操 (155-220) was described as yingquan and zhaoya material.\(^8\) Within the context this description is at least neutral, saying no more than that Cao Cao was a resource in battle. However, the worth of “talons and fangs,” or “falcon and hound,” had been determined by Liu Bang劉邦 (r. 206-195 BC), the first Han emperor. In return for the dynasty-founding services of his many followers, Liu Bang awarded the highest offices and noble titles to his non-combatant advisors. As for those who spilled blood in the field, he compared them to the hounds of the hunter: they only fetched the prey as ordered, while it was always the hunter who masterminded the chase and thus deserved the merit fit for men.\(^9\)

Liu Bang was not the first to draw a distinction between civil and military, or wen 文 and wu 武. These two concepts must have entered the Chinese mind from the ancient Zhou dynasty at the latest as its father-and-son founders were distinctly styled as King Wen

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\(^8\) For the complete text of this call to arms, see Su Yuanlei蘇淵雷 ed., SGZJZJY, (Changsha 1992), ch. 6: 363-64. This document is meanwhile one of the finest masterpieces of Han literature by Chen Lin陳琳 (died 217).

and King Wu. Two categories of servants as oratores (“cultural”文 scholars) and bellatores (“martial”武 warriors) served the kings’ interests through speech and violence. Versatility in both disciplines rather than an even distribution of duties was expected of the elite class. However, civil service or broadly speaking, wen, played an upper hand right from the beginning simply because “speech subsumes violence into its symbolic code: actions can only be recorded, recalled, and represented through words. Actions may speak louder than words, but words speak longer.”\(^{10}\) The term wu also had a peacekeeping priority over warmongering. Its servitude to the ultimate achievement of wen was preordained by one of the greatest Eastern Zhou feudal lords in his famous ideographical reading of the character for wu as zhige止戈, or “to dismiss halberd.”\(^{11}\)

An empire, Chinese or not, was hardly ever won by the power of words alone. Liu Bang, in particular, lacked the education to prefer words over action. Nonetheless, his post-war comparison of civil and military endeavors to those of the hunter and hound was original from a political viewpoint. Devaluing the military could have simply celebrated the


\(^{11}\) To the proposal of a monument piled up by enemy corpses in memory of his greatest victory, King Zhuang of Chu楚莊王(r.613-591 BC), one of the solid candidates for the Eastern Zhou Five Hegemons五霸, admonished his warrior vassals on the peacekeeping nature of war efforts. *Zuo Zhan*左傳, Duke Xuan宣公: 12th year. For a reading of his complete speech on this occasion, see Lu, Y, “Scenes of Violence from the Zuo Chronicle,” *East Asia Forum*, (Toronto 1997) p. 48.
triumph of Liu Bang as the first Chinese emperor who rose from the civilian mass, over his military aristocrat rival, Xiang Yu 項羽 (232-202 BC). However, the more sustaining motive for civil supremacy over military was unity. Unity ensured domestic peace, which should guarantee prosperity and civilized life in a diversified empire like China.

The Chinese had possibly come to this conclusion from their bloody experience with centuries of interstate warfare following the disintegration of the Western Zhou. The legalist experiment by China's reunifier, the First Emperor 始皇帝 (r. 221-210 BC) from the state of Qin 秦, suffered sudden death for all its inhumane austerity, but it was initially intended to perpetuate a unified empire mainly by means of political centralization, mass demilitarization, and absolute law enforcement. The works of Han Fei Zi 韓非子 (ca. 280-233 BC), a great influence to the legalist government of Qin, combined wen and wu for the first time into a contrasting yet complementary term when emphasizing their organic indispensability to the state, without preference given to either. 12 By the time Liu Bang's great-grandson, Emperor Wudi 武帝 (r. 140-87 BC) sanctioned Confucianism, blended with certain Taoist and Legalist concepts, to be the state orthodoxy, official disfavor of militarism became evident. “Talons and fangs” did not represent the Confucian ideals of

12 The original words are: "A state must have the civil and the military; any administration must incorporate reward and punishment.” 國家必有文武，官治必有賞罰 See "Jielao"解老, Han feizi xin jiaozhu 韓非子新校注, ed. Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷 (Shanghai 2000) p. 201. There remain however, questions about the authenticity of the “Jielao” chapter, among a few others in the Han feizi.
order and sage benevolence well; their influence was further constrained by a refined bureaucracy. In retrospect, the balance between *wen* and *wu* was already officially revoked almost a century earlier by Liu Bang, a non-Confucian dynastic founder, who downgraded military achievements to the job of a dog. Thus from the early imperial era, likening someone to talons and fangs, or falcon and hound, indicated primarily the military professional along with an inferior role to his civil colleagues, especially in peacetime government.

As Fairbank has observed in his foreword to the co-authored volume *Chinese Ways in Warfare*, there were three levels of control for maintaining peace and order in a Confucian society:

"The first and preferred means was education, really indoctrination in the classical teachings, so that each individual would thoroughly understand the great 'principles of social usage' (*li* etiquette, how to behave) and so would do his part in the status in which he found himself. When this failed, the second level of social discipline, especially for the inferior person not adequately aware of how to behave, was the system of rewards and punishments. At this carrot-and-stick level, the rulers should reward the virtuous and chastise the malfeasant in proper proportion to the effect of their conduct upon the social order... In this normative structure, the military functioned on a third level... when disorder had reached such proportions that neither indoctrination in the classical teachings nor suasion by rewards and punishments was efficacious.... For the emperor to resort to violence was an admission that he had failed in his own conduct as a sage pursuing the art of government. The resort to warfare or *wu* was an admission of bankruptcy in the pursuit of *wen*. Consequently it should be a last resort, and it required justification both at the time and in the record."\(^{13}\)

\(^{13}\) Kierman and Fairbank ed., *Chinese Ways in Warfare*, (Harvard 1974) p. 6
Thus the talons and fangs were the last to prove their worth unless under unusual
circumstances. Even so, their full prospects were bound to be limited by ever-more politics.
Long before the birth of Confucius, there was already talk about how the gentlemen worked
with their mind and petty men, their bodies君子勞心, 小人勞力, which would potentially
degrade a soldier’s blood and sweat.14 Ample evidence also suggests that the Warring
States generals were cautious about the possible mistrust of the ruler, outshone,
overpowered, or even victimized by their civilian counterparts. To them, the most
dangerous enemies were often not those they fought at the front, but their lords and
colleagues who excelled in politics.15

14 From a speech by Zhi Wuzi知武子(active in early 500’s BC), also known as Xun Ying荀繹, a
powerful warrior aristocrat of the warring state of Jin晉. Zuo zhuan, Duke Xiang襄公, 9th year.

15 For examples, the Qin generalissimo, Wang Jian 王翦, at his departure for a decisive campaign
against the southern kingdom of Chu楚, had to persuade his sovereign that all he desired was an
adequate reward upon his triumphant return, so that no one would feel uneasy about him in charge of an
army of appalling size, almost the entire force of the state. Wang's predecessor, Bai Qi 白起 (died. 257
BC) was not as smart a political survivor. Known for sagacity as well as cruelty, Bai brought the Qin a
decisive victory over the northern state of Zhao趙 in 260 BC, but historians also accused him of an
atrocity that saw the Zhao prisoners of war, numbering 400,000, buried alive. In spite of his brutal
success, Bai never conquered the words of the civil ministers of his own state, and was eventually forced
to commit suicide as a result of dissension about strategy. Similar survivor and victim also came from
the hostile states of Chu and Zhao: Wu Qi 吳起(died 381 BC) and Lian Po廉頡. The former was the
purported author of Wuzi 吳子, one of early China's classics on warfare. Despite his military genius,
lack of political sophistication led him to a violent death, with hundreds of his own countrymen's arrows
embedded in his corpse. The latter, a veteran commander, was ranked lower than a civil statesman, Lin
Xiangru蔺相如, whose diplomatic maneuver and negotiating skill had won the state dignity before its
stronger rival. Lian was very upset and openly disdained Lin, but Lin was such a sage that he chose to
Other than subduing their own military countrymen, politicians sometimes did defeat interstate rivals without resort to arms. Such efforts, regardless of how seemingly effortless and perhaps discreditable in the eyes of a simple fighting man, are indeed perfectly in line with what the military classic *Sunzi* 孫子 has to say on the hierarchy of victories.

The commonly accepted date for the text of *Sunzi* is between mid 400’s – 300’s BC. According to *Sunzi*, the highest realization of warfare is to attack the enemy's plans; next is to attack their alliances; next to attack their army, and the worst is to attack their walled towns.上兵伐謀，其次伐交，其次伐兵，其下攻城. Armed combat is the least desirable means to attain victory; unsettling the mind and upsetting the strategies of one’s opponent conforms to the most desirable victory as "winning without fighting."不戰屈人之兵.

\[\text{avoid a direct confrontation whenever possible. Moved by Lin's open-mindedness, a kind of moral power, Lian finally reconciled and offered himself, stripped with thorn branches tied across his back, to Lin for chastise. Instead of whipping him, Lin treated him with full courtesy although not without a well-worded sermon on esprit de corps. All events above are from SJ, (Tianjin 1995) Ch. 65: 2065-67; Ch. 73: 2233-38; Ch. 81: 2361-68. Whether these records were subject to moralistic treatment is still questionable.}\]

\[\text{16 The problem of dating the Sunzi was dealt with in Sawyer, R, The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China, (Boulder 1993) p. 2}\]

\[\text{17 “Mou gong”(Planning Offensives) 謀攻, Sunzi, ed. Liu, Yanqiang, (Beijing 2005) p. 75-83.}\]
Like many other ancient military treatises, the Sunzi shares the early Confucian assumption as to the primacy of mental attitudes in human affairs. It regards one's knowledge of oneself and one's enemy, as the key to victory or defeat. Intensive engagements are disfavored, especially siege warfare, which would cause heavy casualties. This principle of outwitting rather than overpowering somehow echoes what the Analects records as the four intentionally avoided topics by Confucius: unexplainable prodigies, physical prowess, disorder, and the spirits. 

Still, the most demanding task for the disciples of Sunzi's doctrines is to fulfill the idea of quan 全, or keeping things complete. The Sunzi explains this idea as "to take the enemy's country whole and intact is better than to destroy it, so is to capture an army intact, a regiment intact, a battalion intact, and a company intact than to annihilate it 全國為上，破國次之；全軍為上, 破軍次之；全旅為上，破旅次之；全卒為上，破卒次之；全伍為上，破伍次之." Therefore if one were to score a perfect victory, he must win with minimum expense of his own resources,
and at the same time preserve his spoils intact.

All of the above was still conditional upon a breakdown of the normal Confucian social order during which military intervention became unavoidable. Under the profound influence of the *Sunzi*, military celebrities active in the Han-Xiongnu conflicts such as Wei Qing (died 106 BC), Huo Qubing (140-117 BC), Li Guang (died 119 BC) and Li Ling (died 74 BC) found their assignments at the front more difficult than ever as the rear was expecting them to win without fighting.\(^{20}\) No matter how enormous their success, they would still get little recognition if the price paid for that success was judged as costly.\(^{21}\)

Judgments on military performance were made by a court run by Confucian bureaucrats. Entrance to the Han officialdom was through recommendation and restricted examination. All state servants were assigned to tenure-based, defined areas of jurisdiction on ranked stipends. The same kind of bureaucratization also applied to the military, only with more circumstantial limitations. Generalships were in theory occasional appointments, although a few of them became permanent after 87 BC mainly as honorary offices occupied

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\(^{20}\) Across the vast northern expanse, Xiongnu was the first nomadic empire to challenge imperial China. Its ethnic origin remains a controversy: the people could be as western as proto-Turkish or as eastern as proto-Mongol, but probably with an Altaic linguistic affiliation. Di Cosmo, Nicola, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*: 161-205.

\(^{21}\) Further discussion on the perfectionist demand of victory in Han times can be found in: Huang Baisong 黃百松, *Zhongguo mingjiang de zhihui*, (Taibei 1979) p. 12.
by imperial distaff dignitaries without any established military background. In local administration, the Han continued the Qin infrastructure of commanderies (jun 郡) and counties (xian 县, in some cases, Circuits dao 道), and placed two heads at each level in charge of civilian and military affairs. The military heads were, in general, an auxiliary placement except in special administrative zones, usually frontier dependencies and strategic garrisons where they exercised fuller authority. There were of course, always supervisory bodies to check on military personnel in the capital or at local administrations just as they checked on everyone else. Thus, within the sophisticated network of Han bureaucracy, the military as a whole was invariably subject to omnipresent controls through orders from and under the surveillance of the dynastic center.

Strictly speaking, many Han military staff, such as the majority of those permanent generals at court, did not even qualify for the designation as soldiery for their lack of professional experience. Regular delegations of military high command to these "unprofessionals" indicated to some extent the complex nature of warfare in imperial China. Over the centuries of the Sino-Xiongnu conflict, Han China had to contemplate many possibilities: appeasement, dividing the tribal people, assimilating, and alliance with the Southern Xiongnu, all for the purpose of winning a war or more precisely, restoring order
in the most economical way.22 “Talons and fangs” were not the solution here. So long as central authority stayed effective, the talons and fangs would have to remain subordinate to and dependent upon the civil bureaucracy, who assigned them to duty, wrote their fitness reports, provided them supplies, and evaluated them for the historical records.23

The various inhospitable conditions the talons and fangs were forced to live with does not automatically lead to a hopeless and powerless career though. Neither was there a mutual exclusion between Confucianism and militarism in early imperial China. To the early Chinese, war was an art of multi-dimensional operations that valued prudence over excessive violence and preservation over destruction. A good government, as in one of the Analects' passages on "Confucius said", must maintain "sufficient armament" zubing足兵in addition to an orderly society; a ruler's failure to teach his subjects military skills was seen

22 The widow of the first Han emperor, Empress Lü呂后(r. 187-180 BC), although enraged by an insulting letter from the chieftain of the Xiongnu Confederation, rejected the bold proposal of military retaliation made by Fan Kuai樊噲(died 189 BC), her husband's valiant charioteer and also her brother-in-law. She was instead convinced by her civil officials to pursue an appeasement policy in acknowledgement of the fact that her recovering empire was as yet no match for the rising nomads. HS, Ch. 64: 3754-5. More than two centuries later, it was again another empress, the Empress Dowager Dou竇(regent 89-97) who accepted her scholar-strategists' advice to exploit the division within the Xiongnu nomads, naturalize the Southern Xiongnu with all the benefits of vassalage, such as intermarriage, material incentives, and cultural refinement, and use them as an ally in the final elimination of the Northern Xiongnu from the Chinese border. The Northern Xiongnu moved westward during the reign of Emperor Hedi和帝(89-106). For the Empress Dou's involvement in the successful removal of the Northern Xiongnu from Han China, see her biography in HHS, Ch. 10: 415-17.

23 Kiernan & Fairbank ed., op. cit. p. 9
as tantamount to abandoning them. The phrase "sufficient armament" was quoted by the Eastern Han warlord Cao Cao in the foreword to his commentaries on the *Sunzi*, among fragments from his military anthology which will appear in Chapter Three. In another recorded conversation between Confucius and his warlike disciple Zi Lu 子路, when asked who he would like to go together with on a campaign, Confucius said that he would keep away from the foolhardy but stay with the sagacious. So he shared the view of his near contemporary, the author of the *Sunzi*, that war is a contest of minds. The pivotal concern for all the Warring States philosophers was internal peace, only their emphases varied: the Confucians specialized in perpetuation, while militarists or *bingjia* 兵家 like Sun Zi dealt with restoration. As the state ideology of Han China, Confucianism was still in its experimental stage. Its preference for virtue over force in rulership was largely reinforced by a legalist institutional framework, and its incompatibility with militarist interests was never as substantial as that of the late imperial Neo-Confucianism.

To maintain an empire by more sophisticated means than coercion may simply be viewed as one step up to a higher civilization. Discouraging militarism on moralist

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25 *Analects*, 7:11. The original line is: those who would rather die with no regret from barehanded tiger fighting or barefoot river-crossing, I will not join; my company must be cautious about matters and good at planning ahead.暴虎冯河，死而无悔者，吾不与也，必也临事而惧，好谋而成者也
principle and by bureaucratic control was also a means to compromise the power usually associated with the military, a matter of the very security of imperial rule. The Sunzi has two famous lines on the freedom of field commands from central authority: "a capable general who is not interfered with by the ruler will be victorious" 將能者而君不禦者勝 and "there are orders from the ruler not to be accepted 君命有所不受." Similar statements also appear in many other military classics. This old doctrine of noninterference privileged the military greatly. On occasion, even emperors were not exempted from the same disciplines applicable to all ordinary soldiers.

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26 Besides the Sunzi, the best known military classics that reiterates the idea of noninterference with field commands is the Sima rangju bingfa 司馬穰苴兵法 datable to the mid to late fourth century BC. Zhao Guohua 趙國華, Zhongguo bingxue shi, (Fuzhou 2004) p. 70-73.

27 The best-known incident of this took place in 158 BC, during an inspection of the three capital garrisons by the emperor Wendi 文帝 (r.179-157 BC). Two garrisons welcomed him instantly at the sight of the imperial cavalcade, but the third, under the command of Zhou Yafu 周亞夫 (died 143 BC), denied the emperor's access. The gatekeepers insisted that the troops obey only their general's commands and are immune to the mandate of the Son of Heaven. After Emperor Wendi made his entry with Zhou's permission, he was again warned to ride slowly, because galloping was forbidden in the garrison. When he finally met Zhou Yafu, he was greeted briefly by the commander who, still armed, said that it was appropriate for a soldier in armor to give only a simple military salute instead of a more formal one. Emperor Wendi thus regarded Zhou as a truly competent general and told his successor to count on Zhou if crisis arose. Zhou did later save the empire from the Rebellion of the Seven Kingdoms 七國之亂, although in the end, his high reputation served only to make him another victim of sovereign's mistrust. See Zhou’s biography in HS, Ch. 40. For another treatment of this incident as a subject of military etiquette, see Chen Shuguo 陳戍國, Qinhan lizhi yanjiu, (Changsha 1993) p. 185-9. Armored military personnel were made excusable from casual salute to the ruler as early as since the Eastern Zhou era. A similar incident was recorded in Zuo zhuang, Duke Cheng 成公 16th year.
The assumption of military immunity, though theoretically encouraged, was not always practiced in reality. It was politically unwise to risk one's career or life by defying the ruler, especially over military matters. Times and again there were generals like Bai Qi, who were recalled from the middle of a promising campaign and had to give up maximizing their exploits. Nevertheless, the mere fact that the generals had the most immediate influence over their troops made them a considerable presence in government. In times of political unrest accompanied by prevalent violence, such as the Eastern Han – Three Kingdoms transition, how the military acted was not only crucial but often decisive.

Previous works in English on the period in question include some major volumes on the official institutions and administrative geography of the Han, translations of the historical accounts for the years 189 to 280 from the Zizhi tongjian 資治通鑑 made complete by Achilles Fang and Rafe De Crespigny as well as the latter’s recent Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to Three Kingdoms. Also available are more compartmentalized studies of regimes and leading figures and finally, the romantic tradition of the Three Kingdoms has long been captivating to readers and critics alike.

The current thesis is meant to be an examination of one particular group, which it dubs as the "talons and fangs" of the Eastern Han warlords. It differs from earlier scholarship on the Eastern Han and Three Kingdoms in three ways: 1) It looks at the last years of the Eastern Han as one typical case of military dominance in imperial China. Not
only did these turbulent years see political changes such as the debut of provincial warlords, they also extended for almost a century the prestige of the warrior elite, an otherwise underdog in the Confucian hierarchy. 2) This thesis will also reveal the personal experience of the last Han warriors, not something one would expect from the viewpoint of a military textbook. The reality of a soldier’s life or death was one in which action spoke louder than words, and body moved faster than mind. 3) Due to the huge impact of later military romance, this essay will recognize both the historical and cultural dimensions of its subjects while minimizing confusion between the two.

Most of the talons and fangs of the Eastern Han warlords lived into the actual era of the Three Kingdoms and are traditionally taken as men of the Three Kingdoms. However, the eclipse of the Eastern Han coupled with the duration of the Three Kingdoms produced at least four generations of warriors. The first two generations were in their prime before the consolidation of the tripodal powers. For the majority of their lives they were still vassals of the Eastern Han warlords. Moreover, the turbulence they braved between 189 and 220 was more action-packed than the stalemate of the real Three Kingdoms. Thus the current discussion is limited to these warriors of the transitional years only.

If loosely defined, almost all the Eastern Han warlords were themselves originally warriors. The founders of the three dominant forces who tripartized China all emerged as military officers: before full-fledged, Cao Cao was the Colonel Who Arranges the Army
dianjun xiaowei典軍校尉 in the capital, Liu Bei 劉備 (161-223) was a humble county commandant xianwei縣尉, and the Sun 孫 clan started their southern enterprise as efficient militia against banditry.\(^{28}\) They are nonetheless not to be confused with their talons and fangs – warrior vassals who implemented their military vision. The talons and fangs’ job was mainly physical, although they did not necessarily lack good brains. In singling them out as one definitive group, the current essay will focus on the vicissitudes of the talons and fangs more than anything else. It does not elaborate on the general military history of the Eastern Han - Three Kingdoms transition, neither will it re-evaluate the three dynastic founders of the era who have been subject to much scholarly discussion.

The period in question is a highly romanticized one of all imperial China. Romance usually precedes modern historians’ access to the earliest official records. This inevitably brought preconception, which then often resulted in distorted identities of the historical talons and fangs. Still, history and romance are a complementary pair. There is no absolute authenticity in any written history. The earliest records are themselves a mélange of fact and fiction. Warriors could already have inspired legends during or soon after their factual

\(^{28}\) Cao had earlier occupied a few local offices, but Colonel Who Arranges the Army was his first assignment in the capital, which allowed him to near the core of court intrigues that were soon to transform the empire. This office was one of the Eight Colonels of the West Garden西園八校尉, a force created in 188 to offset the power of the General-in-Chief who commanded the five colonels of the permanent Northern Army北軍. More details of these military organizations in the capital will follow in Ch. 2. The origins of the three warlord houses are found in SGZ, Fang, Beichen方北辰ed., (Xian 1996) Ch. 1, 32, 46.
existence. Knowledge of romance indeed allows room for constructive imagination, which is always an asset to one’s almost impossible quest for historical truth.

Based on all the considerations above, I shall take a clear individual approach to my subject of study: warriors also known as the talons and fangs. The best way to generalize a configuration of these collective individuals while identifying their variables is through traditional methods such as textual research and archaeological findings. In addition, some interdisciplinary perspective, combined with statistical analysis, is also vital to my thesis because not only history inspired romance, but early literature may also supplement and testify possible historical truth, especially for a topic involving the Three Kingdoms.

The structure for the current essay is one so it facilitates an adequate acquaintance with the talons and fangs in both historical and romantic traditions. The first three chapters review the major military events between the years 189 to 220, introduce the Han military institutions and a range of the soldiers’ daily realities: social fabric, equipment, tactics, and some aspects of their private life. The next three chapters draw heavily from official biographies of a selected assembly of eighteen talons and fangs. At the beginning of each chapter there is an overview and at the end, a brief conclusion that summarizes some common as well as unique issues: regional differences, loyalty and legitimacy, the way of fighting, personal strength and limitations, etc. The final chapter statistically analyzes the warriors’ presence in official records, and recounts their “reincarnations” in later anecdotal
histories, poetry, dramas, fictions, to more recent media on Three Kingdoms heroism. This arrangement shall keep my writing observant to the original sources without missing romanticism in the historiography of the period.

For original historical sources, I rely primarily on the *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 by Chen Shou 陳壽 (233-297) with commentary by Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (372-451), and the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 by Fan Ye 范曄 (398-445). These are respectively the third and fourth oldest from the series of some twenty five official Chinese histories. The *SGZ* follows the pattern of earlier biographical histories but lacks treatise, or *zhi* 志, which in traditional Chinese historiography refers to an exposition on government, education, economy, calendar, geography and others. Chapter Seven of the current essay covers this most important core text in greater details: authorship, reliability, technical layout, supplementary citations, etc.

Fan Ye’s *HHS*, originally ninty chapters of biographies only, was the ultimate attempt to compile the history of the Eastern Han Dynasty. The earliest undertaking of such was the government-sponsored *Dongguan Han ji* 東觀漢記, which spanned the entire duration of the dynasty itself, followed by no fewer than eight similar works. Fan Ye consulted to many earlier versions, but suffered death penalty before finishing his own. His *HHS* in its present form was made complete with the incorporation of eight treatises in thirty chapters from the *Xu Han shu* 續漢書 by Sima Biao 司馬彪 (240-306), a lost text except for those treatises. The only other historical record of the Eastern Han that has
survived in entirety is a chronicle, the *Hou Han ji* by Yuan Hong (328-376).²⁹

Overall, superior scholarship and literary style could have contributed to the more time-honored success of the *HHS* by Fan Ye than its earlier counterparts. The most instant contribution, however, is Fan’s device of seven new categories of biographies, six of which became standard in most future dynastic histories. Two categories, the “Wen Yuan” or “Garden of Literature” and the “Lie Nü” or “Virtuous Women,” were adopted by all. Again, the biographies in the *HHS* do not cover historical figures who died after 220, and are therefore less relevant than those from the *SGZ* to the subjects of my study, most of whom lived well into the official years of the Three Kingdoms.

There are also more systematic compilations of the Eastern Han – Three Kingdoms administrations, largely based on the treatises in the *SGZ*, *HHS*, and other reliable documents, by scholars centuries later. One may gather from, for examples, the *Donghan huiyao* by Xu Tianlin (13th century) and *Sanguo huiyao* by Yang Chen (1845-1922), an annotated guide to all the military offices of the era as well as a complete list of military ennoblements. Chapter One of the current essay will make extensive use of these information to introduce the various military institutions between the Western Han and the Three Kingdoms.

²⁹ Between eight to ten versions of the history of the Eastern Han are well documented. For a critical evaluation of this historiographical tradition, see Hao Runhua, *Liuchao shiji yu shixue*六朝史籍与史學: 69-99.
Chapter One

The Age of Warlords

The Eastern Han-Three Kingdoms transition

(Events described in this section are mainly from the SGZ and HHS with a focus on the military activities of the era. Other English references, such as Achilles Fang’s Chronicle and De Crespigny’s To Establish Peace, offer a more comprehensive view of chronological history. For Chinese official titles I refer mainly to Hucker’s Dictionary. I may occasionally use my own or adopt others’ versions, e.g., Bielenstein and De Crespigny.)

Since the talons and fangs distinctly lived a military life, it is appropriate to examine their historical background through a military perspective. Before there were warlords let alone their talons and fangs, however, the Eastern Han was already weakened at two fronts. Internally, the court was falling apart with eunuchs and consort clan contesting their abusive influence on the emperor Lingdi 霊帝 (r. 168-189) to strengthen themselves; the emperor himself was also allegedly responsible for such excesses as 1000 Nude Penthouses or luoyouguan 裸游舘. 30 Externally, there came in 184 the Yellow Turbans 黃巾 rebellion by a religious mass, largely hunger-stricken and homeless from an agrarian crisis in North China and a few smaller floods along the lower Yellow River valley.

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30 Wang Jia 王嘉 (died 390), Shiyi ji 拾遺記: 144-147.
These calamities, combined with draconic taxes and a corrupt government, happened just in time to invite the worst threat ever to the Eastern Han’s Mandate of Heaven.\(^3\)

The Yellow Turbans began with a secret Taoist sect known as the Taiping Dao or the “Way of Supreme Peace,” and were named for the colour of the scarves they wore around their heads in uprising. Three brothers, Zhang Jue 張角, Zhang Bao 張寳, and Zhang Liang 張梁 founded this sect in Shandong 山東 Province. They were quick in gaining huge support throughout North China by means of sorcery, healing, and a highly organized network of religion including allies in the imperial court.\(^2\)

Perhaps more capable as religious than military leaders, the Zhang’s did not sustain long into the rebellion. From the beginning, their plan for revolt was compromised by the arrest and execution of traitors in the capital Luoyang 洛陽. The result was a premature call to arms and inevitable lack of coordination. Approximately 360000 Yellow Turbans rose in three areas: the Zhang brothers led a group just north of the Yellow River, further northeast in the neighborhood of present-day Beijing was another major force, but

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\(^3\) A classic study of the Yellow Turbans is Levy, Howard S’ short article, “Yellow Turban Religion and Rebellion at the end of the Han.” *JAOS* 76: pp. 214-227.

\(^2\) Robinet, Isabelle, in her *Taoism: the Growth of a Religion*, pp. 53-56, considered the Yellow Turbans movement as the first organized form of Taoism with a potentially rebellious notion of a golden age, or *datong* 大同.
the third, in three commanderies south of the Yellow River, was the closest to the capital and therefore the deadliest.

During the first five months, the rebellion had some remarkable successes. The tide soon turned as the imperial armies counterattacked with local reinforcements led by some future warlords in the provinces, especially those untouched by the rebellion. By the early 185, about one year since they rebelled, the three Zhang brothers were all dead. Their senior commanders had also fallen in action one after another, but the remaining, scattered Yellow Turbans survived the government’s various mopping-up operations and even launched a comeback in the spring of 185. At its height, the rebellion spread over five provinces and kept the capital under pressure. It continued for another twenty years until regional warlords, in the process of their own civil war, destroyed the last strongholds of the Yellow Turbans by 205.

The post-rebellion empire was left in ruins across its most populous regions. Military leaders and local administrators became so used to wartime self-governing powers that they eventually practiced warlordism, the last straw to the very dynasty they had saved from the Yellow Turbans. Three major battles unfolded this age of the Eastern Han warlords. The first battle, fought at Guandu 官渡, present-day Zhongmou, Henan 河南中牟, in 200, consolidated most of North China with Cao Cao emerging victorious over all other provincial warlords in the area. The second battle at Chibi 赤壁, or Red Cliff, in 208, not
only saw Cao's attempted conquest of all China evaporated, but also resulted in the country being divided into three for more than half a century. The third battle at Xiaoting (猇亭, present-day Yichang, Hubei) in 222, finalized the map of the three kingdoms: Wei 魏 (220-265), Shu 蜀 (221-263), and Wu 吳 (222-280), each deriving from the three surviving warlord houses. An addition to these decisive battles could be the war between the court despot Dong Zhuo (died 192) and local authorities of the Han in the years 190-191. The significance of this war is that it had proved the restoration of central authority to be hopeless and consequently encouraged disappointed vassals to seek self-protection and profits in a time of virtual anarchy by assuming regional autonomy. The war of 190-91 and the other three major battles all took place during or soon after the reign of the last Han emperor Xiandi 献帝 (r.189-220). They are the main outlets of all the anxiety, ambition and vigor that accelerated the fall of a dynasty. While military events alone hardly paint the full picture of an age of disorder, in them we do find an epitome of the rise of the first Chinese warlords, directly responsible for the destruction of China's first long-lasting and united empire, the Han.

33 The notion of the three or four major battles has been discussed in Ma Zhijie 馬植傑: 14-20, 44-51, 69-77, 113-20.
It all started with a life-or-death struggle between the eunuchs and the imperial consort clan, who had been at odds ever since the middle of the Eastern Han. In the spring of 189, the emperor’s half-uncle and the occupant of the most powerful office in the Han bureaucracy, General-in-Chief He Jin 何進 (died 189) was murdered by the eunuchs during a court audience. His cohorts responded with instant revenge in which they scoured the imperial palace and slaughtered its entire eunuch population. Amid the great confusion as a result of this incident, a mixed force of Chinese and nomads from the northwestern frontier, led by Dong Zhuo, entered the capital Luoyang in the name of loyal service. Dong, however, turned out to be a disloyal and ruthless opportunist: he assumed the imperial regency, deposed the child emperor, and enthroned an even younger prince whose reign was then named as *Chuping 初平*, or Beginning Peace, while the capital environs were ravaged by his “barbarian” troops. Dong Zhuo's tyranny provoked wide discontentment. Among the most discontented were Yuan Shao 袁紹 (died 202) and Cao Cao, both of whom later rose to eminent warlordship. After recruiting sizable militia from their home provinces, they rejoined in early 190 with several other allies sworn to rid the

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34 More details of the power struggle within the mid-Eastern Han inner court may be found in Gregory C. Young: 1-36.

35 Troops from Han China’s northwestern provinces were often branded with certain “barbarism” due to large representation of non-Chinese recruits and mercenaries. For detailed discussion about Dong’s barbarian troops, see: Xu Delin 徐德麟: 12-14.
empire of its tyrant. The bulk of this rally against Dong Zhuo was the heads of regional administrative units in central and eastern China. As the Eastern Han was still in the aftermath of the Yellow Turbans uprising from which it had suffered a deadly blow, regional protectors maintained larger-than-usual authority in wartime mobilization within their jurisdictions. This time they elected Yuan Shao as the chief commander mainly because of his outstanding family background.\textsuperscript{36}

The ally, often dubbed as the "Loyalist Divisions East of the Pass" \textit{guandong yishi} 關東義師,\textsuperscript{37} was however, no more than a miscellany of careerists who chose to challenge Dong Zhuo out of as much personal ambition as their desire to restore the Han. Mistrust, poor coordination, and concerns for self-preservation plagued the so-called loyalist divisions which, in a series of preliminary clashes, appeared powerless before Dong Zhuo's veteran frontier troops. Fortunately, the allies still boasted a few serious members, among whom were Cao Cao, Liu Bei, and Sun Jian \textit{孫堅} (155-192), all fathers to the three successor states to the Han thirty years thereafter. The war against Dong Zhuo saw their military debut while Liu Bei and Sun Jian were yet detachment leaders under the commands of other established regional powers. Sun Jian's detachment in particular scored

\textsuperscript{36} For four generations the Yuan clan had seen its members achieving the positions of the \textit{sangong} 三公 or the “Three Excellencies”, the highest-ranking officials in the Eastern Han court.

\textsuperscript{37} Guandong in general refers to the regions east of the Hangu\textit{函谷} Pass, a stronghold near the western capital Chang’an.
a breakthrough which, along with the comeback of a Yellow Turbans remnant, eventually forced Dong Zhuo to abandon Luoyang and retreat to the western capital Chang'an 長安.

The whole government, including the last Han emperor Xiandi, was abducted by Dong and so were the ten thousands of civilians in Luoyang as Dong burnt the entire city down to ashes. Among all the damage caused by this fiery evacuation was the loss of inestimable volumes of histories and other official documents. The main forces of the allies, those under men like Yuan Shao and his half-brother Yuan Shu 袁術 (died 199), made no move to hunt Dong Zhuo down. Cao Cao alone took the chase, but his contingent was too small to even sustain the counterattack of Dong Zhuo's rear legions, from which Cao himself barely escaped.

Thus the "loyalist" war had come to a shameful end. In military terms it was largely a test of strength between the provincial forces of West China and those east of the Hangu 函谷 Pass. The former was the stronger. The eastern alliance dissolved, and nationwide the once local servants of the Han, now disillusioned with an irrecoverable empire, adapted themselves quickly to the changing political reality as independent warlords. Their common enemy, Dong Zhuo was assassinated only one year after his retreat to Chang’an, but the hope for the reestablishment of order was once again crushed.

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38 This political, or military division of the east and the west is at best, vaguely recognizable. As a conclusion on the civil war of 190-191, it was introduced in Xu Delin 徐德嶙: 22.
by the retaliation of his former henchmen. The subsequent fall of Chang’an, the emperor’s second flight from his capital, and the brutalities of squabbling renegades throughout the corridor from Chang’an to Luoyang are just the extensions of the chaos caused by the tyranny of Dong Zhuo. Such violent extensions frequented the 190’s and introduced China’s official entry into its first age of warlords.

By the end of the second century, many transitory warlords had perished in the onslaughts of their stronger rivals. Across the realm there were about seven survivors of relentless eliminations. Cao Cao, initially a man of limited resources, managed to take in his possession the refugee emperor in 196. Outsmarting the emperor’s previous manipulator Dong Zhuo, Cao Cao multiplied his political influence by working the symbolic representation of imperial mandate to his full advantage, and strengthened his camp with the enlistment of brilliant minds and awesome “talons and fangs.” Between the war-torn mid-lower Yangzi and the Yellow River where domestic wars concentrated, he was able to force the yet baseless Liu Bei to surrender, exterminate his archrival Lü Bu (died. 198), former bodyguard of Dong Zhuo widely acclaimed as the matchless warrior of the age,³⁹ and destroy the illegitimate government of Yuan Shu, who had proclaimed himself emperor. Through these decisive victories Cao Cao came to gain control over a large piece

³⁹ An interlinear citation from a lost third century text, Caoman zhuan 曹瞞傳, in SGZJZJY, ch. 7: 405 reported this folk saying: “The man of men is Lü Bu, the horse of horses, Red Hare.”人中有呂布, 馬中有赤兔 The legendary steed Red Hare was reported in the main text as Lü’s mount.
of the heartland territory roughly encompassing today’s northern Anhui and Jiangsu, and most of Henan and Shandong. At this central position, he was flanked by three major contenders though: north of the Yellow River the headquarter of Yuan Shao was swarmed with elite talents attracted to his family heritage, and he had at his disposal the wealth and manpower of four provinces relatively undisturbed from the civil wars; in the southern Jingzhou province about present-day Hubei and Hunan, the imperial kinsman Liu Biao controlled the middle reach of the Yangzi; under the lower Yangzi, two generations of the local Sun clan, Sun Jian and his son Sun Ce, had spent their lives in attaining regional dominance and by 200, their burgeoning enterprise was succeeded by the eighteen-year-old Sun Quan, Sun Ce’s brother. The rest of China was split by a few peripheral warlords: in the extreme northeast the long separatist regime of the Gongsun clan confronted both the nomads to its west and the Koguryo people on the eastern peninsula. Another member of the imperial family, Liu Zhang inherited from his father in 194 the governorship of Yizhou province, present-day Sichuan in the southwest, and was relatively ensconced in what was then considered the secluded cornucopia of the

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40 A rather unique topic, the Gongsun’s and their northeastern state was featured in Gardiner, K.H.J. "The Kung-sun warriors of Liao-tung (189-238)," *PFEH* 5 (March 1972): 59-107; and 6 (September 1972):141-201.
Immediately to the north of his territory and on the upper Han River 漢水 lay the Hanzhong 漢中 Commandery in modern southern Shaanxi 陜西, where Zhang Lu 張魯, leader of the Five Dou of Rice sect wudoumi jiao 五斗米教 and third patriarch of the Taoist Celestial Masters tianshi 天師 was running his theocratic state. Farther northwest the Liang 涼 province, present-day Gansu 甘肅, was once home to the military power of Dong Zhuo and his successors but now taken by the frontier general Ma Teng 馬騰 (died. 212) whose formidable troop was a mixture of Chinese frontiersmen and alien horsemen. Meanwhile the northern borderlands were constantly overrun by tribal people ranging from the northeastern Wuhuan 烏桓, a sub-Xiongnu stock, the Xiongnu immigrants within the Great Wall, the proto-Mongol Siberian xianbei 鮮卑, to the proto-Tibetan Qiang 羌 in the northwest, all thirsty for a share of profits from the collapse of the Middle Kingdom.

Among all the warlords who made into the beginning of the third century, the most intense competition was between Cao Cao and Yuan Shao. With his guardianship of the emperor whose reign had been renamed Jian’an 建安, or To Establish Peace since 196, Cao Cao had the convenience of justifying his personal actions with public interests. But he was yet not as resourceful and generally regarded as Yuan Shao, who became hostile toward his

41 The basin province of Sichuan was probably the most naturally fortified part of pre-modern China. Its economy remained one of the last to be disturbed by the Eastern Han warlords’ rivalry.

42 Zhang Lu is the grandson of Zhang Daoling 張道陵 (34-156), founder of the Five Dou of Rice Sect and reputedly father of the Taoist religion. Joseph A. Adler: 67-68.
meteoric rise to almost the embodiment of central authority. The two former colleagues
finally engaged in battle with Yuan Shao initiating the offensive early in 200. Two
preliminary skirmishes occurred on the south bank of the Yellow River and both ended in
setbacks for Yuan Shao’s vanguards which crumbled after their commanders, the two best
Yuan warriors, fell in action. This is just one indication of how crucial the performance of
warriors was to the rivalry of the Eastern Han warlords. What appears in the historians’
 writings is that the apparently smaller force of Cao Cao was able to outmatch because its
more competent warriors had overpowered the enemy commanders, most likely in a duel.\textsuperscript{43}
Such miracles however, did not change the overall disparity between the two opponents. As
the main force of Yuan Shao, still intact, continued its southward advance, Cao Cao was
compelled to retreat farther south of the River, to the township of Guandu where he had
closer access to provisions from his Xu\,许 headquarters, present-day Xuchang\,许昌, Henan.

It was a standstill at the Guandu theatre for two months, during which an array of
some typical tactics and device for trench warfare of the age was used: raised earthwork to
mount crossbow volleys, underground passage, and possibly the first Chinese trebuchets

\textsuperscript{43} The lost \textit{Yingxiongji英雄記}, or \textit{Records of Heroes} by the celebrated scholar Wang Can\,王粲 (177-217),
had numerous mentions of hand-to-hand combat that determined a full battle, contradicting the more
“civilized” way of Chinese strategic plays that should have been widely received among the Han military.
One famous incident of such is a joust between Lü Bu and an avenger of Dong Zhuo’s death, cited in\textit{SGZJZJY}, ch. 7: 408.
It seemed that Cao Cao was at the lower hand during the exchange of blows. His shortage of grain had also reached the point of camp-wide starvation, but he was determined to withstand all the odds and twice surprised the most vulnerable link in the enemy’s operations, its line of supply. The second assault resulted in the destruction of Yuan Shao’s central granary, which instantly wreaked havoc on his armies and then put them to rout. Yuan Shao fled north, and died in anguish two years later.

Official histories and later romance both treated the battle of Guandu as a remarkable case of the outnumbered defeating the numerically superior. How significant a military disparity was involved in this case is often questioned by enlightening recalculation though. There was also Marxist historians’ theory of social distinction, that Cao Cao’s representation of a new and progressive force as opposed to Yuan Shao’s connection with the old and retrogressive aristocracy had predetermined the outcome of their rivalry. This seems to be either over-simplifying or unnecessarily complicating: in a free-for-all such as the Eastern Han civil wars, what mattered to one’s shame or fame was

44 The name *pili che*, or “thunderous cart” appeared the first time in the *SGZ*’s record of the battle of Guandu. It might have a much earlier 707 BC prototype. See illustration in Liu Xu 刘旭: 90.

45 One careful recalculation, as in Zhang Dake张大可: 59-62, suggests that Yuan’s participating force in the Guandu theater numbered 12-130000; Cao Cao, 7-80000, almost two third of his opponent’s.

46 Also see comments by Rafe de Crespigny, *To Establish Peace*: Intro. xxxiii-iv.
above all, personal competence. Strongmen like Dong Zhuo and Lü Bu were of more proletarian origins than Cao Cao. They fell early because of their own limits, whereas Cao Cao excelled most others in political maneuvering, military leadership, and management of human and material resources. These attributes, combined with a bit of luck, ensured him a great victory, and he enhanced this victory with a vast territorial expansion.

After Yuan Shao died in 202, his former domain, the four Northern provinces were each retained by his incapable but quarrelsome sons and nephew. Cao Cao eliminated these lingering forces of the Yuan’s one after another, and extended his conquest beyond the northeastern frontier with a stormy raid against the Wuhuan tribesmen there. By 207 he came to hold sway over the entire North China plain, with nominal suzerainty over the Gongsun clan in Manchuria, and a multinational jumble of northwestern warlords and chieftains. The last obstructions to his further success were now all in the South. The hardest of them were Sun Quan in the southeast and Liu Biao, Governor of the Jing Province, whose regime benefited greatly from the nourishment and natural protection of the Yangzi.

In 208 Liu Biao died, perhaps just in time before he saw his province lost to Cao Cao. The succession went to his younger son. When Cao Cao’s massive invasion forces were pressing on to the border, the young successor surrendered his inheritance. Liu Biao’s

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47 Dong Zhuo and Lü Bu were both originally frontiersmen.
remote cousin Liu Bei, a then baseless adventurer of distant imperial lineage, had been a sojourner in the province since his flight from the north some years ago. His intention was to resist Cao Cao behind the wide moat of the Yangzi, but he acted too late to stop the surrender of the new provincial government, and barely made his own escape from Cao Cao’s lightning pursuit. After a water-bound retreat to Jiangxia 江夏, about present-day Wuhan 武漢, Liu Bei began to solicit the alliance with Sun Quan, the young warlord on the lower Yangzi who had earlier contacted him for possible joint defense. Meanwhile Cao Cao was reorganizing much of the Jing province fleet into his service as he continued spearheading eastwards by land and water. En route he also sent an ultimatum to Sun Quan demanding his surrender.

There was hot debate at the Sun’s headquarters as whether to give in or put up a desperate fight. The scholar advisors were overwhelmed by the enemy’s striking power, so far unopposed, and they questioned the worth of Liu Bei as an ally, who had only an insignificant number of troops and was himself recently defeated. The warriors however would rather take advantage of certain factors to which the invaders remained vulnerable. After all, Sun Quan’s decision was largely in favor of the military but not absolutely inflexible: he entrusted Zhou Yu 周瑜(175-210), his best commander with a 30,000-strong crack force to cooperate with Liu Bei’s 20,000, while he still kept a sufficient reserve at rear with which to negotiate terms should his front line of defense collapsed.
By reasonable reckoning the Sun-Liu allies would have numbered only about one quarter of Cao Cao’s operational strength.\textsuperscript{48} Still, Cao Cao had everything that the Sun warriors had reasonably calculated to worry about: the loyalty of his new fleet, formerly at the service of Liu Biao, was uncertain; his veteran soldiers from the north were under-trained for naval warfare, fatigued from an extensive campaign plus several forced marches, and so unaccustomed to the southern terrain and clime that the camp was stricken with epidemic disease. The moment this multitude of tired and sick armies and a half-hearted navy reached Chibi, or Red Cliff on the south bank of the Yangzi, they were met with the well-prepared defenders and driven all the way back to the north bank. To make Cao Cao’s situation worse, the wind direction changed against him, and Zhou Yu wasted no time to launch a fire attack. The allies’ version of history tended to glorify their victory with tales of slaughter and the successful use of fire as a decimating weapon, whereas Cao Cao’s own words were that his troops became too sick to fight so he burnt down his warships and aborted the campaign voluntarily.\textsuperscript{49} In either case the battle of Red

\textsuperscript{48} Based on the figures given in the \textit{SGZ} and its various commentaries, the size of the troops involved in the battle of Red Cliff should be close to this: the Sun-Liu Ally, 50000; Cao Cao, 20-300000. Yin Wenquan 尹文泉, \textit{Zhongguo zhanshi tujian} 中国战史图鉴: 82-94; also, Zhang Jinglong 張靖龍, \textit{Chibi zhi zhan yanjiu} 赤壁之战研究: 242-249.

\textsuperscript{49} According to one of the most frequently cited documents in the \textit{SGZ}, the \textit{Jiangbiao zhuan} 江表傳, Cao Cao wrote Sun Quan a letter after the battle of Red Cliff that contained these lines, “…a plague happened to strike the army, so I burnt my warships and retreated…” 值有疾病，孤烧船自退 See \\textit{SGZJZJY}, ch. 54: 2657.
Cliff was a failure for Cao Cao, if not a disaster. It involved fire, as both sides claimed to be an incendiary, and because it had failed a potential re-unifier like Cao Cao at the peak of his success, the empire was to remain disunited for another seventy years. Instead of fire, what had most likely ruined Cao Cao’s operation at Red Cliff and eventually delayed China’s reunification was combatant sickness, as it so often forced other warlords to call off their campaigns before and thereafter.\(^50\)

It took the allies another year to destroy all the outposts that Cao Cao had left behind, and by 209 their strategic position along the Yangzi was secured with Cao’s sphere of influence restricted to north of the river line. Meanwhile, control of the middle Yangzi became a privilege of Liu Bei, who seemed to be the happiest gainer from the battle of Red Cliff and its aftermath. He acquired the largest portion of the Jing province with only its northern strip where the Han River ran across still occupied by Cao Cao, and Sun Quan was for the moment considerate enough to take a corner around Wuhan only. With the acquisition of his first sizable territory, Liu Bei saw his career taking off. Within the next decade he seized another province, Yi in the southwest from his distant imperial cousin Liu Zhang, and engaged Cao Cao in a fierce struggle for the Hanzhong Commandery, which

\(^50\) Two more large campaigns between the Cao and Sun, in 217 and 253, were also aborted due to the same uncontrollable factor, disease. For a medical analysis of possible diseases within the battle zone, see Zhang Jinglong: 332-357.
screened his new territory from northern attacks with the Qinling Mountain Range 秦嶺. In the beginning of 219, his elite warriors made an unstoppable movement against the enemies, killed their chief commander, and captured the commandery. In celebration of this victory as well as in response to Cao Cao’s elevation to kingship two years ago, Liu Bei proclaimed himself King of Hanzhon 漢中王. His nominal ally, Sun Quan had long been envious of his increasing power and covetous for a greater share in the basin below the Yangzi. Opportunity called upon Sun Quan in the autumn of 219 when Guan Yu 關羽 (162-219), the protector of Liu Bei’s eastern front, was busy with a sortie against Cao Cao up the Han River. Sun Quan surprised Guan Yu with a secret invasion, striking him from behind. The result was a total extinction of Liu Bei’s presence in the Jing Province including the life of Guan Yu, and Sun Quan now held sole dominance of the middle Yangzi west to the Gorges.

Shortly after the outrageous break-up of the Sun-Liu alliance was the death of Cao Cao in early 220 and a chain of political changes that distracted Liu Bei from immediate retaliation. Cao Cao died a subject of the Han, but the 400 years of the Han Dynasty also died with him as his successor, Cao Pi 曹丕(187-226) received the abdication from Emperor Xiandi and established a new dynasty, Wei. In the following year, 221, Liu Bei reacted by proclamation as emperor of the continuing house of Han. Common reference to his defiant regime is Shu Han or simply Shu after the ancient name for the capital region of
Yi Province where he assumed dynastic rule. Under the changing circumstances, Sun Quan’s urgent concern was to neutralize the north while Liu Bei could attack at any time, although more for the recovery of the Jing Province than a personal revenge for Guan Yu whose brotherly affinity to him is often exaggerated. It was really a matter of expedience that Sun Quan acknowledged the new government of Wei, pretended allegiance to it, and in return he was designated as King of Wu. The new kingdom soon faced an invasion from the west, when Liu Bei retaliated with a land and naval force of 40,000 strong under his personal command.

In the spring of 222 Liu Bei reached Xiaoting, entrance to the Gorges. His troops, now all landed, began to march eastward through mountains and cliffs. Opposing them was a slightly larger force of Wu led by Lu Xun 陸遜 (183-245), Sun Quan’s nephew-in-law and a novice general from a distinguished family. For months Lu Xun refrained from battle to avoid the enemy’s thrust. Then Liu Bei made a serious mistake, probably due to underestimation of his young opponent: by the end of the summer he had over-stretched his position so much that his encampments covered a range of 350 km along the forested side of the Gorges. This invited a fire attack from the east, and Liu Bei’s army suffered disastrously. Liu Bei fled to the town of Baidi 白帝 near present-day Fengjie 酆界 in Sichuan, but he was too ill and anguished to finish his journey home, and died there in the following year. To the victor Sun Quan, the battle of Xiaoting confirmed his dominance of
the middle Yangzi and better still, his western border was to face no more vengeful threat as the regent to Liu Bei’s successor, Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181-234) regarded him more of an ally than enemy. In 223 Sun Quan denounced his Wei vassalage and made his own ascension to emperor of Wu. The Shu Han Dynasty recognized his new reign and formed an alliance with him.

The military situation in China for the next forty years was largely a stalemate between the three kingdoms. There were frequent clashes, but none of the rivals made significant progress beyond their boundaries: the wide moat of the Yangzi separated the northern state of Wei and the southern Wu kingdom; Wu constantly raided the Wei’s southeastern front along the Huai River valley but was unable to take it over; the smallest of the three, Shu Han was cornered in the southwest, surrounded by natural barriers to external attacks; its ambitious prime minister Zhuge Liang and his more militant successor, Jiang Wei 姜維 (202-264), spent their lives in repeated northern expeditions against Wei, but only saw their efforts end in vain.

The major breakthrough came in the year 263 when a Wei detachment made a treacherous shortcut into the heartland of Shu Han, descended upon the capital as if from nowhere, and terrorized the government into surrender. Wei soon, met its own end following a reenactment of throne abdication by which it replaced the Eastern Han. This time the new dynasty was called Jin 晉 (266-420), whose imperial surname was Sima 司馬.
Wu stood the last of the original three kingdoms, but the natural moat of Yangzi failed to safeguard its independence as tyranny deteriorated the state, and in 280 it succumbed to a massive Jin invasion. At this point China had entered a temporary unification under the Jin, although the end of the Eastern Han civil wars and the subsequent Three Kingdoms were, in a broader historical context, only the beginning of a long era of disunion that lasted until the end of the sixth century.

For people active in the war-ridden years of the Eastern Han to Three Kingdoms transition, to characterize them by wen or wu can be confusing. Regimentation prevailed in wartime: everyone served the military, those who lacked the skill to kill in the field offered advice in tent. Adding to the difficulty of characterization is the complexity of imperial China’s military organizations.

The best clarification lies perhaps in the tradition of how the various Chinese dynastic histories were organized. Following the pattern of Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca 135-90 BC)’s Shiji 史記, the historians who wrote the earliest accounts of the Eastern Han and Three Kingdoms arranged biographies in chronological order. Historical personages of the same generation were then grouped into different chapters according to the political circles they belonged to and their main occupations. Thus we know household names such as Zhuge Liang and Lu Xun were not considered as among the warrior class despite their overwhelming military reputation. On the other hand, those who glorified their lives or
deaths in battlefield together take up one biographical chapter as long as they served in the same political camp at similar ranks. It is them that the historians characterized as the talons and fangs frequently and exclusively, making their warrior identity unmistakable.

The talons and fangs are of course, most recognizable by their military titles. Never before was the Han military bureaucracy so occupied as in the last thirty years of the dynasty. Political breakdown and intensifying warfare introduced almost an outburst of military professionals whose names were to be perpetuated in history. Their biographies in the earliest historical records were often an array of heroic tales and highly stylized but bewildering official and noble titles. It is thus imperative to review the bureaucratic and aristocratic institutions associated with the talons and fangs of the Eastern Han warlords.

**Han Military Institutions**

The second to third century Chinese military was in its basic form a 300-year-old consistent governmental force. Reduction, expansion and limited reorganization were made in response to changing domestic climate and foreign policies throughout the centuries, but

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51 Information given in this section is selected from the *HS, HHS, Donghan huiyao* 東漢會要, *Sanguo huiyao* 三國會要, *Houhan shu sanguo zhi bubiao sanshizhong* 後漢書三國志補表三十種, and *Tong dian* 通典. For English studies, see Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times*; Loewe, *Records of Han Administration*, and De Crespigny, *To Establish Peace*. 
there had been no radical changes to the structure and operational manner of the military since the reign of Emperor Wudi.\textsuperscript{52} The Han dynasty began with a pro-Taoist government whose prior concern was to recover from the devastating civil wars following the fall of its predecessor, the Qin. Concurrent with the rebirth of a Chinese empire was the rise of the nomadic people of Xiongnu.\textsuperscript{53} The first Han emperor failed miserably to solve the Xiongnu problem by war and had to instead buy peace from his northern neighbors. This rather inglorious policy of appeasement continued for three generations of imperial rule until China regained some prosperity and embraced the more politically active ideology of Confucianism under the patronage of Emperor Wudi. Chinese expeditions began to sweep across the homeland of Xiongnu to as far as Sogdiana in Central Asia where in 36 BC, a

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{52} In his \textit{The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han}, pp. 138-139, Mark Edward Lewis found one of the key transformations of the Han society to be the abolition of universal military service, and the most common military man in the Eastern Han the non-Chinese nomad warrior. This is somewhat misleading: foreign recruits and mercenaries were certainly a large presence at the frontier, but the interior provinces did not lack Chinese military servicemen. What Lewis perceived as an abolition of a whole system of conscription was more likely a reduction and discontinuation of certain key programmes by a series of imperial decrees between the years 31 to 47. The conscripts themselves as a source of local military force did not necessarily die out though. In the years 48, 58, 76, 94, 100, 102, 109, 115, 116, 117, 144, 160, and 162, numerous rebellions crumbled before the official troops in the provinces and commanderies, still called the \textit{zhoujun bing}州郡兵 as their Western Han predecessors from full universal military service. There seemed to be no radical changes, at least in name, to the provincial and commandery armies under the Eastern Han, although the majority of them were probably no longer conscripts. Gao Min高敏, \textit{Weijin nanbeichao bingzhi yanjiu}魏晉南北朝兵制研究: 19-23.

\textsuperscript{53} For a brief introduction of the interactions between the Qin-Han empires and the Xiongnu nomads, see Fairbank, \textit{China – A New History}: 23-25.
\end{footnotesize}
Han contingent could have confronted some Roman mercenaries in a crossbow volley-and-Testudo formation standoff.\(^{54}\) By the end of the first century when the Southern Xiongnu, bordering China along the Great Wall, was temporarily neutralized by assimilation and its recent split-up, the Northern Xiongnu, retreated to the remote west, the Han military had been performing a decent job in foreign warfare despite a few misfires such as the Central Asian campaign during the interlude of Wang Mang 王莽(r. 9-23)’s Xin 新 Dynasty.\(^{55}\) Thus in military terms the entire Western Han plus the first half of the Eastern Han was largely a history of 300 years’ Sino-Xiongnu war.\(^{56}\) The most prominent Han military establishments, mostly introduced by Wudi, were more or less a direct result of the conflicts with the Xiongnu and a few other border peoples. Military tradition overall also tended to be stronger across the country’s northern and western frontier regions. Some most formidable troops and warriors of the Eastern Han warlords were thereby of northwestern-origin.\(^{57}\)

\(^{54}\) Dubs, Homer H: 10-15.

\(^{55}\) Rudi Thomsen: 155-72.

\(^{56}\) Song Chao 宋超: 2.

\(^{57}\) The early Eastern Han historian Ban Gu already noted the military characteristics of the northwestern Chinese largely due to their proximity to the nomads and horses. Chang, Chunshu: 286.
The next few pages are a rather simplified introduction to the military institutions under the Han. Comments on the civilian business in central and local governments, official ranks, which were often expressed in the stipendiary term "shi 石" or about thirteen kilograms of grain, and administrative geography, were made short to distinguish the current topic. For more inclusive discussions on the Han bureaucracy, readers may wish to consult Bieleinstein’s *The Bureaucracy of Han Times*, Loewe’s *The Record of Han Administration*, and De Crespigny’s *To Establish Peace*.

The Han central government is commonly identified with a Three Excellencies and Nine Ministries "sangong jiuqing 三公九卿" system. In Western Han, the Three Excellencies headed the administration immediately below the emperor. They were: the Chancellor "chengxiang 丞相", the Grandee Secretary "yushi dafu 御史大夫", and the Grand Commandant "taiwei 太尉". In Eastern Han, they were: the Minister over the Mass "situ 司徒", the Minister of Works "sikong 司空", and the Grand Commandant. Over the ages there had been some renaming, deletions, and additions namely the Minister of War "dasima 大司馬" and the three Great Mentors known as "Taishi 太師", "Taifu 太傅", "Taibao 太保", but in general all these highest offices were more of an honorary nature than executive except in wartime. The Nine Ministries handled the various routines of the central government while another key office, the Imperial Secretariat "shangshutai 尚書臺", drew up and circulated edicts and state
orders. Since the early days of the Eastern Han, the position of the Imperial Secretariat was deliberately enhanced to offset the supremacy of the Three Excellencies.

Three administrative levels existed in the Han local governments: province 州 or circuit 部, commandery/kingdom 郡國, and county 縣. From the reign of Emperor Wudi on, the empire was divided into thirteen provinces headed by Governors 牧 or Inspectors 刺史, except for the province about the capital region which was under a Colonel Director of Retainers 司隸校尉. The thirteen provinces supervised a growing number of commandery-level units, which by late second century had reached over 100. These units included: commanderies under Grand Administrator 太守, states or kingdoms 国, nominal fiefs of kings but in practice ruled by Chancellors 相, and some frontier Dependant States 属國 protected by Chief Commandants 都尉. The basic local units were Counties run by Prefects 令, Chiefs 長, and other equivalent officers. In support of this well defined state structure, the Han military operated in three domains: capital, frontier, and local, with its major tasks of safeguarding the person of the emperor, maintaining the frontiers, and keeping order in the provinces.

58 Although established throughout the Han, some dependent states rose to separate para-commandery administration since the early first century. Chang, Chunshu: 267-9.
Western Han

1. Military forces at the capital Chang’an

The Southern Army *nanjun* 南軍 stood as a depot for soldier trainees from all over the empire. It was manned by local conscripts who were rotated annually to guard the capital under the Commandant of the Guards *weiwei* 衛尉, one of the Nine Ministries. The more professional and permanent stationed force was the Northern Army *beijun* 北軍. Emperor Wudi had created eight colonelships in all in charge of this troop, each aided by an Assistant *cheng* 丞, and one or several Majors *sima* 司馬. One of the eight colonels, the Colonel of the Chang River Encampment *changshui xiaowei* 長水校尉 commanded the Northern Barbarian Horsemen *huji* 胡騎. The Chang River was a tributary of the Wei 涇 River southeast of Chang’an. We don’t know the size of the Northern army. Toward the end of Western Han, at least some of the eight colonels must have become sinecures due to prolonged peace in China.

Large operations beyond the capacity of the above standing armies were assigned to Generals *jiangjun* 將軍 who would lead one or more mobilized troops, and receive a variety of titles either literary or indicative of the immediate objectives of their campaigns. “When an emergency was over, the armies were demobilized, the generals dismissed, and their titles shelved until needed again.”(Bielenstein.) However, eight generalships became
permanent after 87 BC. They were: General-in-Chief or Regent Generalissimo dajiangjun 大將軍, General of Agile Cavalry biaojijiangjun 駱騎將軍, General of Chariots and Cavalry chejijiangjun 車騎將軍, General of the Guards weijiangjun 衛將軍, General of the Van, Rear, Left, and Right qian/hou/zou/youjiangjun 前/後/左/右將軍. These were ranked above the Nine Ministries. Their headquarters were located in Chang’an and comprised of Bureaus cao 曹. Regents and other powerful courtiers were the usual recipients of these generalships, which obviously were more honorary than military in nature.

2. Special military zones

The Zuopingyi 左憑翊 Garrison provided protection northeast of the capital. It was headed by a Chief of the Cloud Rampart yunleizhang 雲壘長 and his Assistant at the Zuopingyi Commandery, one of the three commanderies around the capital region (the other two being the Youfufeng 右扶風 and Jingzhao 京兆), also known as the Three Adjutants sanfu 三輔.

Five Chief Commandants of Passes guanduwei 關都尉 guarded the eastern accesses through the Hangu, Luhun 陸渾 and Wu 武 Passes into the capital region, and the western end of the Gansu corridor.
3. The local Militia

All able-bodied men of Western Han between the ages of twenty-three to fifty-six were subject to military service. At twenty-three they served one year in a local training program as Skilled Soldiers caiguan材官, Cavalrymen qishi騎士, Light charioteers qingche輕車, or Sailors in Towered Warships louchuanshi樓船士. Next they spent another year on guard in the Southern Army, or in their home commanderies. Thereafter they became the militia who, until fifty-six, would receive regular training and be summoned to war during emergencies.59

Eastern Han

1. Military forces at the capital Luoyang

The Southern Army was disbanded during the Eastern Han. The professional Northern Army was downsized to five regiments: the Colonel of the Archers Who Shoot at a Sound shesheng xiaowei射聲校尉, the Colonel of the Foot Soldiers bubing xiaowei步兵校尉, the Colonel of the Elite Cavalry yueji xiaowei越騎校尉, the Colonel of the Garrison Cavalry tunji xiaowei屯騎校尉, and the Colonel of the Chang River Encampment, whose

59 For more detailed review of the early Han conscription, see Li Delong李德龍: 88-96, 107, 116-22.
name derived from the camp site of its Western Han predecessor, the Chang stream flowing near Chang’an. The whole force of about 3536 men was supervised by a Captain of the Center of the Northern Army beijun zhonghou 北軍中侯 with a lower salary rank than the colonels. Below the colonel, the second-in-command was a major. There were no more assistants. The Colonel of the Chang River Encampment had an additional Major of Barbarian Cavalry huji sima 胡騎司馬 to coordinate his non-Chinese troops.

The General-in-Chief was the official commander of the Northern Army. However, just as in Western Han, this post was not held by the professional soldiery. It was a reserved honor for the senior male of the maternal imperial relatives. By the latter part of the 100’s the General-in-Chief began to hold the regency. He ranked with the Three Excellencies as the highest officials of the empire, and had authority over the Imperial Secretariat and the government as a whole.

The second last emperor of Eastern Han, Lingdi 灵帝 (r. 168-188) tried to reduce the absolute power of his General-in-Chief, He Jin, by creating a new army in 188 under Eight Colonels of the West Garden xiyuan ba xiaowei 西園八校尉. He appointed his trusted eunuch to be Colonel of the First Army shangjun xiaowei 上軍校尉, senior officer of these troops and superior to He Jin. During an inspection of the West Garden army, Emperor Ling even styled himself the General Supreme wushang jiangjun 無上將軍, a new title seemingly to preside over the General-in-Chief. This new army, with professional
colonels like Yuan Shao and Cao Cao, was the main force responsible for the slaughtering of eunuchs in 189, and disbanded afterward. Despite a nominal eunuch leadership and brief existence, it was not a purely ceremonial establishment and must have been larger than the Northern Army of five colonels under the General-in-Chief.

Below the General-in-Chief, appointments as General of Agile Cavalry and General of Chariots and Cavalry continued to be mainly honorary. As for the other five of the eight permanent generalships introduced in the Western Han, they remained unfilled until the outbreak of the Yellow Turbans 黃巾 uprising in the 180’s.

During wartime many temporary generalships were restored, invented, and self-designated. Irregular designations as Deputy General 偏將軍 and Major General 補將軍 were mentioned frequently in historical records. The usual appointment below the rank of general was General of the Gentlemen of the Household 中郎將, initially the style of an officer in charge of guards at court, but later used for commanders on active service outside the capital. Slightly lower in status than the General of the Gentlemen of the Household was the Chief Commandant of Cavalry 騎都尉, a normally unfilled post but reclaimed by fighting men with the intensification of war.

The organization of a full-size army was usually like this: a general took command of an army. An army in the field was organized into Regiments 营 under Colonels,
with Battalions *bu* 部 under Majors. At the bottom echelons were Companies *qu* 曲 under Captains *hou* 侯, and Platoons *tun* 屯 under Chiefs *zhang* 長.

2. Policing forces, guards, and para-military units

The Colonel Director of Retainers supervised the entire capital province, one of the thirteen provinces in the empire. His jurisdiction of seven commanderies extended from west of Chang’an to the east of Luoyang. The Intendant of Henan *henanyin* 河南尹 governed the commandery about the capital. The Prefect of Luoyang *luoyangling* 洛陽令 was like the mayor of the capital city.

The Colonel of the City Gates *chengmen xiaowei* 城門校尉 was in charge of the guards at the twelve gates about Luoyang. The Bearer of the Gilded Mace or Capital Constable *zhijinwu* 執金吾 safeguarded the city outside the palace and particularly the arsenal.

The Commandant of the Guards, still one of the Nine Ministries, was responsible for security for the imperial palace. Another minister, the Superintendent of the Imperial Household *guanglu xun* 光祿勳 took care of the emperor’s personal safety. To accomplish this task, he had at his disposal five corps under the Generals of the Gentlemen of the Household *wuguan zhonglangjiang* 五官中郎將. Only two of them, Gentlemen Rapid as
Tigers *huben* 虎賁 and the Feathered Forest *yulin* 羽林 were probably experienced warriors. These had a combined number of 1500 to 1700.

3. Special military zones

The General Who Crosses the Liao River *duliao jiangjun* 度遼將軍 was restored after its brief appearance in Western Han, and made a regular post during the Eastern Han. This general commanded a permanent garrison on the Ordos loop of the Yellow River in present-day Inner Mongolia. The establishment was to prevent the alliance of the southern Xiongnu in northwestern China and the Northern Xiongnu in Central Asia.

Three military encampments, Liyang 黎陽, Yong 雍, and Tiger Fangs *huaya* 虎牙, formed three lines of defense against possible attacks from the northwest. They were all positioned close to the old capital at Chang’an, and were under the authority of Chief Commandants *duwei*. The Liyang Camp was reported to have been manned with 1000 seasoned infantry and cavalrymen.

The five Chief Commandants of Passes were reduced to one, at the Hangu Pass only out of consideration of its continuing traffic.

The Chief of Cloud Rampart at the Zuopingyi Garrison was abolished, possibly due to strategic shift with the relocation of the capital.
More Chief Commandants in addition to those stationed at fixed encampments acted as military protectors of a growing number of Dependant States since the early second century. The Dependant States were largely inhabited by non-Chinese people along the northern and western frontiers. They were equivalent to interior commanderies on administrative level.

4. Military forces in the provinces

The Eastern Han discontinued local conscript training programs as Skilled Soldiers, cavalrymen and others. Centralization of power was the main concern of the Eastern Han rulers. They seemed to have preferred a civilian populace rather than a militant mob ready for local rebellion.

As mentioned earlier, the Eastern Han was divided into thirteen provinces, supervising some 100 commanderies, kingdoms, and dependant states. The very basic administrative unit was the county. Most commanderies were headed by Grand Administrators, all kingdoms by Chancellors. Senior military officers in the commanderies

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60 Whether it was a partial or total abolition of the conscription system under the Eastern Han is debatable. Unlike what Mark Lewis has suggested in his article, historical records indicate official cancellation of the annual training programs only. Conscripts could still have been available, although untrained. Mark Lewis, “The Han Abolition of the Universal Military Service:” 33-75; Xu Tianlin, Donghan huiyao: 482-5.
and kingdoms were respectively the Commandant and the Commandant of the Capital zhongwei.

Counties and the commandery-units above them may levy troops, usually from the local militia, to resolve emergencies within their legal territories. In case of cross-border crisis, provincial inspectors were authorized to raise troops from all the regions involved. For the most of the Eastern Han, provincial inspectors, except the Colonel Director of Retainers at the capital province, were ranked lower in salary than their jurisdictional subordinates, heads of the commandery-units. Their presence was mainly to supervise the commandery-units in their jurisdiction, and report on local conduct to the central government. However, by the end of the 180’s and in the aftermath of the Yellow Turbans uprising, some inspectors were renamed to mu, or Provincial Governors at a rank higher than the commandery heads with full administrative powers. Thus during the civil wars which followed, the province became the center of local and regional military power.

**Three Kingdoms Military Organizations: Adjustments and Developments**

Changes were made to the Three Kingdoms military organizations to accommodate the new daily necessity of warfare. Of particular interest are the following adjustments and developments:
1. *Dudu* 都督 or Commander-in-Chief

Cao Cao introduced *dudu*, a new office in charge of large operations involving multiple chains of command or military routines within a certain battle zone. His two archrivals soon followed the practice. A Commander-in-Chief’s jurisdiction ranged in size from a few provinces in the largest state of Wei to one single commandery in the smallest kingdom of Shu whose territory was confined to one province only. The Commander-in-Chief was an irregular appointment for the purpose of one campaign or the establishment of one battle zone only. Bearers of this title held their regular ranked offices, some as low as Deputy General. The system of commander-in-chief continued into future dynasties and survived at least in name till early republican China.\(^{61}\)

2. The Four Generals Who Conquers, Fortifies, Subdues, and Pacifies

Besides the continuation of the eight tenured generalships of the Han, some sixteen out of a multitude of temporary generalships under the Three Kingdoms deserve special

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\(^{61}\) Zhou Yu’s official rank was Deputy General when he acted as the Commander-in-Chief in the battle of Red Cliff. For more information about the system, see Zhang Xiaowen張小稳: 12-19.
attention. These were the four Generals Who Conquers, Fortifies, Subdues, and Pacifies with a directional suffix: zhengdong/xi/nan/bei jiangjun 征東/西/南/北將軍, zhendong/xi/nan/bei jiangjun 鎮東/西/南/北將軍, pingdong/xi/nan/bei jiangjun 平東/西/南/北將軍, andong/xi/nanbei jiangjun 安東/西/南/北將軍 etc. The first eight, collectively called the sizheng 四征 and sizhen 四鎮, often exercised chief commandership of a dudu at one of the four battle fronts. Although still sort of contractually-limited, the Generals Who Conquers and Fortifies were ranked higher than those of the Van, Left, Right, and Rear, and in some cases, even the General of Chariots and Cavalry. Again, these were special appointments in accordance with wartime realities.

3. Standing Armies and Guards

Cao Cao established a Regiment of Martial Patrol wuweiyings 武衛營 to guard his personal safety soon after he became the chancellor. The first commander of this elite force, which outgrew the old Five Regiments of the Eastern Han, will be introduced in Chapter Four. Four similar battalions joined the force of imperial guards during the reigns of the first two emperors of the Wei Dynasty. These units in addition to a standing Internal Army or zhongjun 中軍 in the fashion of the Northern and Southern Armies under the Han, protected the central government. An External Army or waijun 外軍, subdivided into the
left, right, and van, spread over all strategic areas of the empire under the usual command of the Generals Who Conquers, Fortifies, Subdues, and Pacifies. Key posts at the Internal Army were the Commissioner or hujun 護軍, in charge of the election of military personnel in the capital region, and the Director or lingjun 領軍 as head of the Five Battalions and the Internal Army.

The Shu and Wu both maintained five armies of the van, rear, center, left, and right. The Shu shared with the Wei a similar chain of command including the Director, Commissioner, and a few other officers. Due to its riverine geography, the kingdom of Wu boasted strong navy with monstrous warships capable of carrying at least eighty horses. Meanwhile a complex deployment of escorts ensured the safety of the emperors and the central government, all with imposing names such as the Five Battalions wuying 五營, Five Regiments wuxiao 五校, Trouble-solvers jiefan 解煩, Daredevils gansi 敢死, and Tiger Archers husheli 虎射吏, etc.

4. Military Masters junshi 軍師

One of the most popular Three Kingdoms offices, the Military Master had a low profile Eastern Han origin.\(^62\) At the fifth of the Nine-Rank system of official hierarchy, it

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\(^62\) The first appearance of this office is in Wei Xiao (died 33)'s biography HHS, ch. 13: 138-44.
lacked prestige but somehow was significant as a transitory or auxiliary post occupied by some greatest names of the Three Kingdoms. Its most famous occupants were Xun You荀攸 (157-214), a senior mastermind of Cao Cao, and Wei Yan魏延 (174-234), a veteran general of the Shu Han. Two variants of the Military Master, Director General of the Household junshi zhonglangjiang軍師中郎將 and Director General junshi jiangjun軍師將軍, were what prepared Zhuge Liang for his ultimate service as the regent chancellor of Shu Han. The exact nature of this office however, remains unsettled between merely advisory to a lord or supervisory over such important matters of an entire army as election, disciplines, and litigations.

5. Hereditary Soldiers, Allowance and Inheritance of Semi-Private Troops

Historical statistics indicate that population during the Eastern Han civil wars had hit an all time low of documented Chinese civilization, at around ten millions. Lives in a falling empire were cut short by natural and man-made disasters. Shortage of soldiers who

63 The eighth century encyclopedia Tong dian通典 attributed various supervisory powers to the military master in Xun You’s case. No such evidence is found in historical documents closer to the dates of the Three Kingdoms.

64 For comparative data, see Ge Jianxiong葛劍雄, one of the leading socio-geographical historians: Zhongguo renkoushi中國人口史, vol. 1.
were often lost faster than found troubled every warlord. A make-do remedy was the Military Households or *shijia* policy, created by Cao Cao and soon adopted by Liu Bei and Sun Quan. The basic idea was to regimentate a selected population into military households where sons were made soldiers and daughters the soldiers’ brides in a hereditary manner. The government could therefore count on a continuous flow of new blood for military services. More about this policy is covered in the next chapter.

A rather unique military tradition in the state of Wu was the allowance and inheritance of semi-private troops. Meritorious vassals of the Sun’s were often entitled to a number of troops between a few hundreds to several thousands as their semi-private properties: the troops along with any lordship were inheritable by their adult sons; the only exceptions seemed to be the successors’ irrelevance to military occupation or criminal convictions against them. Under these two circumstances the semi-private troops were reclaimed by the government and free to be reassigned to other vassals. As a regime grown out of a network of powerful local clans in South China, it was an inevitable choice for the Wu to remain the least centralized of the Three Kingdoms with, among other things, its circumstantial delegations of private troops. Similar practices were a possibility in the peripheral Shu Han, but certainly a prohibition under the Wei whose heartland bureaucracy would have discouraged any attempts at decentralization.
Han Military Aristocracy

Military designations under the Han often coupled bureaucratic appointment with ennoblement. In China, as in most cultures elsewhere, aristocracy preceded bureaucracy. Although its introduction could be much earlier, the formal institution of Chinese aristocracy is datable to the beginning of the Zhou Dynasty. Five noble ranks, or jüe爵 which dictated the various ritualistic and material privileges one may be entitled to, were originally assigned to a multitude of the Zhou principalities. The English approximations are the duke公, marquis侯, earl伯, viscount子, and baron男. However, as the house of Zhou deteriorated, the conventional hierarchy quickly succumbed to influential status. Thus at a states confederation in 678 BC, the princes covenanted by blood-smearing in the following order: the Marquis of Qi齊, the Duke of Song宋, the Marquises of Wei衞 and Chen陳, the Earl of Zheng鄭, the Baron of Xu許, the Earl of Gu滑, and the Viscount of Teng滕.\(^65\) The reunifier and the first empire-builder of China, the Qin, originally an earldom created another twenty-grade military merits system二十等軍功爵 in the mid 300’s BC particularly in recognition of military distinctions. Under the Qin Dynasty, the

five -jue feudal institution was replaced by a centralized government, but the twenty-grade system continued.66

Central authority was again threatened during the early years of the Western Han, successor to the short-lived Qin. This was largely due to the Han’s reinstitution of feudal powerhouses: the dynastic ancestor, Liu Bang had granted two-thirds of the empire, divided into nine kingdoms, to the princes and his most meritorious vassals.67 The Han kingdoms, practically the five–jue Zhou principalities under a new guise, exercised full authority within their domains and seven of them even went to war with the central government in 154 BC. They suffered crushing defeat though, and became subject to reduction and elimination ever since. By the early Eastern Han, the difference between kingdoms and commanderies remained only nominal, and the kings were totally eclipsed by the Chancellors, imperial delegates to supervise and administer their fiefs.

66 The twenty grades of military merits were a para-aristocratic system in that they were hereditary. The system was open to every citizen rich or poor as an incentive for headhunting in interstate wars. Grades of merits were largely based on the numbers of enemy heads severed, and rewards ranged from fiefs, stipends, servants, to freedom of closest relatives from slavery or imprisonment. Holders of the two highest grades, guanneihou關內侯 and chehou徹侯 later renamed to liehou列侯 to avoid Emperor Wudi’s personal name taboo, were close to the Zhou lords minus local political power.

67 “Two thirds” is a rough estimation by Wang, Yü-ch’üan in his An Outline of the Central Government of the Former Han Dynasty: 3. There were two rounds of kingdoms establishment during Liu Bang’s reign: the very first kings were all non-Liu’s異姓王; Liu Bang managed to rid of them gradually, and thereafter only princes may be awarded kingship.
The Han maintained two other regular noble institutions: *hou* 侯 and *yi* 邑, or marquisates and appanages. Neither possessed political autonomy. The appanages were granted to the empresses and the princesses. The marquisates had strong military affiliation: they were the two highest designations from the twenty–grade para-noble system created during the Qin as rewards for outstanding military service; their Han continuation also served the purpose of weakening the semi-independence of the kingdoms. During the war against the seven rebellious kingdoms, the marquisates were the backbone of the imperial force.

The marquisate owners are better defined as lords for their noble title *hou* was a generic term with no technical meaning of a “marquis,” second order under the Zhou hierarchy of nobility. Most of them were non-royalties with considerable military accolades, a precondition for marquisate enfeoffment set by Liu Bang. Subsequent violations of this preordain were frequently met with protests, yet the old marquisates would meet their inevitable, gradual deterioration, and so would any old rules. Public selling of the twenty-grades of military merits started from as early as Emperor Wudi’s reign along with

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68 Upon his crackdown of the non-Liu’s kingdoms, Liu Bang ordained that henceforth no one except princes bearing the imperial surname may receive kingship, no one without military merits hold marquisate,非劉姓不得封王, 非軍功不得封侯, and anyone who disobeys shall be attacked by all under the Heaven. This commandment, marked by an official sacrifice of a white horse, is recorded in various historical texts including the *SJ and HS*. 
admission of non-military merits into the system. Since the late Western Han, the government had already been in the habit of designating imperial distaffs as marquis, often doubled with appointment of permanent generalship despite the fact most recipients never actually saw a combat. Such disgrace to the Han military institution remained commonplace until the rise of the Eastern Han warlords whose relentless rivalries would reintroduce the professional soldiery to an explosive number of new marquisates.

According to Michael Loewe’s statistics, the eleven emperors and the Empress Dowager Lü of the Western Han had altogether conferred 785 marquisates over some 200 years. The numbers seem moderate considering the size of a marquisate, all counties under the Western Han and between a ting, or precinct, a xiang or village, to a few counties the most under the Eastern Han. Like their higher noble peers, the kings whose fiefs were about the size of a commandery, the lords had also succumbed to increasing local authorities in the general trend of a more bureaucratic and less aristocratic government. They were entitled to a prestigious source of income, but deprived of political independence. Their material benefits usually lay in the property of an inheritable manor and the number of households from which they may collect taxes. Part of the revenue was kept as private emoluments while the remainder contributed to the central government. The

entry-level marquisate, Lord Within the Passes or guanneihou 關內侯 would receive income from a certain number of households (usually less than 1000), but without a fief. As the need for wartime rewards arose, almost all the named talons and fangs of the Eastern Han warlords were promoted to this lordship and above.

In general, the Eastern Han matched the Western Han’s military strength at the frontiers. Its weak point is interior reinforcement. By keeping the mass untrained for war, the empire was supposed to stay free from separatist movements, so as not to reproduce the free-for-all brought by the Wang Mang interlude. This, unfortunately, proved to be a shortsighted measure. By removing some key elements of its nationwide conscription program, the Eastern Han had become vulnerable to violent uprisings, such as the Yellow Turbans. The Southern Army used to exist as a secondary standing force in the capital as well as the headquarters where local conscripts throughout the empire fulfilled their military duty. With its dismissal, the presence of central military authority was less felt among the people.

Toward the end of Eastern Han, the regent Generals-in-Chief, with their control of the Northern Army and superiority to both the Three Excellencies and the Imperial Secretariat, rose to dictatorship at court. Their omnipotence was so irrestrainable that the last Han emperors had to entrust eunuchs with certain military command to rebalance imperial power.
In local government, executive and supervisory powers were initially split between the commandery-units and the provinces: in normal times the commandery heads governed independently, only under the surveillance of the lower-ranked provincial inspectors. However, the later restoration of governorship or *mu* empowered the provinces with absolute regional authority. Thus governors of one or more provinces eventually grew to an array of warlords raising private armies in the name of loyal service to the state. High offices at court such as regent generalship were another desirable disguise that would legitimize the warlords’ actions on behalf of the central government.

To sum up, decreasing military readiness, the all-powerful regency of General-in-Chief, and rising autonomy in the provinces all contributed to the disintegration of the Eastern Han. There was always broader issue of personal loyalty to consider: diminishing central authority was always followed by a shift from the concept of public duty to personal loyalty at all levels. The high demand for military talents and years of poor conscript training had made competent warriors one of the most valuable assets to the warlords. The warlords depended on the loyalty and competence of their warriors for survival and success. Men of arms were meanwhile looking forward to the patronage of a promising political figure in a time of troubles. They, too, had to rely on bands of companions, or *qinjin* 親近 usually formed by family members or trusted friends, who were supposed to secure their commandership and bring coherence to the units. They were
often rewarded with formal office and nobility, but underneath an assortment of gleaming
titles was really a generation of desperate men available for a brutal service in the warlords’
ragged armies. Some of them seemed to have become all they could be, while many others
only ruined themselves and their fellows in the most disastrous moments of a falling
empire.

Chapter Two

The Everyday Warriors
Social Standing

Of all the aspects of the Eastern Han society, the most studied is probably the shi(zu)士族 or the shidafu士大夫, a prestigious class whose existence and influences were to last longer than the government system of imperial China.70 Shi is better known as the first of the four-fold occupational divisions in traditional China, shi, nong 农, gong 工, shang 商, meaning respectively public service, peasantry, artisans, and merchants. However, in the context of social status, it was the upper of two broadly divided classes that dictated the theme of Chinese society between late Eastern Han and Tang 唐 (618-907). English translations for the term shi, such as gentlemen, noblemen, or elites, often prove inadequate or inappropriate just like the famous make-do “feudal” for fengjian 封建.71 The very original shi is widely identified as a warrior class during the age of the Eastern Zhou warring states. It fit between the aristocracy and the serfs, somehow corresponding to the knighthood of medieval Europe.72 Since the formation of the first Chinese empire, the new central government had prioritized order and unity over violence, and the meaning of shi


71 For another definition of the shi and its association with medieval great clans, see David G. Johnson: 5-18; 33-44

72 Liu, James J. Y.: 2.
also diversified accordingly. By the end of the Eastern Han, shi, while retaining its original military connotation, had come to describe a socially conscious group with one or more of the following attributes: a) formal scholarship, b) family heritage of distinguished official service; c) rich and powerful landownership in the countryside. Still, many conditions could have affected one’s eligibility for the shi membership. The complexity of this Eastern Han stratum is duly recognized by Patricia Ebrey:

“… I conceive of the shih (shi) as a class with fluid borders: it was not a hereditary caste; families could rise into it or fall out of it. Moreover, there could be marginal cases. Nevertheless, it did matter whether one was or was not a shih…”

The population without the blessing of a shi membership was broadly classified as the shu庶, the ordinary and humble. This lower class in comparison may provide important clues to a better understanding of the dominant shi class. It indeed matters more to the current study because among its most controversial members were some famous Eastern Han warlords and their warriors. One generalization observed that the shi class was home

73 A far more comprehensive analysis of the Han social classes and qualifications is found in Ch’ü T’ung-tsu, Han Social Structure: 63-159.

74 Ebrey, Patricia, “Toward a Better Understanding of the Later Han Upper Class:” 62-3
to most masterminds whereas the *shu* produced many great warriors, or talons and fangs. 75 The two classes contrasted sharply here with their civil and military virtues: the *shi* was marked by learning and wisdom, but some *shu* had to literally fight for honour and prestige. Warriors of course did not represent the entire *shu* population. The most accomplished of them may proudly claim enviable offices, nobilities, estates, everything unattainable by say, a farmer or artisan, and even some less fortunate *shi*, but theoretically they were still no different from the rest of the *shu* class. What may be suggested therefore is that formal scholarship, out of the three possible *shi* attributes mentioned above, is the primary indicator of one’s upper class standing. It seems to agree with the opinion held by some Han contemporaries such as Ban Gu 班固 (32-92) whom, in his dynastic history, *Han shu*, gave a straightforward definition for the *shi* as those who attained status through education. 76 It was essentially by this criterion that most military men, who tended to be under-educated if not illiterate, were disqualified from the “better half” despite the tremendous political and economic powers they might have wielded. 77

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75 Shen, Guoqing 沈國清: 14.


77 The general opinion regarding the undereducation of a military man is well spoken in the biography of Lü Meng 呂蒙 (178-220), one of the greatest commanders in the Three Kingdoms state of Wu. *SGZ*, ch. 54: 2329.
For the very few generals who did meet the education requirement, they could still be easily downgraded by other factors. The warlord Cao Cao is also a celebrated figure in Chinese literature especially for his four-syllable songs based on ancient metre, but he lacked a decent family background which his father, the adopted son of a eunuch, could never give him. Bastardy or birth by concubine was another common barrier to social acceptance. An example of this was Yuan Shao, Cao Cao’s archrival before 200. Yuan bore the surname of one of the greatest shi clans in the empire. Many of his followers were after his family fame. Nevertheless, in the words of his half brother, the son of their father’s principal wife, he was nothing but a nu奴, or household slave. Thus even the most refined military leaders may find themselves thrown into the lower of the two Eastern Han social classes, let alone their talons and fangs. On the other hand, in times of civil unrest while wars practically involved everyone, being a warrior could be the quickest route to wealth and fame as long as one survived the brutality of cold weapon combat. This scenario has been well summarized in the age-old Chinese saying, “Disorder welcomes heroes乱世出英

78 Cao Cao’s father was believed to have been a Xiahou夏侯, and changed his surname after adopted by the eunuch Cao Teng曹騰. The Cao’s and the Xiahou’s were thus closely related. See: Caoman zhuan cited in SGZ, ch. 1: 1.

79 Yuan Shao was an elder half brother of Yuan Shu. SGZ, ch. 6
In very rare cases some Eastern Han warriors were also referred to as *shidafu*, but to really enhance their social status and revive the original meaning of *shi* was another story.\(^{81}\) The rationality of Chinese culture seemed to have successfully prevented the emergence of a Chinese counterpart of the samurai or other varieties of military elitism found elsewhere. Throughout the following centuries of disunion, military strongmen achieved positions as high as emperors of all of the four Southern Dynasties (420-589), but they too, had an identity crisis to deal with as whether they were primarily at the top of a political state or the bottom of a social hierarchy.\(^{82}\) The word *shi* also appeared in a new term, *shijia* which was applied to a separately registered population with hereditary obligation to military service. This will be discussed in the following section.

**The Sources of Warriors**

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\(^{80}\) This expression derived from a famous prediction of Cao Cao’s potential when he was young: “a cunning winner out of disorder*. \(\text{Caoman zhuan}\) cited in *SGZ*, ch. 1: 2.

\(^{81}\) One example of such is found in the line *yu zhujiangzuo shi dafu gong cong rongshi* with 部將佐士大夫共從戎事, *SKZ*, ch. 1: 36.

\(^{82}\) Li, Dingyi 李定一: 196-205
The kind of people who were to join the army varied greatly with different regimes and historical periods. Such variations would determine the quality of the soldiers, the social fabric of an army, its overall characteristic, and combat strength, all significant factors to the well-being of an armed force. In its chapter on the Warring States military affairs, the Warring-States Confucian canon *Xunzi* contains the following observation:

“(Of all the fiercest warriors) … the *jiji* of Qi cannot withstand the *wuzu* of Wei, the *wuzu* of Wei cannot withstand the *ruishi* of Qin.”

The three aforementioned elite troops were the products of different selection criteria and processes. Their ranks in competency were most likely affected by the ways they were enlisted and trained. Likewise, acquaintance with the talons and fangs of the Eastern Han warlords requires a basic understanding of the various forms of enlistment up to their time.

**Conscription (zheng 徵), Recruitment (mu 募), and Shijia (士家)**

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Changes frequented the armed force of traditional China. One general pattern is that the earlier the time period, the higher extraction of its members came from and the better its reputation, with the possible exception of a few non-Chinese regimes that tended to patronize their tribal warrior spirit. This phenomenon was set in the backdrop of three main types of enlistment: conscription, recruitment, and shijia or Households of Hereditary Soldiers.

Conscription is usually defined as compulsory enlistment for military service by law. Its earliest Chinese record dates back to the ancient Shang Dynasty (ca.1600–1000’s BC): divinations on oracle bones mention mobilizations of 3000 to 15000, several of which under the command of King Wuding’s wife, Fuhao, the earliest known female warrior of China. The Shang and its successor Zhou both seem to have regarded military service an honourable duty shared by the ruling houses, the aristocracy, and the common folk. Princes of the Warring States started chariot fighting as young as 15-year-old. As a Zhou social custom for most of its duration, only free residents within the capital region of the Zhou and its vassal states known as the guoren or citizens

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84 Fu Hao, or possible ancient pronunciation as Fu Zi, was a warrior queen active in the mid-1100’s BC and one of the most documented contemporaries of the oracle bones. In 1976, her tomb was unearthed with over 1900 artifacts among which a bronze tripod named after her posthumous title muxin stood one of the most imposing relics of the ancient Shang civilization. Wang Zhaochun: 6.

85 Yang Gan, younger brother of a 17-year-old marquis of Jin, was reported to have engaged in a chariot duel. Duke Xiang, 3rd year (570 BC), Zuo zhuan.
were entitled to military service. Those in the remote areas, or *yeren* (villagers) as well as a large slave population were excluded from conscription. This norm continued until explosive demands for manpower in response to large and permanent territorial conquests made it impossible. When warfare ceased to be a game of the nobles and became cannibalistic in the millions, the rich and famous would naturally turn away from such peril, leaving only the poor and the slaves to risk their lives in return for things like tax incentives or freedom. Accordingly, soldiery was to become increasingly estranged from its elitist origin.

The Qin conscription was the first to operate in a network of counties and commanderies. All males at their seventeenth must register at the local authorities as reservists. Between the ages of 23 and 60 they must complete one year training in the local militia, one year on guard in the capital or at a frontier post, and one month’s corvee each year. In the event of some most decisive campaigns, there had been incidents when 15-year-olds were summoned to the field.

The Western Han policy was a carryover with reduced conscription term: ages of

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86 Zhao, Shouzheng 趙守正: 3-9.

87 Voluminous records of Qin conscription on bamboo strips were unearthed at Shuihudi 睡虎地, Hubei Province in 1975. For more readings see Gao Min 高敏, *Shuihudi qinjian chutan* 睡虎地秦簡初探: 7-15
liability were now between twenty-three and fifty-six.\textsuperscript{88} There was also a height requirement, which in early Han was set at around 155 centimetres.\textsuperscript{89} In the eighth month of each year, local military reviews were held in order to pass or fail conscripts who had finished their training programme, and also to discover the best candidates. For the thirty three or some best years of a man’s life, he would devote only five to the government’s levy (two years’ fulltime service and one month corvee each year on rotation). The result was a decent morale, fresh blood, and an inexhaustible population, which all helped the Western Han military to emerge victorious in most of its gruesome foreign wars. Still, the problem with leviable manpower existed. Although in theory everyone in receipt of state-owned farmland was liable to conscription regardless even the Three Excellencies’ families, people always found ways around it and the conscripts often ended up to be those with limited means.\textsuperscript{90} Moreover, effective conscription relied on an accountable population registration, which could become very problematic especially in domestic unrest. A new method, recruitment, was to replace conscription as the dominant form of enlistment. It was mainly through this and some other auxiliary channels that the warlords’ talons and fangs

\textsuperscript{88} Chen, Baoqiu\textsuperscript{陳寶秋}: 11-15

\textsuperscript{89} Zhao, Ming, \textit{Zhongguo gudai junlü baitai}\textsuperscript{中國古代軍旅百態}: 149

\textsuperscript{90} Sun, Jinming\textsuperscript{孫金銘}: 47-51
commenced their military adventures.

Recruitment is probably not a problem-free interpretation for the Chinese word, *mu*. It means paid enlistment, but the paid Chinese recruits were not necessarily under-trained. The original goal of recruitment was to form some special crack force with extraordinary soldiers like the three aforementioned Warring States elite units. Payments to the recruits could be money or waive of certain duties. In extreme hardship men could join the armies for the sake of basic provisions.

The earliest recruitment under the Han was the result of Emperor Wudi’s long, bitter war against the Xiongnu nomads. This war consumed both men and horses so fast that alternative sources of replenishment had to be opened. The eight regiments of the Northern Army were also manned by professional recruits. However, conscription remained a primary source of soldiers until the anarchy following the collapse of Wang Mang’s transitory regime practically disabled its enforcement.

Meanwhile there had been concerns with high cost of transportation and maintenance as frontier duty usually involved long distance journey from the conscripts’ home. Thus between the years 31 and 47, a series of decrees by the Emperor Guangwu 光武 (r. 25-57), founder of the Eastern Han, outlawed some key components of the conscription

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91 Song, Chao: 40
system such as the local training programme and annual military review. What happened then was the lack of trained conscripts in the provinces. When troubles came, make-do troops were raised locally and largely by means of recruitment. Recruits on such occasions, drawn mostly from the peasantry, merchants, and foreign nationalities, were more or less a joke compared to the capital and frontier veteran troops. Nor did they match the quality of the former conscripts who would have at least received some formal training.

The gradual replacement of conscription with recruitment proved to be a short-sighted and fatal miscalculation of the Eastern Han government. At the beginning of the dynasty, conscription was unfeasible due to the unruly aftermath of a civil war. Instead of resuming full conscription once peace and order were restored, the Eastern Han continued recruitment which should have better served as a wartime option only. Without a ready supply of trained conscripts the provinces became vulnerable to domestic disturbances. Eventually they appeared defenceless before the deathblow to the empire, the Yellow Turbans’ uprising. A vicious cycle soon began after the reigning emperor empowered provincial governors with full civil and military authorities within their jurisdictions. The short-term goal of such expediency was well met: the rebellion was contained and finally put to rout, but a new threat emerged in the once weak provinces that

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92 The discontinuation of many conscript training programs came as a result of a series of imperial edicts issued between the years 31 and 47. See: Xu, Tianlin 徐天麟: 482-5.
had now become too strong to remain loyal to the central government. Governors, generals, and many other nominal servants of the Han wasted no time to establish themselves as warlords. Manpower was crucial to their competitions, and they all craved as many lives at their disposal as possible. Before long the empire’s population had dwindled to a historic low due to the rampage of civil wars in combination with natural disasters. Even the most vigorous enlistments would not yield sufficient numbers of reinforcements. The warlords found a temporary solution though, in the invention of some kind of new human resources management known as the shijia, or Households of Hereditary Soldiers.

The shijia was part of a triple population management aimed to regularize and maximize wartime productivity. The unifier of north China, Cao Cao was the first to divide his people into the regular, the colonial, and the military. The division was based on assigned responsibilities: the former two were taxpayers and labour providers, whereas the military, or the shijia, served full-time in the armies.

93 During the reign of Emperor Shundi (126-143), taxable population was estimated at 49.15 millions; at the end of the Three Kingdoms in 280 the number was about 7.67 millions. The 7.67 millions figure was less than half of the result of another nationwide census conducted in the same year at 16.16 millions, therefore almost certainly flawed by the exclusion of a large unregistered population. During the worst decades of the Eastern Han-Three Kingdoms civil wars around the early 200’s, taxable population must have been significantly lower than 16 millions. For Eastern Han to Western Jin figures, see Nishijima Sadao: 596 and David A. Graff: 35-6.

To ensure a reliable supply of soldiers, a set of strict codes were imposed on the *shijia* population: 1. the *shijia* could never change their registration status, which was not only life-long but also hereditary; 2. the daughters of the *shijia* must marry their own kind; if widowed, their remarriage was again restricted to the soldiery; 3. in case of desertion, the deserter’s wife shall be punishable by slavery or death. If one were born into this population, his chances of self-emancipation by means such as education were almost none; the only hope for a change of fortune probably lay in the prospects of his advancement through the ranks. The population affected by this rather inhumane regimentation soon grew to nationwide as Cao Cao’s two archrivals, Liu Bei and Sun Quan both followed his steps by segregating their own military households.\(^95\) However, the *shijia* soldiers must have been too abused to have a decent morale, and it is unlikely that they had strengthened the warlords’ armies even though they were supposed to display certain professionalism. The military impotence of the future Western Jin dynasty may support this speculation: the Western Jin military consisted of overwhelmingly hereditary soldiers. Most of them were the descendants of the first generation of *shijia* in north China.\(^96\) The outcome of their fight against the waves of nomadic invasions in the early fourth century was a streak of crushing

\(^95\) Ma Zhijie 馬植傑: 235-44.

\(^96\) The northern province of Jizhou 冀州 was once inhabited by over 100,000 *shijia* households. See: Biography of Xin Pi 辛毗 in *SGZ*, ch. 25: 1244.
defeats culminating in the dynasty’s chaotic retreat to the south. It takes of course a lot more to account for the quick fall of China’s traditional center than a mere enlistment failure, but the transfer of shared military duties by the entire population to a selected group does seem to incur inefficiency and discontent, which could have contributed to the general decline of Chinese military power from its Qin-Han grandeur to the Western Jin infamy.

**Other sources of warriors**

A large agricultural society in the tradition of fighting large wars like Han China drew most of its conscripts and recruits from the peasantry who, nonetheless seldom embarked on a successful military career. Most of the named talons and fangs came from some rather offbeat backgrounds instead. They were often outside the traditional occupational divisions of the *shi*, the peasants, artisans, and the merchants, and they often served the examples of a few secondary means of enlistment in addition to official conscription and recruitment.

First there were the volunteer-warriors. These were usually frontiersmen and urban youth devoted to martial arts and willing to make good use of their military skills in the army. The backbones of Emperor Wudi’s Xiongnu campaigns, Wei Qing, Huo Qubing, and
Li Guang, all began their legendary exploits as volunteer enlistees. Their Eastern Han successors such as Lü Bu and Sun Jian, while perhaps equally valiant, played a more destructive role: instead of fortifying the empire through foreign expeditions, their valiance only accelerated its disintegration from a civil war. It is also noteworthy that Cao Cao’s veteran cousins, who had bled with him since his earliest campaigns, formed probably the largest volunteer cohort of the time.

Another important source of the warlords’ armies is the so-called buqu. This Chinese term combines the names of two basic military units under the Han. It means retainers, or private troops. The latter could be a word-for-word translation of jiabing, another term used by historians for the same meaning as buqu. The retainers emerged from a jobless, landless, or homeless population produced by illegal land redistribution during the eclipse of the Eastern Han. Rather than staying within the registered population only to meet the government’s excessive demands for duties and taxation, they chose to disappear into the castles and manors of the great clans where they could expect some stability for labour and services provided for the cause of private militia. There were numerous records

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97 SJ, ch’s. 109, 111.

98 This cousin cohort includes some of the finest warriors in Cao Cao’s camp, all surnamed Cao or Xiahou.

99 See previous chapter, under “Han military organizations.”
of certain clan’s merging into a warlord’s force with its army of retainers. One of the largest retainer forces belonged to Xu Chu 許褚, a young castle master who later became the commander of Cao Cao’s Tiger Guards huwei 虎衛. Its size was described as “several thousand households 數千家.”\textsuperscript{100} Most retainers would eventually fall into semi-slavery as the hereditary soldiers. They were also deemed as transferable property, as evidenced in the inheritance of private troops from Sun Jian and Ma Teng by their sons.\textsuperscript{101}

The last men to fill the armies can be categorized as social outcasts. These included the knights-errant, bandits, convicts, rogues, and surrendered enemies. Interestingly, they often made great talons and fangs. The knights-errant, or xia 俠 (the knightly or chivalrous), had been with Chinese culture since the Warring States Period. According to James J. Y. Liu, “knight-errantry was a way of behaviour rather than profession; those who took justice into their own hands and did what they thought necessary to redress wrongs and help the poor and the distressed” would befit a knight-errant. He has also characterized the Chinese knights-errant with eight good qualities from altruism to generosity.\textsuperscript{102} Still, their outright trademark is the use of violence,

\textsuperscript{100} SGZ, ch. 18: 926.

\textsuperscript{101} SGZ, ch’s 36, 47.

\textsuperscript{102} Liu, James J. Y.: 1-6
usually in an unlawful way and involving some assassination business. Therefore it is no
wonder that these menaces to an orderly society had been subject to official persecution.
The Han emperors were among the harshest persecutors. Ironically, an Eastern Han court
memorial still listed the reciprocal slaughter of revenge seekers amid the major causes of
unnatural deaths among the citizens.\textsuperscript{103} In reciprocal murders a knight-errant could be an
avenger or a victim, whose representations are found in two of Cao Cao’s most fearsome
warriors: one made a name as a cool assassin in broad daylight, and one had to change
surname early in his teens to evade retaliation.\textsuperscript{104} Both were indicative of the prevalence of
vengeance in the Han society.

Despite the apparent higher death toll vengeance claimed than most other crimes,
its usual executors, the knights-errant either hired or voluntary, continued to enjoy positive
portrayals in official histories. The reason might well be their embodiment of a few
principles valued by the various schools of thought, such as the Taoist individualism and
Confucian till-death-honour and loyalty. Sima Qian was the first to honour knight-errantry
by designating a “Biography of Assassins”刺客列傳 in the SJ. Since then conventional
view has been at least in sympathy with the knights-errant, that they represented some
\textsuperscript{103} Lewis, Mark Edward, \textit{Sanctioned Violence in Early China}: 88-89

\textsuperscript{104} These two were Dian Wei and Zhang Liao. More details about their lives are to follow in Chapter 4.
higher moral realizations than just another band of lawbreakers. Their service in the military was thus justifiable if not quite desirable.

The more unfavourable and irregular servicemen were the convicts, rogues, and bandits. Mobilizations of convicts began as early as in the semi-historical Xia Dynasty (pre-1600’s BC). The last Shang king was also believed to have mobilized a large convict and slave force in a desperate fight against the Zhou invasion. A similar incident recurred some 800 years later when the second emperor of Qin (r. 210-207 BC) freed ten thousands of the “redcoat” zheyi 赭衣 convicts and slaves to defend his falling empire. The records of such repeated incidents seem to suggest their peculiarity, that the early Chinese military featured restricted membership; its mixture with convicts and slaves was an abnormality, and could be symbolic of the end of a dynastic cycle. The central and western Asian campaigns under the reign of the Han emperor Wudi were at least twice reinforced by ten thousands of convicts and mischievous youth, or e-shaonian 惡少年, but for a victorious cause. Since then the enlistment of bad social elements had become much less a kind of omen but just another secondary source of manpower. This practice had dual effects upon imperial China’s military force and society in general. On one hand, convicts, especially

105 See the records of the Xia-Shang and Shang-Zhou transitions in SJ, ch. 4: 62, 79.

106 SJ, ch. 7: 244-9.

those on death row, could make daredevil soldiers for their gain of a second life, and sending young troublemakers off to the front would have certainly made streets and villages safer. On the other hand, the increasing presence of bad elements must have seriously undermined the integrity of the military. When criminals and bandits joined the rank and file, though irregularly, soldiery would face the consequence of disesteem. This situation was of course in addition to the rise of things like the civil service examination that contributed to the transformation of traditional China from its early warrior aristocracy to a centralized bureaucracy dominated by trained scholars. Testimonial to the military’s reputation at its worst were two popular proverbs still heard in today’s Chinese language: “Good quality iron is not for the nailery, a decent man does not fill the soldiery,”好鐵不打釘，好男不當兵 and “A scholar will always be at a loss of words before soldiers regardless his power of reasoning秀才遇到兵，有理講不清.”

A further discussion on the experiences of the post-Han Chinese soldiery is beyond the scope of this essay, but it is safe to say for now that the Eastern Han warriors stood a milestone in the history of the Chinese military for their increasingly complex backgrounds.

All considered, the troops under the Eastern Han warlords could not have been

108 Documented origin of popular sayings like these often eluded due to their spoken nature. One opposite example was found in the lines of a wartime lyric, “decent men must join the army,”好男要當兵 by the patriotic poet Ke Ling 柯霛 (1909-2000) after the fall of Shanghai to the Japanese in November 1937. Obviously even Chinese intellectual attitudes toward soldiery were circumstantially adaptable.
great ones. They were first of all, a demobilized generation from over 100 years’
deterioration of the universal conscription system. Most of them had seen nothing even
remotely resembling a combat until their participation in one of the most brutal civil wars
fought in imperial China.

Secondly, the morale of any given troop was likely to be low mainly because of
war-weariness among the restless but ever-increasing shijia households. An almost routine
measure was for the warlords to hold the families of an entire army hostage when it was on
campaigns. Thus the problem of low morale and disloyalty must have been an
across-the-board one that had affected generals and soldiers alike.109

Finally, the warlords’ camps were manned by almost all walks of life. While
unconventional elements like rogues, assassins, and bandits might have reduced an armed
force to no more than a band of desperadoes, their adventurous spirit did make some
Greatest warriors ever known to Chinese culture. After all, the talons and fangs of the
Eastern Han warlords have been the most romanticized military figures of all China. What
one should bear in mind is that the troops they had joined were probably not so great, and
certainly far behind the greatness of the two official Chinese forces responsible for the Qin
unification and the Western Han expeditions.

109 The hostage practice is recorded in the biography of Xin Pi, SGZ, ch. 25: 1244.
Kingdoms state of Wu, he has the following generalization on the ragged armies of the time:

“There was some minimal organization in the armies of the contending warlords, such as the obvious division between horsemen and foot-soldiers, and we have observed that a commanding officer would surround himself with a core of companions, skilled soldiers who owed him personal allegiance and served as bodyguards. As for equipment, uniforms, supply and general co-ordination, however, the texts indicate either that they were completely lacking or, when they were present, that this was exceptional. For the most part, these armies were simple armed mobs, with soldiers driven variously by loyalty or fear of their commanders, by personal desperation, and by the hope of plunder to enhance their miserable lives. And they were accompanied by a mass of camp-followers – sometimes these were wives and children, but more normally they were cooks and prostitutes, peddlers and gamblers, and a few who specialized in care of the sick and wounded…”110

Above is a vivid picture of an everyday troop during the Eastern Han civil wars. The bigger picture was, after all, extreme human conditions responsible for the lowest population ever and literally, one of the most cannibalistic eras in Chinese history. From

110 de Crespigny, Rafe, Generals of the South: 266
official historical records alone more than 120 incidents of cannibalism spotted the entire course of Chinese civilization especially during dynastic transitions, which saw hunger-stricken or simply cold-blood armies including those of the Eastern Han warlords packed dry meat from human remains.Prostitutes, peddlers and other camp-followers were already the more civilized elements in “simple armed mobs” whose lives were often not just a matter of misery, but of survival between to eat or to be eaten as much as to kill or to be killed. How an average soldier survived his days, other than those obvious moments of truth, invites questions like what he did when not embattled, how he made a living, whether he had any form of entertainment or fun, how he might acquire himself a family or merely a woman and so on. Below are some answers divided into several topics.

**Daily Necessities**

The Tang woman poet, Chen Yulan 陳玉蘭 wrote a poem titled “To My Husband,”  

*jifu 寄夫* which reads in my translation:

My husband is guarding the frontier whilst I stay in the southern land of Wu

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111 For a long list of documented Chinese cannibalism from the 1100’s BC to 1968, see Chong, Key Ray, *Cannibalism in China: 158-159.*
夫戍邊關妾在吳

The west wind has blown upon me, and I’m worried about him.

西風吹妾妾憂夫

A line of my words takes a thousand teardrops:

一行書信千行淚

When coldness neared you, has the clothing package arrived?

寒到君邊衣到無

A fine piece of seemingly feminine sentimentality, this poem bears historical testimony that the Tang frontier conscripts were responsible for their own clothing.¹¹²

Similar evidence is also found in China’s two earliest extant family letters. These letters, unearthed from a late Warring States Qin tomb in 1976, were written on wooden strips by the two brothers called Heifu and Jing. The addressee was someone named Zhong at their home. The first letter says that the two brothers were separated the day before, but later reunited. Their troops were attacking the city of Fan. The defence was tough. They were not sure if they could survive the battle. They requested some silk clothing or cash. The second letter, marked urgent, was written after the city fell. The

¹¹² *QTS*, vol. 799: 30.
brothers were well, and they asked for some cash and cloth. The siege they survived was most likely an episode in the Qin’s decisive conquest of the southern kingdom of Chu in 223 BC.\textsuperscript{113} The brothers set out in winter and when the climate turned warm, they had to ask home for emergency summer clothing when on the move.

One may wonder whether, under the predominant conscription system of the Qin, Western Han, and Tang military, necessities such as soldiers’ outfits were supposed to be all self-sufficient or partially provided for by the government. The answer is elusive among textual sources due to the scarcity of records. However, archaeological discovery at a Han excavation site seems to suggest two kinds of provisions, personal wear, which were the conscripts’ responsibility, and uniforms, which were government-distributed, but for a price.\textsuperscript{114} The fact that the Han conscripts had to purchase their uniforms made them the owners of all their outfits and thus, entitled to free clothing and accessories trade. All trades were exclusively military. There were business officers to record transactions and report them periodically. There was also some price control. Payment could be made in cash or a military bill with a consigner. If the debtor failed to clear the bill within the prescribed time, he might be charged with fraud and penalized by a reduction of his stipend and ration. In

\textsuperscript{113} For reading and dating of these letters, see Zhao Huacheng 趙化成: 42.

\textsuperscript{114} The Eastern Han bamboo strips from Juyan 居延漢簡 are rich in information about the everyday lives of the frontier soldiers. Wang Zhenya 王震亞: 25-9.
the event of a soldier’s death, higher authorities such as the garrison commanders or frontier Chief Commandants would pass all his belongings, after proper record keeping, to his family.

The personal belongings of a conscript were usually more than a mere wardrobe. Other typical items, according to the “Military Treatise,” or Bing zhi 兵志 in the Xin Tang shu 新唐書, ranged from bow, arrows, chisel, whetstone to felt hat and gaiters. Armour and helmets were however, crafted and stored in the state armouries and only sold to those who could afford them.115 More possible gear for the conscripts to buy are found in the lines of the famous Ballad of Mulan 木蘭詞, who was said to have sung “oh let me to the east market to buy saddle and horse...”東市買駿馬116 Indeed, conscript service in traditional China could have been an expensive business, which might explain why its providers in general enjoyed a more noble reputation than soldiers levied through recruitment and other avenues. In the latter’s case, the government would cover most of the soldiers’ necessities including casual wear because their enlistment was not duty-bound but rather reciprocal in nature. One of the most generous regimes was the Northern Song 北宋 (960-1125) whose military force of unprecedented size was almost entirely formed by recruits. A 1029

115 Xin Tang shu 新唐書, ch. 50: 1323-40

imperial edict entitled all cavalrymen to seven sets of spring and winter attires, and foot soldiers to seven spring and six winter sets. Such generosity usually meant near-bankruptcy expenditure, from which the Northern Song never managed extrication despite its numerous reform efforts. The Eastern Han and Three Kingdoms warlords were much poorer sponsors, so poor that their troops routinely survived on shortage of equipment and supply. Still, the warlords’ reliance on recruits placed an extra burden on an already bankrupt empire. One final note is that, unlike the conscripts, the recruits had no right to free trade of their equipment, which were supplied by the state and hence remained state property.

Military Market 軍市

Ancient warfare, just like its modern cousin, is fundamentally economy-driven. Individuals who joined the military were also motivated, sometimes indirectly, by economic gains. The archaic military text, Jun Chen or Military Divinations exposed this commercial relationship in the following phrases: “Soldiers do not come to a moneyless army, neither do they go to a rewardless one.”

\[117 \textit{Song shi}}宋史, ch. 194 -7.\]

\[118 \text{Three lines quoted in the } \textit{Sun zi} \text{ are all that is left of the } \textit{Jun chen} \text{ which, along with another lost...} \]
One special establishment to enrich military life in old China was the military market, or *jun shi*, a place where soldiers traded commodities among themselves or with other members of the society.

The operation of military markets spanned over 1000 years between late Warring States and the Five Dynasties (907-960), with the Han to Three Kingdoms being its heydays. Its disappearance was mainly due to the rise of medieval commercialization and urbanization, and the superfluous material benefits the Song recruits received from the central government. ¹¹⁹

During its existence, military market was subject to special administration and regulations. One of its earliest textual sources datable to the mid-Warring States, the *Book of Lord Shang* or *Shangjun shu* contains a list of prohibitions that the military markets in the state of Qin must observe. Some prohibitions are women so they do not demoralize the troops, illegal food dealing as it threatens the lifeline of an army, and idlers whose presence disintegrates a disciplined unit. ¹²⁰ Another text, the *SGZ*, indicates that the military text, could have come from as early as late Shang to 659 BC the latest. Xu Yong, *Xianqin bingshu tongjie*: 457-60.

¹¹⁹ Zhai Mailing regards the operation of military markets one of the foremost indicators of commercial culture in a patriarchal society. She argues the Pre-Song military market was a euphemism for women’s market, or *nüshi* 女市, where prostitution was the top business. See her “Junshi yu nüshi:” 132.

¹²⁰ Zhang, Jue ed., *Shangjun shu quanyi*: 11-30
military markets were a rarity during peacetime or in the rear due to restrictive policies; however, wartime commanders were encouraged to open markets at their own discretion to improvise as needs arose and to minimize disturbances to civilian life. There were also severe punishments for soldiers who forced unfair deals with the civilians.

All transactions were taxable, one source estimated at about 2% of the amount of a deal. The taxes generated from the military markets thus became an accountable source of army income. Common practice under the Han was to exempt such income from government taxation, therefore it often ended up in the field commanders’ personal treasuries. The fact that commanders controlled revenues from military market activities was double-edged: the good generals would reward their troops with market income, in return they could count on heightened morale and strengthened loyalty of the soldiers; the bad ones just made some worst examples of military corruption, one of which was the Ferghana campaign of 104 BC under Li Guangli 李廣利 (died 88 BC), brother-in-law of Emperor Wudi. Combat casualties of this campaign were low, but deserters and sick death

121 See the biography of Pan Zhang潘璋 in SGZ, ch. 55: 2378

122 Xue Yingqun薛英群: 271

123 One of the Han commanders to benefit from this income was Feng Tang馮唐 in SJ, ch. 123: 2707-08.
The most detailed records of a Han military market have come from archaeological discoveries at Juyan, a large garrison in Inner Mongolia. The commodities once traded there were revealed to have included grain, clothing, meat, vegetables, livestock, agricultural tools, farms and houses, and weapons. Army officers were actively involved in market administration, and all traders, civilian or military, must hold a special pass. Born into an age of heightened military market activities, the Eastern Han to Three Kingdoms soldiery did have quite a commercial life, despite wartime devastation brought by and upon them.

The Soldiers’ Women: Marriage and Prostitution

Soldiers under the Qin and Western Han conscription system were civilians in peacetime: they made a living, usually as farmers, artisans, or merchants, received periodical military training, paid active service on rotation as self-sufficient conscripts, and resumed their civilian life when off duty. Even within the bureaucracy of the central government, there was no tenured generalship until the 100’s (the various ways of

\[124 \textit{SJ}, \text{ch. 123: 3196-202.}\]

\[125 \text{Xue Yingqun: 104-9}\]
enlistment including conscription and recruitment have been discussed in the previous section). Marriage must not have been a difficult fulfillment for most men simply because soldierly was never a full time occupation. However, the rise of recruits and worse still, the hereditary soldiers or shijia, did seem to have introduced a massive population of bachelors desperate for a bride. As aforementioned, daughters and widows of the shijia were already obliged to marry and remarry their own kind as an accountable source of wives. Still, the ragged armies of the Eastern Han warlords needed more ways to solve the marriage problem for their soldiers whose dangerous life-long service made them the least desirable husbands. Plundering was a regular, though unofficial solution. The Biographies of Virtuous Women 列女傳 in the HHS contain records of incidents where women, as spoils of war, fought to death against rape and forced marriage. One of the most infamous plunders was committed by the troops of Dong Zhuo:

“In the second month of 189, Dong’s troops ran into a peaceful gathering of townsfolk at the city of Yangcheng 阳城 for an early spring festival. Dong let his troops attack the civilian crowd. They beheaded all the males, took all the women and everything

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126 The wife of a certain Xu Sheng 許升 was one of such named virtuous women featured in HHS, ch. 84: 811-12.
valuable… the women were later ‘distributed’ to the soldiers as wives and consorts…”¹²⁷

For women in a war-torn empire, what could be worse than forced marriage was still military prostitution. Although records usually shy at whether and how women used exclusively for intercourse were paid, given the context of extreme wartime destitution which might as well have denied them of any payment but basic subsistence, prostitution seems less a misnomer than sex slavery. A peaceful family life was a luxury to most soldiers, and more often than not the women in their lives were not their legal spouses, but army prostitutes, known in Chinese as yingji 營妓. The late Ming dictionary, Zhengzi tong 正字通, associated this term yingji with Emperor Wudi of Han, who was allegedly responsible for “the formal establishment of the yingji facility, to satisfy wifeless soldiers.” 漢武始置營妓, 以待軍士之無妻室者¹²⁸ At least one of his generals, Li Ling was less than hospitable to female presence in the armies, which he considered as being in conflict with a supposedly macho unit. On one occasion he ordered an execution of all women, prostitutes or relatives of his soldiers.¹²⁹ Indication of yet centuries earlier similar practice is also

¹²⁷ Biography of Dong Zhuo in SGZJZJY, ch. 6: 337.

¹²⁸ This late Ming to early Qing dictionary contains twelve volumes and some 33000 entries, most of which are abundantly annotated.

¹²⁹ HS, ch. 54: 779-82.
found in the *Yuejue shu* 越絕書, an Eastern Han text stating that, during the 470’s, Gou Jian 句踐 (r.497–465 BC), king of Yue 越, once “sent widows guilty of misconduct to the mountains, so his sexually frustrated soldiers could play with these women and have their needs met.” This actually sounds more like sex slavery, or an Eastern Han and earlier utilization of bad women in violation of proper widowhood.

The period in question was a good host for military prostitution. Incessant civil wars had left married soldiers and their wives apart for years and single soldiers more likely to remain single. In the warlords’ camps, prostitution was not only a sanctioned presence, but also a legitimate reward. One famous recipient of such reward was Xiahou Dun 夏侯惇 (died 220), Cao Cao’s veteran cousin who received prostitutes and female entertainers 伎樂 名倡 in the year 216. Cao Cao’s command on this occasion compared the worthiness of Xiahou Dun to that of an Eastern Zhou vassal who received musical instruments from his lord for peaceful diplomacy with the western nomads. This suggests that prostitutes could have been quite an exceptional honor to the warriors of the time.

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130 *Yuejue shu*: 281.

131 The vassal was Wei Jiang 魏絳 of Jin 晋, Duke Xiang, 11th year, *Zuo Zhuan*. Cao Cao sounded a bit sarcastic: a talons and fangs material like Xiahou Dun was not refined enough to appreciate musical instruments. Women, for sex and entertainment purposes, were a more suitable reward.
Again, not everyone regarded women an honorable asset to the military, especially the civil bureaucracy. In 214, Cao Hong 曹洪 (died. 232), another veteran cousin of Cao Cao, hosted a banquet in celebration of his latest victory. A group of barely naked young women performed exotic dance. This was met with outright condemnation by one of the guests, a Grand Administrator who saw in female nudity in public the ghost of ancient tyrannies. Ashamed, Cao Hong called off the show instantly. What his women revealed in this case was indeed more than their bodies, but the Chinese civil-military duet on ideological and practical keynotes: the military were patronized well with official sanction of their less refined indulgence; the civil elites or shi could nonetheless dwarf them, even those of a higher command, into some social underdog by virtue of moral eloquence.\textsuperscript{132}

**Military Pastimes**

When providing markets, brides or prostitutes to meet the typical financial and personal needs of an average adult male, an ancient Chinese army camp was also an arena where its men spent their extra energies in various combat-related games. The *Shiji* recorded stone-sling 投石 and long jump 超距 as the two sports the Qin soldiers played

\textsuperscript{132} *SGZJZY*, ch. 25: 1388. This incident clearly denies any distinction between prostitutes and female entertainers at a warrior’s service: if Cao Hong’s women performed exotic dance, they most certainly slept with him as well.
before they vanquished Chu in 223 BC.\textsuperscript{133} The \textit{Book of Songs} left one of the earliest descriptions of archery match among the Western Zhou gentlemen.\textsuperscript{134} However, of more particular relevance to the Han military were wrestling and a form of soccer.

The Han term for wrestling was \textit{juedi} 角抵. During the Tang-Song era it became known as \textit{xiangpu} 相撲, or sumo. This grappling-based game, possibly of Warring States origin, was officially introduced in the spring of 108 BC under Emperor Wudi’s patronage. It must have won huge popularity as the Han writers often used the term \textit{juedi} as a general reference to all folk amusements, especially acrobatics.\textsuperscript{135} Naturally, the Han soldiers would not have missed the fun of this nationwide pastime.

The oldest Chinese names for soccer, \textit{cuju} 蹴鞠 or \textit{taju} 蹴鞠, came from Han texts. Unlike wrestling whose function, as records show, did not go beyond mere amusement until about the Tang, soccer was indeed integrated into formal military training, and listed under the military chapter in the \textit{HS}’s treatise section.\textsuperscript{136} The Han soccer, according to the \textit{HS} annotator Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581-645), was a solid ball wrapped in leather and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{133}SJ, ch. 73: 2238-41.
\item \textsuperscript{134}Shi, 312: “The Vermillion Bow” \textit{tonggong} 彤弓.
\item \textsuperscript{135}Gao Rui 高銳: 200
\item \textsuperscript{136}HS, ch. 30: 1762
\end{itemize}
stuffed with feathers and hair. The Han historian Liu Xiang 刘向 (ca. 77-6 BC) dated its invention to the Warring States period and characterized it as military. It was certainly a welcomed coincidence with a major development in ancient tactical maneuver, from chariot warfare to the cooperation of cavalry and infantry units. Now soldiers must move faster, endure longer, and react quicker. Soccer was probably the best all-round sport to enhance speed, stamina, and reflexes. Many Han commanders had made good use of this game. The best known of them was the young general Huo Qubing, who inspired his tired troops with soccer during one of Han China’s deepest penetrations into the Xiongnu steppe.

Finally, due to the active Han-Three Kingdoms aquatic warfare, the Chinese version of tug-of-war could have been popular among the warlords’ naval forces. The earliest possible form of such game, named in the pre-Tang era as qiangou 牵钩 or shigou 施钩, can be found in a Mohist article. It seemed to be mainly a technique to hook in the enemy warships when they were fleeing, and keep them back when they were attacking.

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137 Detailed definition for the taju was given by Yan Shigu in his interlinear annotation to the HS, ibid.

138 This comes from the fragments of Bielu 别錄, a lost anthology by Liu Xiang. The treatise of the HS ch. 30 contains what is left of it.

139 SJ, ch. 111: 51.

140 The aquatic hook was introduced in the “Lu Wen” 魯問 section of Chapter 13 in Mo Zi 墨子’s basic writings. Further discussions on the Mohist military chapters can be found in Robin D. S. Yates’ “The Mohist on Warfare: Technology, Technique, and Justification”, Journal of the American Academy of Religion, XLVII/3 Thematic Issue S (September, 1980) 549-603.
This naval connection always follows the Chinese tug-of-war, and is even reflected in its modern name *bahe* (拔河), or river tug. It also appeared to be more associated with the south, the mid to lower Yangzi valley to be precise, where aquatic tradition was stronger.
Military Equipment: Physical and Mental

War is both an art and science. A strong military force, ancient or modern, must boast sophisticated armament as well as strategies and tactics. The former is the tangible product of science and technology, the latter the intangible fruit of thoughts. The common impression is that the Chinese value sagacity over pugnacity and such preference had frequented the very large corpus of military treatises ever since the time of Sun Zi. The emergence of massive troops entailed an unquestionable obedience to the commander, thus Sun Zi explained one task of a commander as to obliterate the senses and volitions of his troops so that they would perceive and think only what he directed.141 Any personal pugnacity, like the masculine chivalry from the bygone age of noble chariot matches, must be abandoned. Those over aggressive and inclined to battle on their own were even subject to martial code severe as that imposed on the flight of cowards. Sun Zi listed those who out of heroism are resolved on death and those of irascible temperament amongst the five types of men who threatened the army; another Warring States strategist, Wu Zi reckoned individual bellicosity as one fatal weakness of the Qin soldiers because it fragmented the

141 Liu Yin 刘寅: 49b-50a.
Nevertheless, the above ideas represent only some ideal states suggested by theoreticians. In reality the Chinese warriors never followed them religiously. Time and again Chinese histories jolted through bursts of raw martial energies. The Han-Three Kingdoms transition provides perhaps the greatest irony to the theories of classical militarist schools. Victories often relied exclusively on the valor of the warlords’ talons and fangs, and some warlords even disobeyed the classics themselves by risking their more precious lives in direct combat. The epoch these warriors made had left China plenty heroic tales and serves certainly an evidence that traditional Chinese warfare could have as much to do with men’s bodies as their minds.

The subject of the current study is the less cultured warriors, whom also happened to be set against a historical backdrop of thrilling personal heroism. Therefore in treating the two types of military equipment to arm one’s body and mind, armament and strategies, this chapter gives priority to the former, an immediate matter of life or death to the warriors. New developments in military theories, as well as codes of battle particular to the period will also be discussed here. However, earlier works such as the Warring States corpus that must have been well known to the Eastern Han warlords, have already received much

142 Ibid: 18b.
scholarly coverage elsewhere, and thus will take very minimal space of my writing when required.

**Physical Equipment: Arms and Armor**

Armaments have existed for the purposes of offense and defense. Pre-modern warriors throughout the world all carried weapons and donned armor to meet these two purposes. Weapons always grow sharper, faster, and deadlier as civilizations advance; armors only became thicker and sturdier until modern men gave them up totally at gunpoint. The Chinese made their first major breakthrough in military technology between the Warring States and early Western Han. The results of this breakthrough were two: chariots to cavalry operation, and bronze to iron weaponry. The inconvenient chariots and the classic bronze weapons had co-existed with their new replacements for centuries until they finally phased out in the early Western Han.  

In terms of battle gear, the Eastern Han warriors stood midway in between their relatively under-equipped early Iron Age predecessors and their much heavier-packed successors during the Period of Disunion. They shot and fought on horseback with iron wrought or steel weapons, and wore mainly

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143 Yaông Hong, *Gudai bingqi shihua*: 42.
iron plates but occasionally leather armors. The straight, thrusting sword or jian剑, symbolic of the bronze age nobility, was no longer their favorite; instead they preferred the more practical saber or dao刀, halberd ji戟, and lance shuo槊.144

Before any possible romanticization about these mounted Chinese warriors, one should bear in mind that horses were a rarity to traditional China. The Chinese were not naturally horse-bound people. While competing with the nomads they often found themselves at disadvantage. During the last Sino-Xiongnu campaign led by the Regent General Wei Qing, the Han forces set out with 140000 mounts and returned with less than 30000. After Wei Qing died, no further military action occurred because the Han was reportedly short of horses.145 The divided empire of the Eastern Han was in a more deficient state than the bankruptcy as a result of Emperor Wudi’s exhausting foreign wars. If one could easily spot uncovered human remains in the field and poverty-stricken woman dumping her own baby on the roadside as witnessed in a contemporary poem, it would have been inadvisable to expect good horse supply, nor plenty expert riders.146 In addition, the deterioration of the universal conscription system since the early Eastern Han, as already

144 Ibid: 45.
145 For repeated equine shortages of the agricultural empire of Han to early medieval China, consult Madeline K Springs: 102.
146 One of the most famous literary records of such devastations is Wang Can王粲(177-217)’s narrative poem Seven Sorrows (Qiai)七哀, see translation and comments by Ronald C. Miao: 127-33.
discussed in Chapter 2, had long left the nation in shortage of properly trained soldiers, let alone elite cavalrymen.

Nevertheless, just as the old Chinese saying goes “Disorder Welcomes heroes,” extraordinaires were always available to save troubled times or make matters worse. Out of the largely demilitarized Eastern Han population there were still hordes of “supermen” to serve the warlords as talons and fangs. Although in general the northern or western frontiersmen tended to be more formidable due to their interaction with the nomadic tribesmen, regional and demographical factors were not that crucial as the southeasterners could easily offset their disadvantages with better aquatic war skills. Archery was one vital skill to all, though. Everywhere in the empire, whether native to horsemanship or seamanship, produced remarkable archers. Some of the greatest warriors from the northwest such as Dong Zhuo rode with two bows and shot left and right.  

Shooting on horseback, a major task for the mounted troops, required both precision and tremendous brawn. The Han archers used two main projectile weapons, compound bow and crossbow. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Chinese crossbow, possibly a fifth century BC invention with an intricate trigger mechanism for farther and deadlier shooting based on the principle of released velocity, was already a more popular

\[147 \, SGJZJY, \, ch. \, 6: \, 335.\]
equipment for the Han military than the compound bow. A typical Han compound bow was 130 cm long, and was measured in terms of its string pressure, or shi. A normal compound bow required 1.5 shi, or 200 modern pounds to draw. The crossbows were either leg or arm-operated, known as juezhang or bozhang. They came in several sizes measuring from one to ten shi. The juezhang crossbows were usually eight shi or heavier, capable of inflicting distant damage. One must use both legs, when sitting, to stretch a juezhang crossbow for loading arrow, which was held in the teeth meanwhile. A mounted archer could never overcome such inconvenience and instead made do with compound bow or six shi and lighter crossbows. These bozhang crossbows, although less inflictive, were still good for approximately a 260 meters’ range.

At mid range, the talons and fangs favored the halberd, a tested old-timer, and two relative newcomers, the lance and shafted long broadsword that were to dominate the battlefields in the upcoming Period of Disunion. The halberd was one of China’s oldest weapons since recorded history. Its typical form was a spear about 2.5-meter- long with a slender blade (sometimes three) fixed across the head for offensive versatility. Like most other weapons, the halberd gained size and weight over the ages, hence the Western Han

148 Joseph Needham: vol. 5, Part 6: 30-(d)-(2)

149 Micheal Loewe, *Everyday Life in Early Imperial China During the Han Period 202 BC-AD 220*: 85
halberds were longer and heavier than their mainly bronze Warring States precursors, whereas the Eastern Han halberds, almost all iron and steel now, were even more intimidating.\textsuperscript{150} Cao Cao’s bodyguard, Dian Wei (died 197), a man of exceptional strength, wielded a pair of giant steel halberds weighing eighty \textit{jin}, or fifty-three modern pounds. He was also a master of the handy halberds, or \textit{shouji} 手戟, a compact variant of the traditional halberd often found in historical texts as an auxiliary weapon designed for throw.\textsuperscript{151}

The venerable halberd, after well over 1000 years’ active service in the Chinese military, reached its heyday during the Three Kingdoms’ rivalry. Within the next 300 years’ of disunion, it would increasingly give way to its two younger cousins, \textit{shuo} or lance, and \textit{changdao}長刀, literally long saber, and eventually retire to ceremonial status only. The Eastern Han etymologist dictionary \textit{Shi Ming}释名 gave the following definition for \textit{shuo}: a spear \textit{mao}矛 over one \textit{zhang}丈 and eight \textit{chi}尺, or 4.6 meter long, is called a \textit{shuo}, and carried on horseback.\textsuperscript{152} Apparently it was some sort of a super long lance almost double the length of an average Han halberd. The most famous lancer of the time was probably Lü Bu, often mistaken as a matchless halberdier due to his fictional

\textsuperscript{150} Duan Qingbo段清波: 52-62
\textsuperscript{151} SGZ, ch. 7: 382; ch. 18: 924; ch. 49: 2157
\textsuperscript{152} This 27-chapter, 8-volume etymologist dictionary was ascribed to Liu Xi劉熙 of late Eastern Han.
representation in later folk literature.\footnote{153 Lü Bu’s biography in SGZJZJY, ch. 7: 404-15 twice mentioned that his weapon was lance.} The \textit{changdao} was another of Dian Wei’s favorite weapon. Its name only suggests a longer-than-usual saber. The first indication of its exact length came about 200 years later in a folk song, where a certain northwestern horseman Chen An\textsuperscript{154} 陈安 was extolled as capable of fighting with both a seven-\textit{chi}-long saber and a serpentine lance.\footnote{154 Chen appears to be an outstanding Jin spearsman in the \textit{Song of Longshang}隴上歌. For his accounts, see \textit{Weijin nanbeichao wenxue cankao ziliao}魏晉南北朝文學參考資料: 3-4.} Since weapons in general increased in size, the Eastern Han long broadsword would have been most likely under seven \textit{chi}, or 1.6m long. At this length, some shaft or at least an extra long hilt would have been attached to the curvy blade. This would make the long broadsword reminiscent of the huge shafted crescent scimitar the Chinese had traditionally ascribed to their folkloric God of War, Guan Yu. However, the icon of crescent scimitar came from late medieval weaponry, and whether the long broadsword had actually armed the historical Guan Yu remains questionable.

The shorter and lighter version of the long broadsword was the saber, with a universal ring-shaped handle. Most unearthed samples measure about 110cm long and come with lacquered scabbards. Some are among the best products of early steel making with a hardness and elasticity attained only after thirty times or more fire tempering.\footnote{155 Yang Yi楊毅: 73.} The
saber in Han times was a new addition to close combat weaponry. Its hacking and slashing capacities quickly proved to be more practical than the thrust-oriented sword, or *jian*, especially for the fast moving cavalry. The much older sword, a straight pointed blade good for thrusting only and a reminder of Bronze Age warfare, now appeared too gentlemanlike before the new era of aggravating bloodshed. It continued to serve the warriors, but more as symbolic adornment than regular equipment for real combat.\(^{156}\) This shift from sword to saber, like the gradual retirement of the halberd, was a major change in Chinese weaponry that occurred somewhere between the first united empire and the great disunion. The following two similar events that took place some 400 years apart bear the best witness to this change:

In 206 BC, the future founder of the Han Dynasty, Liu Bang was in mortal danger at a banquet hosted by Xiang Yu, leader of the nationwide anti-Qin uprising. Xiang Yu’s cousin feigned a sword dance with the true intention to kill Liu Bang. Xiang Yu’s uncle was however, friendly to Liu and tried to cover him by joining the sword dance. The situation culminated in the arrival of Liu Bang’s mighty charioteer who, on learning of his lord’s danger, rushed to the scene with a sword and shield.\(^{157}\)

420 years later, three warriors from the southern warlord state of Wu almost

\(^{156}\) *Ibid*: 40.

\(^{157}\) *SJ*, ch. 8: 260.
re-enacted the above dancing scene. This time the banquet host was Lü Meng 呂蒙 (178-219), a self-educated young commander. His guests included two of the most spectacular second-generation Wu warriors, Gan Ning 甘寧 (ca. 180-222) and Ling Tong 濟統 (189-217), who happened to be in feud because the former was believed to have killed the latter’s father. Ling Tong started the dance with a saber. As his vindictiveness unfolded, Gan Ning responded with a double halberd dance in self-defense. The two “dancers” were then disengaged by Lü Meng, who interfered with a saber and a shield.\(^{158}\)

Between the sword dance of 206 BC and the saber dance of 214 is an epitome of the change in close combat weaponry. The absence of sword from the three southern warriors’ mischief might reconfirm its disuse at the time as a competent everyday weapon. Instead, famous swordsmiths began to mass-produce multilayer steel sabers.\(^{159}\) Other daily replacements for the sword seemed to be: halberd, sometimes double, and a combination of shield with saber or halberd.

The shield was part of a complex defensive system that also comprised such things as helmet, armor, and caparison. Wood, rattan, animal skin and metal had all been used to make shields as well as most of the protective wears for soldiers and horses. The Eastern

\(^{158}\) *SGZ*, ch. 55: 2355

\(^{159}\) Duan Qingbo: 126-36
Han shields were usually rounded rectangular and larger than the 50-60 centimeter-tall gourd-shaped shields whose service lasted from the Warring States to the Western Han.\textsuperscript{160}

Meanwhile, armor design had received very little changes until the Three Kingdoms era. Throughout the two Han dynasties, armor was invariably painted black and regularly referred to as \textit{xuanjia} 玄甲, a textual proof that collaborates with archeological findings.\textsuperscript{161} Despite diversity in styles, armors of the Han usually fit in two basic forms: the average \textit{zhajia} 札甲, or pleated coat of mail, and the exquisite \textit{linjia} 鱗甲 or fish-scale armor. The \textit{zhajia} was so named because its breast and back plates were formed by large leather or iron pleats, and tied upon the shoulder. It lacked high-density protection and was only worn by ordinary soldiers. The fish-scale armor consisted of much smaller, almost tiny iron leaves resembling fish scales around the torso, with strung pleats below the waistline and on shoulders for easy arm and lower body movement. The best example of this more upscale armor so far was unearthed from the tomb of a late 100’s BC prince. Its 2244 iron leaves each measuring about 4 cm by 2.5 cm weigh a total of 16.85 kg; the torso leaves are immovable, whereas the shoulder guards and waist extension are covered by slightly larger

\textsuperscript{160} Yang Hong, \textit{Gudai bingqi shihua}: 50.

\textsuperscript{161} The image of black armor was used in for example, Emperor Wen 文 of Wei魏, Cao Pi曹丕 (187-226)’s narrative poem \textit{Zhi Guangling yu mashang zuoshi} 至廣陵於馬上作詩, or \textit{Poem Written on Horseback at My Arrival in Guangling}. For a critical reading of this piece, see Lu, Yimin陸亦民: 40-44
and flexibly linked plates. During the Western Han, wearers of the fish-scale armor were likely restricted to the highest-ranked. The Eastern Han could have made this prestigious wear available to more as a result of advancement in wrought iron technology.

Judging from the outfit found on the excavated early Han warrior figurines and even the terracotta armies of the Qin, it seems that the Chinese military of the period was somehow poorly armor-clad. Only 8% of the cavalry figurines from the Han excavation wear the zhajia armor; certain units in the terracotta formation have no protection other than war robes. Helmets are an absolute rarity. Many Western Han figurines wear padded war caps, whereas thousands of the Qin terracotta warriors have no headgear at all. In contrast, the Roman legionaries during the final Punic war of 146 BC were each more completely armed with a gladius, two javelins, a scutum, and encased in a 15 kg chain mail shirt and a helmet adorned with black and purple plumes. Combat mobility and limited iron production are both possible reasons for the Chinese to have fought light-packed. A common observation is that the so-called bareheaded daredevils, or ketou ruishi of the Qin purposely charged without headgear to increase momentum or, to give up certain

162 Kao Ch’un-Ming: 47-56

163 For sample illustrations of a zhajia and linjia, see Liu Qiulin: 173-4

164 Richard A. Gabriel: vol. 2, 385-91
defense for the sake of preemptive offense. Some Han figurines in the appearance of a commanding officer, wear only one shoulder guard on the left, apparently a practical design to free their right arms.

Nevertheless, preference for mobility did not always take priority in the design of Chinese armor. More recent armies generally wore heavier if not better outfits. First there were some Three Kingdoms brick relieves featuring images of foot soldiers all in tasseled helmets, with halberds and shields, then came the heavy cavalry of the Period of Disunion consisting ironclad men and horses in the thousands, historically known as the jiaji 甲騎具裝, and finally, the state armory of the Song Dynasty reached an unprecedented level of refined craftsmanship. Armor in the Ming 明 (1368-1644) and Qing 清 (1644-1911) Dynasties tended to be less metallic again as a pragmatist acknowledgement to the increasing use of firearms. Clearly, technology was always a factor to affect how heavy or light men could go with their protective wear.

The Han-Three Kingdoms transition was an introductory period for several new varieties of armor that were to become dominant in the long period of disunion and with some modifications, well into the Sui-Tang era. Complete set of equine armor, or juzhuang

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165 Yuan Zhongyi 袁仲一: 281
166 Kao Chʻun-ming: 47-56, 70-73, 126-32.
具装 made its debut during the battle of Guandu in 200. Later tomb frescoes and pottery figurines from the Disunion revealed six caparison components: mask, neck-guard, breastplate, body armor, posterior cover, and tail spine. Extant pieces are all iron.\textsuperscript{167} A panoplied horse was certainly a compromise between cavalry shock and ever deadlier crossbow volleys. In reality, equine armors or juzhuang must team with jiaji, or heavy cavalrymen to become a virtually unstoppable war machine. The jiaji cavalrymen often wore one of three popular armor, tube-sleeve mail, or tongxiu kai筒袖鎧, vest armor or liangdang kai兩當鎧, and shining armor, or mingguang kai明光鎧. These, in ascending order of preciousness, were all new to the Three Kingdoms.

The tube-sleeve mail was made by stringing together numerous small protective pieces shaped like fish scales or tortoise shells, in the form of a tube. It was somehow a development from the Han fish-scale armor, with its front and back joined at the sides and two tube-sleeves for shoulder protectors. An extreme variant of such named after the brilliant strategist Zhuge Liang but made in the 400’s, was allegedly resistant to the shot of a 25 shi heavy crossbow!\textsuperscript{168}

The vest armor had a breastplate and a back cover that, instead of being joined at

\textsuperscript{167} Albert E. Dien: 31-8

\textsuperscript{168} Yang Hong, Gudai bingqi shihua: 66
the sides, were attached across the shoulder with leather straps. It was made of hard metal or bull hide. The breastplate was always strung by scale-shaped pieces for mobility while the back could be pleated. Warriors in vest armor often wore a thick doublet underneath to reduce chafing.

The shining armor was so named because its front and back were inset with two highly polished mirror-like coverings. In sunny days, the mirrors’ reflection could easily dazzle enemies. Various reinforcements such as knee guards, leather waist belt and multiple shoulder protectors had been configured with this buttocks-length armor. At the time of its invention, the shining armor provided the most extensive ironclad protection over the wearer’s body, and outshone all other armor of the day both in craftsmanship and practicality. For the next 700 years or so, it continued to equip the Chinese military long after the disappearance of the tube-sleeve mail and vest armor.

The Eastern Han government exercised direct state control over the production of weapons and armor, a carryover from a Western Han policy. The state armory or wuku, also a Western Han establishment, occupied a large compound in the capital Luoyang and was under the supervision of a superintendence. The size and scale of the operation at this facility, though still buried, would have been comparable to its Western Han

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169 Kao Ch’un-ming: 70-73
predecessor whose enormous remains near the present-day Xian encompass storehouses that are over 100-meter-long and walls four to eight-meter-thick. Some of the finest products from the Eastern Han armory had incorporated new technologies such as hundred-layered steel tempering. This is known through literature, in the rhapsody of *Wuku fu* or *Odes to the State Armory*, written by Chen Lin (died 217), one of the Seven Masters of the Jianan Reign.

Rigorous quality control seems to be the norm for the armory of the period. According to the *Zuo gangkai jiao* or *Instructions for the Making of Steel Armor* attributed to Zhuge Liang, finished armors were always put to the test by more tempered spears. The result of such a demanding process was firm yet resilient steel protection, and Zhuge Liang became a legendary figure associated with armor-making. Between the Three Kingdoms and the Southern Dynasties, a custom existed to name after him the finest armor such as the aforementioned crossbow-resistant tube-sleeve mail. Still, the toughest and nearly impossible demand for quality was yet to come some 200 years after his death, from the arsenal of a short-lived northern regime where weaponry was a no-win business:

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170 Zhao Huacheng趙化成: 42.

171 Han Geping韓格平: 97-99.

172 Deng Shujie鄧淑傑 ed. *Zhuge Liang ji*諸葛亮集: 34.
upon completion, bows and armors were tested against each other. Failure to penetrate would subject the bow smith to death penalty, whereas failure to resist would kill the armorer.\textsuperscript{173}

Despite the kind of decent quality that should have come with arduous tests, it will be a misconception to think that armor in early China came in large quantity. On the contrary, armor were an inadequacy even by the time of the Tang Dynasty whose military was estimated to have been 60\% armor-clad, already a huge increase over the Han percentage.\textsuperscript{174} The several new types of armor for men and horses discussed above were all very rare during their introductory phase, the early 200’s. When equine armor served in the decisive battle of Guandu between Yuan Shao and Cao Cao, the former had in his disposal 300 sets of such, a mere 3\% of his entire cavalry force, whereas the latter claimed a total of ten sets camp-wide.\textsuperscript{175} The rarity of the newer vest armor and shining armor is meanwhile reflected in the prince Cao Zhi's List of Armor Awarded to Your Servant by the Previous Emperor, where he reported one set of shining armor, ten sets

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Yang Hong: Zhongguo gubingqi luncong: 67}
\footnote{Ibid: 93}
\footnote{Xia Chuancai ed.: 201-03}
\end{footnotes}
of vest armor, and 100 sets of regular armor. This composition of the newest equipment of the day as from one to 10% of any given normal stock could have been exceptionally high considering it is based on the entitlement of a prince from the largest and most resourceful of the three kingdoms. An anecdote from the biography of Lü Meng, the young general of the south who interfered with his colleagues’ saber dance, indicates that armor was indeed a luxury so much beloved by its wearers that some even paid the price of life for taking caring of it. Lü Meng had under his command a sergeant who was also his townsman. On one rainy day, the sergeant took a civilian’s bamboo hat to cover his armor. Though out of the good intention of saving a piece of government property, this act constituted a violation of martial law and Lü Meng had no choice but executed him tearfully.

Besides the ultimate price an armor set could claim, the story above also gives a glimpse of the harsh discipline the soldiers of the period had to live by. This brings up the second question this chapter intends to address: what were some of the most distinctive mental equipments the warlords’ armies had relied on, in addition to their more tangible arms and outfits?

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176 Zhao Youwen 趙幼文 ed. : 309

177 SGZ, ch. 54: 2320.
Military Theories, Tactics, Codes of Warfare

Most of the Eastern Han warlords and their advisors would have been familiar with the many military classics that had preceded them, namely the *Sun Zi*, *Wu Zi*, *Sima fa* and others. However, the brutally unpredictable civil war they ventured into was nowhere near an ideal fulfillment of the best known military theories such as “winning without fighting” and “to preserve a defeated enemy force is better than destroy it.”178 Tens of thousands of lives were destroyed in one single battle, massive fleets went up in flame, strongholds were stormed, cities and towns turned into infernoes, often accompanied by civilian massacres. Such was the ghastly reality of the Han-Three Kingdoms chaos, where no victory could be achieved without very hard fighting. De Crespigny has characterized such fighting as some primitive form of the German blitzkrieg in the Second World War, and he also observed a similarity with the “forlorn hope,” establishing a position formed by picked soldiers, generally volunteers, within enemy lines as a foundation for a full assault.

In the case of the Chinese warlords’ ill-disciplined forces:

178 Ralph Sawyer’s translations in his *The Art of War*. 
“The commanding structure and fighting techniques... were based upon small groups of men dependent upon individual leaders. The heart of each unit of battle was the commander himself, supported by his companions, and the most important tactic was expressed in the common phrase ‘break the enemy line.’ In aggressive action, the commander and his companions acted as spearhead for a drive at the enemy array, and if they were successful they could hope to be followed by the mass of their followers, spreading out to exploit success and to attack the broken enemy from the flank and the rear... For a primitive army, such a style of attack requires immense courage by the leader and his immediate followers, and a high level of personal authority to attract the main body of his men to follow in the charge.”179

The above quote is a fine summary of a raw but common tactic adopted by the Eastern Han warlords, the “forlorn hope” or in historical Chinese term, xianzhen 陷陣. It has also given the talons and fangs a due recognition for the decisive role their might and courage played in combats. Forlorn hope is certainly a much lower realization than the sophistication of some masterminds. However, the warlords’ armies were not necessarily ill-disciplined. They lacked the professional training the Western Han conscripts once received; they suffered all kinds of destitution resulting from a falling empire, and they

179 De Crespigny, Generals of the South: 488-9
were fed up with unending service. Nonetheless, these seemingly simple armed mobs were still subject to the commands of some most celebrated Chinese generals ever that enforced ruthless discipline. The death penalty to Lü Meng’s townsman was just one example of such enforcement.

Two of the greatest minds in military leadership ever known to China, Cao Cao and Zhuge Liang both gained fame through the chaos of the second to third century. It is rather fortunate that these two were also productive writers, and the various writings they left are now the most important key to an inquiry about the intangible military equipment of their time. Special topics range from scrutiny of generalship to camping and combat discipline that is relevant to the Han-Three Kingdoms soldiery. The senior of the two, Cao Cao was a culturally refined warlord whose poetry evoked as much admiration as his vast conquests. His surviving military corpus consists of a prefaced commentary to the *Sunzi*, along with some fragmentary phrases and passages supposedly from lost texts and speeches. One must note that most of these quotes became known through much later official encyclopedias such as the early Tang *Beitang shuchao*北堂書抄, the mid-Tang *Tong dian*通典, and the early Song *Taiping yulan*太平御覽. Discretion is an asset when handling these materials, even though their indirect sources have been in general quite

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180 Detailed reading of Cao Cao’s commentary is found in Yates, Robin, “Early Modes of Interpretation of the Military Canons: the Case of the *Sunzi bingfa*.” 70-72.
reputable for reconstructing lost documents.

Four ordinances or ling 令 consisting of disjointed passages speak of how Cao Cao perceived the determinants of victory, what he considered as defective generalship, and the particular orders and disciplines he enforced within his camp. Below are my partial translation for the first ordinance, full translations for the second and third, and a summary for the fourth due to its disorganized verbosity. For a complete reading of the first ordinance, two other passages not directly related to the current theme can be found in the Appendix.

1) Junce Ling 軍策令 “Reflections on Strategic Issues”

In this month, Xiahou Yuan 夏侯淵 (died in 219, one of Cao Cao’s closest veteran cousins)’s antler-shaped barricades were destroyed by enemy fire. The barricades were fifteen li 里(tricent, or approximately 1/3 mile) away from our encampment. Yuan took 400 soldiers to the scene, and let them supplement. The enemy had spied him from mountaintop, then suddenly they rushed out of the valley. Yuan sent soldiers to resist, but the enemy sneakied to his rear. The soldiers made their way back, but Yuan never came back. It was

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181 The four passages below, originally from the encyclopedias Tong dian and Taiping yulan, are all included in the current edition of Cao Cao’s anthology.
truly heartbreaking. Yuan was indeed never good at generalship. The soldiers nicknamed him the “talentless general.” A commander-in-chief should not venture himself in close combat, let alone barricade repair!”

夏侯淵今月賊燒卻鹿角。鹿角去本營十五里，淵將四百兵行鹿角，因使士補之。賊山上望見，從谷中卒出，淵使兵與鬥，賊遂繞出其後，兵退而淵未至，甚可傷。淵本非能用兵也，軍中呼為 “白地將軍”， 為督師尚不當親戰，況補鹿角乎！

2) Jun ling 軍令 “Army Ordinance”

My soldiers are prohibited from drawing bows and crossbows when encamped. When on march, those who wish to adjust their bows and crossbows may do so without loading arrows. Violators are subject to 200 whips. Officers are prohibited from killing whoever enslaved or selling whatever confiscated. Violators will have their sales confiscated and along with their superiors who neither prevented nor reported, suffer fifty cudgels.

At their departure from the camp, the soldiers must raise spears and halberds, unfold the banners, and beat the drums. After three li’s march, they may relax with their spears and halberds down, fold the banners, and stop the drums. When approaching
encampments, they shall unfold the banners and start the drumbeats; at the arrival, they shall again fold the banners and stop the drums. Violators will be paraded with their heads shaved.

During marches, there is no chopping of the various fruit-bearing trees, mulberry and jujube trees in the fields.

吾將士無張弓弩於軍中，其隨大軍行，其欲試調弓弩者，得張之，不得著箭。犯者鞭二百。吏不得於營中屠殺賣之，犯令，沒所賣，及都督不糾白，杖五十。始出營，豎矛戟，舒幡旗，鳴鼓。行三裏，辟矛戟，結幡旗，止鼓。將至營，舒幡旗，鳴鼓，至營訖，複結幡旗，止鼓。違令者髡剪以徇。軍行，不得斫伐田中五果桑柘棘棗

3) *Chuanzhan ling* 船戰令 “Ordinance of Warship Engagement”

At the first roll of the drumbeats, soldiers and officers must be battle-ready; at the second round, team leaders of the smallest units of five and ten must board, set the oars and sculls. Each soldier is to board with weapon in hand, and each man is to take up his designated position. All the ensigns and drums follow the flagship. At the third roll of the drumbeats, all warships, big or small, will sail in order. The left must not sway to the right or vice versa; the van and rear must not switch. Violators are subject to decapitation.
雷鼓一通，吏士皆嚴。再通，什伍皆就船，整持櫓棹，戰士各持兵器就船，各當其所。幢幡旗鼓，各隨將所載船。鼓三通鳴，大小戰船以次發，左不得至右，右不得至左。違令者斬

4) *Buzhan ling* 步戰令 “Ordinance of Battle on Land” (summary)

This rather verbose ordinance is essentially a reiteration of four combat realities: formation, directed movement, mutual surveillance, various prohibitions and their corresponding punishments. A joint operation of foot soldiers and cavalry began with topographical survey followed by marked formation. The mounted troops were always positioned at the two wings so they could outflank. All units must advance at drumbeats, retreat at gongs, and move to wherever the semaphores pointed. Every combatant was watched from behind by his immediate superior who, saber-poised, would instantly cut down whoever disobeyed. When chasing the enemy, positioning oneself too far ahead or too far back from his main unit was a relatively minor offence with a set fine of four gold tael. Archers must never flee a battle, otherwise they could even implicate team leaders who failed to report their offence. Capital offences punishable by decapitation are listed below: unauthorized retreat during attack, failure to assist allied troops that are under attack, idling or running around disorientedly without commander’s instructions, making noises
especially shouting or yelling that confuse, theft of cattle, horses, clothing and other necessities in preparation for battle, desertion and its cover-up by the deserter’s family.

The first ordinance warns of a fatal mistake in generalship that Cao Cao and perhaps some of his rivals, too, had learnt the hard way: exposure of commanders to trivial but dangerous missions. The other three ordinances indicate a rather cold-blooded military authority with many death penalties, some for seemingly undeserving matters like idling and yelling. Personalities in leadership could have affected the severity of punishment, but to say the majority of the warlords’ armies must have retained some form of discipline will not be an overstatement. After all, it was the discipline-demanding Cao Cao that had the largest manpower and resources at his disposal.

The ordinance of warship engagement does not add much substance to a reconstruction of the Han-Three Kingdoms aquatic warfare. Needham and De Crespigny have shed much light on this topic with their studies of the various types of Chinese warships and meticulous comparison between the third century river fleet of China and the coeval Mediterranean armada.\(^{182}\) In brief, the Chinese fleet at the time acted more like the extension of a land army than an independent force. Warships were primarily a means of

\(^{182}\) Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation* IV: 3.
troop transportation, and nothing much more than a new surface for the traditional spearmen and archers to fight on, this time a floating platform. Long range tactics such as fire boats and ramming ships, although regularly deployed, were too heavily dependent on weather and currents to achieve any predictable results.\textsuperscript{183} The Eastern Han fleet had special ramming ships named \textit{maotu}冒突 that featured sharp frontal protuberances to hole the enemy below the waterline. The most frequently referred vessels of war were, however, the \textit{mengchong}蒙沖 and \textit{doujian}斗艦. Both were massive warships with side loop holes for crossbows and pikes. The \textit{doujian} or Fighting Junks provided a better floating platform for hand-to-hand combat by boarding, or by anti-personnel missiles; the \textit{mengchong} were covered with raw ox-hide and designed more for ship-against-ship clash by destroying the cohesion of enemy formations, isolating and surrounding individual units. An appropriate rendering of this term is De Crespigny’s “Armored Breakers.”\textsuperscript{184} In addition to the \textit{mengchong doujian}, aquatic warfare of the period required the cooperation of a few other vessels from the lighter \textit{zouge}走舸, “Patrol Boats,” to the heavier \textit{louchuan}樓船, “Multi-deck Battleship.”

Despite the well-developed task specialization among ships, aquatic weaponry in

\textsuperscript{183} Ramming and boarding the enemy ships were also primary Roman naval tactics. Grant, R. G., \textit{Battle at Sea – 3000 Thousand Years of Naval Warfare}: 42-54.

\textsuperscript{184} De Crespigny, \textit{Generals of the South}: 278.
Han times remained underdeveloped. Other than the circumstantial improvisation of fire attack, one regular warship could not normally expect to destroy another. Naval commands largely followed the rules of land operation, with some considerations of ship-building skill, capacity, vessel mass, fleet size, seamanship, and nature such as the winds, currents, waves and tides. Aspects like the drumbeats, boarding order, and sailing formation in Cao Cao’s ordinance of warship engagement are very much reminiscent of what he demanded his army during march and battle on land.

The other great military and literary mind of the time, Zhuge Liang was Cao Cao’s younger opponent. The author of the SGZ, Chen Shou, was the first to compile Zhuge’s various writings. The result, which he presented to the imperial court of Jin in 274, forty years after Zhuge’s death, was a corpus of twenty-four chapters or 104112 characters. The military collections are in the chapter titled Bingyao 兵要, or “Military Essence,” four chapters of Junling or “Army Commandments,” and several jiao 敎 or instructions.185 Two more military treatises, Jiang yuan 將苑 and Pianyi shiliu ce 便宜十六策, were included by Zhang Shu 張澍 (1776-1847) in his edition of Zhuge’s anthology, the most comprehensive to date. These two additions, despite their eloquence, are most likely Sui隋 (589-618) fabrications and hence do not necessarily picture Chinese generalship and rules of

185 The original list of works is from Chen Shou’s “Jin Zhuge Liang ji Biao”進諸葛亮集表, dated to the late 200’s. See Preface, Zhuge Liang ji (Zhang Shu’s edition).
engagement in the Han to Three Kingdoms transition. The original military contents in Chen Shou’s third century compilation are in the form of short disjointed passages. Some talk about weaponry, as well as superstitions of the days such as equine and bovine deification; one passage virtually repeats Cao Cao’s ordinance governing the rules of marching. These are to be found in the Appendix. Still, other passages, such as the followings from the junling chapters, do shed additional light on Chinese warfare between the second and the third centuries:

If the enemy cavalry, followed by foot soldiers, attack from both sides, they suffer immobility in mountainous areas. We should meet them behind chariot-covered line; On a narrow path, we should confront with sawtoothed blockade 若賊騎左右來至，徒從行以戰者，陟嶺不便，宜以車蒙陳而待之。地狹者，宜以鋸齒而待之

On hearing drumbeats, all warships, big or small, shall raise white ensigns and crimson flags, advance and fight. Anyone who failed to advance will be subject to decapitation. At the signal of the gongs, green flags shall be raised and all ships return. If the enemy are near, retreat slowly; if they are far, retreat quickly. 聞雷鼓音，舉白幢絳

186 Unlike the disorganized passages recognized in Chen Shou’s original list, the Jiang Yuan and Pianyi shiliu ce are both well-argued and solidly structured dissertations most likely of a post-Han authorship. Notes to Zhuge Liang ji: 77.
When the enemy are approaching our antler-shaped barricades, our soldiers must hold their positions behind the barricades. When the enemy have reached the barricades, our soldiers should attack with spears and halberds as long as they have room. They must not rise as this will hinder our crossbow volleys.

During aquatic battles, our crews shall soak their clothes and curtains aboard, and gather them. These can extinguish enemy torches and fire arrows. Disobedience is punishable by shaved head and mutilated ears.

When fighting in the field, no one makes unnecessary noises. Everyone listens attentively to the drumbeats, and watches carefully for flag signals. Advance when the flags point forward, retreat when the flags point backward; go to the right if the flags signal right, go to the left if the flags point left. Rushing around regardless to directions is punishable by decapitation.
When engaging the enemy, watch where the flags point to; halt if three gongs sound, retreat at two gongs. 兩頭進戰，視麾所指，聞三金音，止；二金音，還。

On generalship, the bingyao chapter contains the following discussions:

1. Loyalty to men is like water to fish. Fish will die without water, men are doomed without loyalty. Therefore a fine general upholds loyalty, which shall fulfill his ambitions and make his name known. 人之忠也，猶魚之有淵。魚失水則死，人失忠則凶。故良將守之，志立而名揚

2. Men cherish one millisecond more than a giant jade disc because moments are difficult to come by but easy to lose. Thus the way a fine general catches moments is so that he hurries before properly dressed, runs like his feet are not touching the ground, and makes no stop even if his shoes were lost. 不愛尺璧而愛寸陰者，時難遭而易失也。故良將之趨時也，衣不解帶，足不蹣地，履遺不躋

3. A fine general is free of arrogance when privileged, free of arbitrariness when authorized, free of reservation when patronized, and without frustration when dismissed. Therefore his movements idealize the incorruptibility of a jade disc. 貴
4. The way a fine general governs is that he never dictates but entrusts whoever officially responsible for the selection of candidacy, and he never interferes with the measurement of merits by the appropriate laws. As a result, the capable will not go unnoticed, the incompetent can not pretend, and those of false or unfit reputations can not advance in ranks. 良將之為政也，使人擇之，不自舉；使法量功，不自度。故能者不可蔽，不能者不可飾，妄譽者不能進也

5. An army of disciplined soldiers but incompetent commander can not lose; an army of undisciplined soldiers but competent commander can not win. 有制之兵，無能之將，不可以敗；無制之兵，有能之將，不可以勝

The extant segments from Cao Cao and Zhuge Liang’s military dissertations seem to suggest four primary attributes an ideal general of their time should possess: 1. He must embody loyalty; 2. He acts fast when opportunities call; 3. He is unaffected by circumstances, for better for worse; 4. He knows to whom to assign specific tasks and he never risks himself into trivial yet dangerous missions. Nevertheless, the ultimate assurance
of victories is discipline. Discipline can remedy the lack of brilliant generalship, but even an almighty general cannot prevent defeat due to indiscipline. The realities of the Han to Three Kingdoms transition often validated, diversified, and sometimes contradicted the theories of its greatest military minds. The lives of the many warriors from the three dominant warlord states shall serve the best examples of validation, diversification, and contradiction.
Chapter Four

Noble Veterans of the North

The nature of leadership varied greatly among the three warlord houses of Cao Cao, Liu Bei, and the Sun’s. Such variance in turn affected the characters and experiences of the warriors at their service. The rise of Liu Bei was a slow and treacherous one: for some twenty years he remained powerless and baseless. The only gift he had was his imperial lineage, although even this was not exceptional to the other warlords. His comrades-at-arms were somewhat idealist: they accompanied him through fire and water for their faith in his alleged legitimacy and kindness. The Sun warriors on the other hand were rather unorthodox. Most of them came from south of the Yangzi River, which in the turn of the third century was still quite a frontier far from China’s traditional heartland. They fought as peripheral dissidents, and their masters were not blessed with the imperial surname of Liu. Strong regionalism provided them cohesion, and they represented the newest vigor of dynastic rivalry. Neither the Liu, nor the Sun warriors, however, had enjoyed prestigious offices and noble titles before their lords proclaimed separatist regimes

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187 Another warlord related to the imperial house was Liu Yan (died in 194) of Sichuan, succeeded by his son Liu Zhang. SGZ, ch. 31: 1565.

188 See discussion of the rise of Sun Jian in Fang Shiming 方詩銘, 141-43.
of their own. The ranks of Liu Bei and the Sun’s within the bureaucratic hierarchy of the Han were nowhere near paramount, thus they could not afford their subordinates lavish rewards as their archrival Cao Cao could.\textsuperscript{189}

The strongest of the three, Cao Cao commanded the largest manpower, civil and military. He was the de facto head of the central government through manipulation of the puppet emperor. The imperial army was his personal army. He had the convenience of awarding his veterans with high military posts and titles of nobility. As a result, the Cao warriors became the ones to realize the maximum material gains for serving as someone’s talons and fangs, and they epitomized the last military aristocracy of the Han Dynasty. The author of their historical biographies in the \textit{SGZ}, Chen Shou, arranged them into different biographical chapters which seem to correspond, in descending order of importance, to blood tie and seniority, merits that required advisory skill, and merits that required combative skills only. This arrangement might also have simply reflected the warriors’ ranks: the most senior veterans in Cao Cao’s camp were his cousins surnamed either Cao or Xiahou. This group usually claimed the highest permanent generalships in the Han military system, those of the Regent, the Agile Cavalry, or the Chariots and Cavalry; Next in ranks, the generals of the Left, Right, Van, and Rear belonged to five later recruits, often from

\textsuperscript{189} At any given time and in terms of both official ranks and actual influences, the Sun’s and Liu Bei were much behind Cao Cao. See a comparison of such in De Crespigny, \textit{To Establish Peace}. Intro: xxx-v.
captives or surrendered enemies. These warriors represented the best combination of raw martial prowess and sagacious generalship. Those who lacked the mind of a strategist or advisor but nonetheless boasted superhuman strength and ferocity occupied the lowest echelon, at the ranks of chief commandant or second-rate general. Below is an analytical review of the lives of seven star warriors under Cao Cao, divided into three groups according to Chen Shou’s original device. It will start with the mightiest yet lowest-ranked talons and fangs, Cao Cao’s two bodyguards.

All events and quotes about the warriors covered in this and the next two chapters are from the biographies of the SGZ unless otherwise noted. These three chapters are not a straightforward translation of the original text. They contain historical narratives, analysis, and at times, references to other traditions such as folklore and literature. Readers may wish to consult Rafe de Crespigny’s A Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to the Three Kingdoms for simplified introduction.

The Tiger Guards: Dian Wei 典韋 and Xu Chu 許褚

Cao Cao had an elite battalion of personal bodyguards from about 196. This was

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190 The Cao and Xiahou cousins were introduced as a group in SGZ, ch. 9; the five ablest commanders, ch. 17; the muscle-only warriors, ch. 18.
led successively by Dian Wei and Xu Chu, Cao’s two mightiest talons and fangs. The two most likely never met because of Dian’s violent death which seemed to have preceded Cao’s enlistment of Xu Chu.\(^{191}\)

Dian Wei was a strong-built fellow from Chenliu 陳留 County, Henan Province. His temperament was that of a wandering swordsman, or *xia*. The *SGZ* opened his biography with an assassination that recalled the rampage of wandering swordsmen-related vengeance in the Eastern Han society. Some Liu 劉 and Li Yong 李永 were in feud. Dian Wei sided with Liu to plot against Li, an ex-magistrate with tight guards. In pretence of a visitor, Dian brought chicken and wine on a carriage, and entered the gate of Li’s residence. With a concealed dagger, he killed the couple of Li in seconds. He backed out slowly, fetched a saber and a halberd from the carriage outside, and walked away. Li dwelt near the marketplace. Out of a chasing crowd of several hundreds, no one dared near Dian Wei. About two kilometers down the road, Dian met his partners and escaped after some fighting. This is how he gained recognition by heroes of the realm.

Dian’s military career began in 190 as a common soldier under Zhang Miao 張邈 (died 197). Once the huge standard above Zhang’s headquarters was about to topple over despite the attempt of many soldiers to steady it. Dian Wei held the pole with one hand,

\(^{191}\) Cao Cao met Xu Chu in the winter of 197 during his second attack on the city of Nanyang where he lost his first guard Dian Wei about two seasons’ earlier. *SGZ*: ch. 18: 925.
immobile against the wind. Later he joined the troops of Xiahou Dun, Cao Cao’s veteran cousin, and was promoted to Major after scoring numerous enemy kills.

In 194, Cao Cao confronted Lü Bu at the town of Puyang (present-day Puyang, Henan). He surprised Lü’s contingent camp with a night attack and by dawn, the enemy began to scatter. Hardly had Cao Cao secured his position when Lü’s reinforcements blew in and cornered him from three sides. Arguably the matchless warrior of his time, Lü Bu personally charged in the heat of the battle. Tens of bouts passed between the two forces from dawn to dusk, and Cao Cao’s position became precarious. Dian Wei was the first to respond to Cao’s urgent call for forlorn hope commando. Scores of other volunteers under Dian’s command, double armor-clad and shieldless, advanced with pikes and halberds. Showers of arrows from the opposite line pelted down around them. “Warn me,” Dian told his men, “if the enemies are ten paces closer.” 十步乃白 He then strode ahead, braving the volleys. “Ten paces!” someone shouted. “At five!” said Dian. His men were frightened: “The enemies are here!” Dian Wei made a thunderous move with a dozen halberds in hands. Whoever opposing his halberds were swiftly knocked down. The SGZ did not indicate whether these were normal halberds or lighter ones designed for throw. Since Dian handled a dozen of them, they were most likely thrown weapons.

Thanks to Dian Wei’s forlorn hope strike, Cao Cao made a narrow escape from one of his few but nightmarish military debacles. Dian Wei was promoted to commandant in
charge of several hundred bodyguards at Cao’s quarters and, after more forlorn hope efforts with this battle-hardened battalion, made out of himself a colonel校尉. He was a loyal and steadfast warrior, often attended Cao Cao day and night, and seldom slept at his own private quarter. His food and alcoholic consumption more than doubled the ordinary. His favorite weapons were long saber and giant double halberds which earned him a jingle by his comrades-in-arms: “Sir Dian is a champion in our camp, his double halberds eighty jin.”\footnote{SGZ, ch. 18: 924. Eighty Han jin is just over twenty five kg.}

In the spring of 197, Zhang Xiu 張繡 (died 207) of Nanyang 南陽 (present-day Nanyang on the border of Henan and Hubei provinces) relinquished his domain to Cao Cao. The two feasted. As Cao toasted around, Dian Wei attended him with a one-foot-wide axe. None of Zhang’s retainers dared a peep at Cao Cao. About ten days later Zhang rebelled, surprising Cao’s encampments. Dian Wei guarded the front gate to screen his master’s retreat. The rebels could not get past him so they swarmed in from other directions. Dian and his a dozen or so subordinates pitted one against ten, but the enemy’s numbers kept increasing, their spears on the rampage. Dian Wei drove his double giant halberds into the avalanche of thrusts, one plunge of his halberds would produce a dozen spears broken. His comrades were all killed. He himself had taken scores of cuts. The enemies pressed on, and Dian Wei engaged them in close combat. He grabbed two of the rebels bodily and whirled
them as bludgeons, knocking down several more until his wounds ruptured. Then he fell, eyes-widened and curses still in his mouth. The rebels, all terrified, dared to come close only after Dian was dead. They severed his head, showed it around, and went back to examine his corpse.

The revolt of Zhang Xiu had cost Cao Cao dearly: in addition to the tiger guard Dian Wei, he had also lost his eldest son, Ang 昂 and his nephew, Anmin 安民. He cried at the news of Dian Wei’s death, sent some spies to retrieve his corpse, and personally mourned before it. The remains were then sent to Dian Wei’s hometown for burial. Swine and sheep were sacrificed every time Cao Cao passed Dian’s grave. Dian’s only son, Man 滿, received both the official title of Major and Cao Cao’s personal custody. Some twenty three years later, Dian Man’s eventual office and nobility culminated at Commandant and Lord Within the Passes, under the continuous patronage of Cao Cao’s second son, Pi, Emperor Wendi of the Wei Dynasty. It seems that the early demise of Dian Wei, Cao Cao’s twice savior, had made him one of the most beloved and missed talons and fangs.

Dian Wei’s successor, Xu Chu, native of Qiao 謝 (present-day Qiao, Anhui province), was an equally competent warrior of gigantic size and strength. His first recorded heroic act occurred when his castle was under siege by a large band of the Yellow Turbans. The outnumbered defenders soon depleted their arsenal, but Xu Chu kept the besiegers at bay with well-aimed rocks that killed many. When the castle granary was
running low, Xu made a deal with the Yellow Turbans to trade his oxen for their grain. At the exchange, the bovines suddenly headed back. Xu grabbed two by the tail, and dragged them back a hundred paces. Dumbfounded at his superhuman brawn, the Yellow Turbans scuttled off without the oxen.

Xu Chu and his castle retainers joined forces with Cao Cao as the latter reached the Huai 淮 River Valley where his fearsome name was most heard. Cao made him a commandant on all night vigil the very first day they met, and likened him to Fan Kuai, the brave charioteer of the Supreme Ancestor. Those retainers who followed Xu Chu into Cao’s service all came to be known as the Tiger Guards, or hushi 虎士. They were always among the first to climb enemy walls, and before long Xu Chu advanced to the rank of colonel. Following a preemptive strike on an attempted assassination of Cao Cao, Xu Chu’s ultimate worth was yet to be shown during Cao’s northwestern campaign with Ma Chao 马超 (176–222) in 211.

One of the unrivalled warriors of his time, Ma Chao was waging a war against Cao Cao, who had held his father, the northwestern warlord Ma Teng, hostage in the capital. He deployed his troops at the Tong Pass 潼關 (in present-day Shaanxi), just east of the convergence of the Yellow River and the Wei River. Cao Cao sent a contingent across the Yellow River to interdict Ma’s position from the west bank. As his men were ferried halfway over, Cao Cao covered the rear at the south shore, Xu Chu and 100 tiger guards
behind him. Suddenly thousands of Ma Chao’s troops under his personal command attacked from nowhere. In the showers of enemy arrows. Xu Chu urged Cao Cao to flee and wasted no time to drag him into a sampan. The enemy van was closing in. The Cao guards all scrambled for embarkation, causing the overloaded boat to sink. Xu Chu hacked at the mob, and used his left hand to shield Cao Cao with a saddle. One after another the oarsmen tumbled dead under enemy volleys. Xu Chu freed his right arm to pole the boat and barely managed the escape.

Days later Cao Cao met Ma Chao in the field, with no company but Xu Chu alone. The physically powerful Ma Chao was contemplating a surprise abduction of Cao Cao yet uncertain if the rider beside was Xu Chu, a monstrous name long known to him. He probed: “Where is that Tiger Lord of yours?” 公有虎侯者安在 Cao Cao pointed to Xu Chu, who answered with a radiant stare, couchant ready to strike. Ma Chao dared no move, and both sides withdrew.

The northwestern campaign ended with Cao Cao’s overwhelming victory. Xu Chu was promoted to the Imperial Corps Commander of Martial Patrol wuwei zhonglangjiang 武衛中郎將, which became the official title for the leaders of the Cao’s bodyguards and the future Wei imperial escorts. Ma Chao’s inquiry of the Tiger Lord was based on his knowledge of the Mad Tiger huchi 虎癡, a nickname Xu Chu’s associates dubbed him in recognition of his ferocity. It was just as well known as his real name empire-wide.
Ferocious or mad he might be, Xu Chu was sometimes also seen as a cautious and taciturn tiger. The year 216 saw Cao Cao’s ascension to kingship. His younger cousin Cao Ren (168-223) came to pay homage. While awaiting the king’s audience, Cao Ren beckoned Xu Chu to the inner chamber for a chat. Xu refused: “His Highness is coming soon.” 王將出 and retired to the court. Cao Ren was displeased. Someone blamed Xu Chu: “The General Who Conquers the South is a royalty. He condescended to talk, how could you refuse him?” 征南宗室重臣，降意呼君，君何故辞? Xu’s explanation was: “He is a royalty, but also a vassal from outer region. I, though unrelated, am to secure the inner chambers. We can talk enough in public, but how secretive it would appear if I converse with him in the backroom?” 彼雖重臣，外藩也。褚備內臣，眾談足矣，入室何私乎 Cao Cao was greatly pleased on learning of this incident and continued to treat Xu as an exceptional favorite.

The death of Cao Cao in 221 caused Xu Chu emotional devastation that he cried until blood spit. He served two more generations of the Cao’s, attaining his highest office as the General of Martial Patrol wuwei jiangjun 武衛將軍 in charge of the imperial escorts.

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193 Cao Ren was Cao Cao’s younger cousin. SGZ, ch. 9: 464. Although non-tenured, the General Who Conquers the South was a prestigious wartime appointment in overall command of the Cao’s southern front. Depending on circumstances, the Generals who “conquers” 征 a battle zone in the east, west, north or south might have been superior to the tenured General of Chariots and Cavalry, according to the quote of Yu Huan 魚豢, a Wei historian, in Shen Yue’s Song Shu 宋書, ch. 39: 1217-42.
and his highest nobility with a 700-household-fief. The original tiger guards under his command were all promoted to ranked officers by Cao Cao in one day. Eventually this cohort of expert swordsmen had produced scores of ennobled generals and over 100 commandants and colonels.

Unlike his predecessor Dian Wei, Xu Chu was lucky to have died a natural death. Both warriors boasted impressive combat skills and prowess in their historical biographies, but the rewards for their merits which required physical effort only paled in comparison to the more prestigious permanent generalships and enfeoffment of thousands of households achieved by sophisticated warriors with more balanced bodies and minds. A group of five such warriors, all unrelated to the Cao clan, share one biographical chapter according to the historian’s categorization. The current essay will introduce three of them, Zhang Liao, Zhang He, and Xu Huang.

**Zhang Liao 張遼 styled Wenyuan 文遠 (169-222)**

Zhang Liao was originally a descendant of the Nie’s 聶. He changed his surname

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194 Xu Chu was the first to bear the generalship of Martial Patrol, which continued throughout the future dynasties of Jin to Tang. Huang Chilin 黃熾霖, 165-66.

195 The other two were Yu Jin 于禁 and Yue Jin 樂進 who will be briefly introduced at the end of this chapter.
only to evade a reciprocal vengeance. Three warlords in quick succession, Ding Yuan 丁原, Dong Zhuo, and Lü Bu, had made use of Zhang’s martial prowess, but it was not until the age of 28 that he settled with Cao Cao, the right master worthy of his lifelong allegiance. One of his early assignments from Cao was to lay siege to a rebellious walled town. The siege dragged on for months. As their supplies ran low, the Cao commanders began to talk about a withdrawal. Zhang Liao however, proposed a rather dashing plan based on keen observation. He noticed that the numbers of enemy arrows had been decreasing recently and the rebel leader, a former colleague of his under Lü Bu, made eye contact with him across the barricades, a possible sign of indecision between surrender and resistance. A personal meeting in the field proved Zhang Liao was right: the rebel leader agreed to surrender. Zhang Liao even paid the rebels a visit alone to consolidate the deal. This bold act, although resulting in a cost-effective victory, was disapproved by Cao Cao as inadvisable for good generalship. Once again Zhang Liao demonstrated his thoughtfulness by convincing Cao that his bold move would not have been feasible were the enemy not already overwhelmed by the far-reaching power of the Cao’s.

Through a series of campaigns between 200 to 207 aimed at exterminating the warlord house of Yuan Shao in northern China, Cao Cao came to appreciate the potential of Zhang Liao and promoted him to full generalship with a precinct lordship dutinghou 都亭
The last campaign with the Yuan’s was vividly portrayed by a contemporary poet as a “gruesome battle to win功誠難.” The Cao forces were over-stretching their position far into the northeastern frontier, caught in the inclement weather of the winter, and faced with a desperate enemy in an unexpected encounter. Against all odds Zhang Liao urged Cao Cao to attack and was entrusted with the latter’s commanding flag. The outcome was another memorable victory for the Cao’s which claimed the head of the chieftain of the Wuhuan tribe, an ally of the Yuan’s.

Emerging as one of Cao Cao’s five ablest generals, Zhang Liao continued to prove himself a balanced combination of wisdom and courage. When a night mutiny wreaked havoc on his troops, he reckoned this must be the work of a few, and dispatched a command that those uninvolved in the mutiny remain still in their positions. The confusion settled quickly. The few mutineers were located and put to death. During a later operation to quell some bandits, Zhang Liao’s courage flared despite topographical disadvantage: a treacherous mountain where the bandits hid by the cliffs. He encouraged his followers: “In

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196 No practical difference in prestige is evident among the county lord xianhou縣侯, village lord xianghou鄉侯 or precinct lord tinghou亭侯 despite designations as they did not necessarily predetermine the size of the fief. It was not uncommon that a village lord held at least certain numbers of households whereas a county lord had no entitlement at all. Wang Yumin王育民: 119-24

197 This line came from the seventh in a series of twelve drum and flute songs of the Wei魏十二鼓吹曲, Butchery at Liucheng屠柳城 by Miu Xi繆襲 (186–245). Lu Qinli: 528.
a one-on-one narrow confrontation, the one who outbraves gets the right of way 此所謂一與一，勇者得前耳!” The operation ended with a due reward to his resolution to outbrave.

The highlight of Zhang Liao’s military exploits came in the summer of 215, at the southeast front where Cao Cao and Sun Quan vied for control of the lower Yangzi. The hot spot of contention, which Cao left to Zhang Liao’s protection, was Hefei 合肥, a small garrison of 7000 before Sun Quan’s mega-force of 100000. Zhang studied a scheme Cao had prepared for him, and discussed the situation with his aides, Li Dian 李典 (ca.180–215) and Yue Jin 楊進 (died 218): “His Dukedom is campaigning afar, so we cannot expect distant remedy. Let’s blunt the enemy’s drive before they are in positions. That will reassure our troops and secure the town. This is the one fight that makes the day. Have no doubt gentlemen.” 公遠征在外，比救至，彼破我必矣。是以教指及其未合逆擊之，折其盛勢，以安眾心，然後可守也。成敗之機，在此一戰，諸君何疑？ At night a daredevil corps of 800 was thus mustered, their swords drawn and thirsty for a bloody tomorrow.

The next morning Zhang Liao personally charged into the Sun’s encampments. Panoplied and halberd in hand, he blasted scores of enemy soldiers and two commanders at once. Roaring “Here comes Zhang Liao!” he smashed the blockades, hacked his way down to the centre flag, turning Sun Quan point-blank of a sudden. In a fluster Sun backed up to a mound, his escorts entrenched him behind tiers of giant halberds. Zhang Liao yelled at Sun: “Come down and fight!” Sun trembled, but soon he found the raiders many times
outnumbered and had them tightly surrounded. Zhang Liao was the first to break through this encirclement, but stopped by the shriek of his companions still trapped inside: “Are you abandoning us, General?” He returned to the melee and brought the rest out as if unopposed.

Zhang Liao’s goal of demoralizing a much larger enemy force with a small forlorn hope raid was well met. The siege of Hefei dragged on some ten more days before Sun Quan finally pulled back. Zhang Liao intercepted his retreat with the aid of several reinforcements, almost capturing Sun Quan in the process. The courage and resolution he showed in a severely outnumbered engagement earned him a backbone post at the Cao’s southeast front, while his name became a nightmare to the southerners ever since.

Like most of his renowned colleagues, Zhang Liao received his ultimate reward for service to the Cao clan after the latter’s usurpation of the imperial throne. He ranked the fifth highest generalship of his time, General of the Van, with a 2600-household-fief near his native town, Jinyang (near present-day Taiyuan, provincial capital of Shanxi). This was nearly four times the fief of Xu Chu, the Tiger Lord. Under the newly established Wei Dynasty, Zhang Liao remained a much beloved veteran and gained such exceptional favors from the emperor Wendi as imperial procession in greeting his mother and personal consultation on his masterstroke performance at Hefei in 215. The emperor was so impressed by Zhang’s heroism that he compared him with the ancient warrior Shao
Hu 召虎. A mansion in the capital Luoyang was built for Zhang Liao, another residence for his mother. The entire daredevil commando who fought with him at Hefei meanwhile entered the palace to join the imperial escorts.

Despite worsening health, the 54-year-old Zhang Liao still sailed to the southern front when Sun Quan invaded again in the winter of 221. Sun was still stricken with the lesson Zhang taught him six years ago. He warned his generals to stay fully alert against even a sick Zhang Liao. In the end nothing fierce as the battle of Hefei recurred mainly due to extreme weather that had frozen the Yangzi River earlier and thus prevented an all-out naval carnage. Both sides withdrew, but Zhang Liao never made his voyage home. He died of illness en route early next year. In an imperial encomium dated 225, three years after Zhang’s death, Emperor Wendi commemorated the glorious victory of 800 against 100000 at Hefei as “unprecedented in military history自古用兵，未之有也,” and praised Zhang Liao along with his lieutenant Li Dian as “true talons and fangs of the state可谓國之爪牙矣.”

198 Shao Hu was a vassal of King Xuan of Zhou 周宣王 (r. 827-782 BC). He was credited with a conquest of the southeast, about the same battle zone Zhang Liao was in charge of. Shi, 262.

199 This event somehow differs from the perspective of Sun Quan’s biography, which attributes the withdrawal of enemy force to his fear-striking defence line rather than unseasonal ice. SGZJZJY, ch. 46: 2331-410.

200 This is an outspoken imperial affirmation of talons and fangs for outstanding military service. SGZ, ch. 17: 888.
Zhang He 張郃 styled Junyi 儘乂(172 or earlier–231)

The other Zhang in the group of the five most meritorious Cao generals but unrelated to the clan by blood was Zhang He, originally a rank-and-file recruit under a northern warlord. He paid homage to Yuan Shao around 191 in which he must have been at least a late teenager. His shift of allegiance to Cao Cao was result of Yuan Shao’s distrust nine years later at Guandu, battleground for the second major campaign of the era. By then Zhang He seemed to have already established a solid reputation that Cao Cao compared his right choice of homage to those made by such canonical figures as Wei Zi 微子 and Han Xin韓信(died. 196 BC).\(^{201}\)

Zhang He certainly lacked the historical proportions of Han Xin, but he was no disappointment to Cao Cao’s high expectation. Both he and Zhang Liao were vanguards during the gruesome battle against the Wuhuan tribe in which his colleague claimed the

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\(^{201}\) Wei Zi, the first duke of Song 宋 under the Zhou 周 feudal system, was a half-brother of the last king of Shang 商, Zhou 紂. After several failed protests against tyranny, he left the court of King Zhou and surrendered to the invading Zhou forces. *Shang Shu* 尚書, ed. Gu jiegang 顧頡剛: 1071-79. Han Xin was once a nameless halbert-bearer under Xiang Yu. His military genius came to full play only after his defection to Liu Bang. *SJ*, ch. 92: 2343-56. Both cases were fitting allusions for Zhang He, someone who had to try more than once before finding his right place.
head of the enemy chieftain. His true generalship, however, revealed itself somewhat late in his middle age. The year was 219, the battle zone was Cao Cao’s west front in the Hanzhong region where fierce contention with Liu Bei flared in a seesaw fashion. Zhang He was a lieutenant to Xiahou Yuan, commander-in-chief at the west front, the same “talentless general” that Cao Cao lamented as an example of preventable commander casualty due to exposure to trivial but dangerous actions. 202 In an attempt for barricade repair far from the safety of his headquarters, Xiahou Yuan tripped an ambush and paid the price of life. The loss of its commander-in-chief left all in confusion, until Guo Huai (died. 255), Major Aide to Xiahou Yuan, reassured the troops with these words: “General Zhang is a celebrated veteran of the empire. Liu Bei is afraid of him. None other than General Zhang can save the day!” 203

In agreement with the above quote from the SGZ, the slightly older text, Wei Lüe attributed to Yu Huan, also added Liu Bei’s fear to Zhang He’s credential: “Although [Xiahou] Yuan was the commander-in-chief, Liu Bei belittled him but feared [Zhang] He. At the news of Xiahou’s death, [Liu] Bei sighed: ‘Better we killed the real

202 See previous chapter.

203 Guo Huai was to become a major figure in the late Three Kingdoms. SGZ, ch. 26: 1321-42
trouble, Xiahou’s head is useless!”

Liu Bei knew the capabilities of his opponents well. As soon as Zhang He assumed overall command by popular support, the otherwise leaderless Cao’s force succeeded in holding its position until the arrival of reinforcements. Liu Bei was finally unable to maximize his victory in the Hanzhong theater by pushing his frontline further north. Cao Cao, on the other hand, was not unaware of the reputation of his cousin Xiahou Yuan as a talentless general. The fact that he offered Liu Bei a talentless enemy commander-in-chief to deal with, not the more troublesome Zhang He, only proved that seniority and blood tie could still outweigh talents even within the reputably meritocracy of Cao Cao.

Despite possible nepotism, Zhang He was to become a pillar of the Wei military after the early 220’s, which saw the death of Guan Yu, Cao Cao, Liu Bei and many other major players of the era. Zhang He outlived all of his old-timer comrades and remained the only senior Wei warrior from the pre-Three Kingdoms era to stand before three of Zhuge Liang’s six northern expeditions. The first invasion came in the year 228, but was quickly aborted following the fall of a strategic garrison to Zhang He which exposed Zhuge’s rear. The garrison commander Ma Su 馬謖, a protégé of Zhuge Liang rich on theories but poor

204 SGZ, ch. 17: 893.

205 Meritocracy was a common association with Cao Cao’s success. Eikenberry, Karl W: 38.
in practice, made a fatal mistake by stationing his main units on top of a nearby mountain, leaving a virtually no man’s garrison on the ground. Such suicidal deployment was almost an invitation to siege, and Zhang He wasted no time to cut off the enemy’s water line. Besieged and thirsty, Ma Su’s troops had already collapsed even before engaging the besiegers who quickly put them to rout. At the time the Wei kingdom was threatened by the rebellion of three border commanderies, but Zhang He subdued them all. It was largely due to the caliber of this senior warhorse Liu Bei feared so much that Zhuge Liang’s first attempt to conquer the north ended in vain. For his empire-saving service, Zhang He’s enfeoffment amounted to 4300 households, a record high ever attained by any talons and fangs of the Cao’s.

The returning assault from the west just months later again called for Zhang He to the front. The Wei emperor was worried about Zhang’s timely arrival, but Zhang had foreseen that his old opponent, Zhuge Liang could not sustain a prolonged offensive because of low supply and had to exhaust in ten days. He made a lightning march by day and night to the west front, just in time to force Zhuge’s second retreat as he had predicted. This time he reached the zenith of his personal career with the appointment as the General of Chariots and Cavalry Who Conquers the West zhengxi cheqi jiangjun 征西車騎將軍，a
rare combination of two prestigious offices.\textsuperscript{206}

The \textit{SGZ} evaluated him as some kind of an all-round general, adaptive to changing circumstances, versed in army movements, battle formations, and topography, thus much feared by even the toughest enemies like Zhuge Liang. Better still, for a professional soldier Zhang admired and patronized Confucian scholars, among whom was some Bei Zhan卑湛 from his hometown. Thanks to Zhang He’s recommendation, he entered the imperial doctorate program for the study of the classics.\textsuperscript{207}

Although victorious twice, Zhang He failed to survive Zhuge Liang’s third northern expedition in 231. A stray arrow shot in his right knee when he tripped an ambush in pursuit of the retreating enemy. This turned out fatal to him, then in his late 50’s or early 60’s, but the liability to his casualty is a subject of discrepancy between the \textit{SGZ} and the \textit{Wei lüe}. The central figure in question here is Sima Yi司馬懿 (179- 251), highest military command of the Wei for some 25 years from the 220’s to his death in 251, and grandfather to the future founder of the Jin Dynasty. The \textit{Wei Lüe}, a lost text directly from the Wei era, observed Zhang He as a subordinate to Sima Yi during Zhuge Liang’s third northern expedition.

\textsuperscript{206} Simply put, General of Chariot and Cavalry was Zhang’s tenure, while General Who Conquers the West his wartime post. For the special prestige of the latter, see my note to General Who Conquers the South征南: 139.

\textsuperscript{207} Literally \textit{taixue}太學, Eastern Han Imperial Academy.
expedition. It was Sima Yi that hurried Zhang He to pursue the retreating enemy in midsummer 231. Zhang protested: “Military classics says we shall leave one escape passage for a besieged town, and never chase off a homebound invader. 軍法，圍城必開出路，歸軍勿追.” His superior did not listen, so he simply obeyed as a soldier and consequently died a soldier’s death.208 The SGZ, subject to the scrutiny of the next dynasty, glossed over the above episode, making it seem as if Zhang He was second to none in command thus fully responsible for his own action. This is likely a silent excuse for Sima Yi, ancestor of the imperial Jin, from fatal misjudgment as the text did confirm his overall commandership in other chapters reporting the same campaign.209 The loss of a star veteran like Zhang He was almost inexcusable to any command. For all its bloodiness, the whole era of the Han-Three Kingdoms civil wars had witnessed only a handful of highest ranked warriors who actually fell in action. Unfortunately Zhang He, with a time-honored service and one of the largest fiefs of his time, just became a rare statistics of such.210

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208 Zhang He’s foresight was only reported in the Wei lüe, a Wei dynasty document and slightly earlier than the SGZ where its fragments survived in the form of commentaries. Chapter 7 contains more information about this important supplement to the historiography of the Three Kingdoms period. SGZ, ch. 17: 895.

209 Sima Yi was Zhang He’s superior during this particular campaign. Jin shu, ch. 1: 8-9.

210 For the low casualty rate for dominant warriors of the period, see conclusions to the current chapter, as well as Chapters 5 and 6.
Xu Huang 徐晃 styled Gongming 公明(died 230)

Xu Huang started as a commandery functionary, served one petty warlord as Cavalry Commandant, and finally joined Cao Cao in late 196. He should have been in his 20’s to have held two offices up to that point, so it is safe to assume he was among the generation of the late 160’s to early 170’s, same as the other four of his colleagues from the same SGZ chapter of collective biographies. The famous novel version, SGYY, not only dramatized his historical natural death into a casualty of war, but also predated it to 227 at the age of 59, possibly the result of a miscalculation.211

The SGZ described Xu Huang’s personality as frugal and meticulous. He always dispatched sentinels far ahead of engagements, thus securing himself an invincible position. He also tended to press a beaten enemy hard to maximize victories. In hot pursuit his troops often skipped meals. He made very few friends, and often sighed the following words: “The ancients worried that they might not find a worthy master. Now I am fortunate to have met one. I must work hard for him, what is the use of glorifying myself?” 古人患不遭明君，今幸遇之，當以功自效，何用私譽為? 212

211 SGYY, ch. 94: 500-03.

212 SGZ, ch. 17: 897.
The SGZ biography of Xu Huang is a detailed recollection of some 30 years’ war service to three generations of the Cao’s, but the highlights of his exploits were two. The first came about the early 204 when Cao Cao was purging the remnant forces of Yuan Shao in north China. Xu Huang, then in his 30’s, carried the task of seizing a walled town which had feigned surrender but resisted afterwards. He shot a letter of warning into the town. The defenders were convinced of their impossible situation and decided to give in for real. As discussed in the previous chapter, Cao Cao was known to be strict with military discipline. Generals responsible for any defeat must be punished accordingly, and cities forced to surrender after failed resistance should expect no mercy. Xu Huang was aware of these policies, but still he took the liberty of sparing the townsmen. In defense of his decision, he wrote a letter to Cao Cao, arguing for the benefits of less costly operations against other enemy towns by setting a merciful example. Cao Cao’s response to his flexibility with existing rules was a sound approval.

Fifteen years later, Xu Huang made his crowning achievement when the kingdom needed its sharpest talons and fangs the most. Liu Bei’s senior warrior, Guan Yu, had besieged the city of Fan (in present-day Xiangfan, Hubei) within striking distance to Cao Cao’s capital Xu. One relief force was sent, only to be flooded and its commander

213 Further brutalities of siege warfare are discussed in 袁庭棟: 421-27.
captured. Cao Cao had almost relocated his government until he commissioned a second reinforcement led by Xu Huang. The siege of Fan consisted of multiple rings of moats and caltrop barricades. Most of Xu Huang’s troops were new recruits, hardly a match for Guan Yu’s veteran force. Xu waited until the arrival of more reinforcements, and feigned an intention to cut off the enemy’s rear by digging a huge trench around the outpost of the siege. The enemy abandoned their outpost, and retreated inside the siege barricades. Xu Huang then ordered two flanks to advance at the same time, but refrain from engagements until they were only ten meters away from the barricades manned by two enemy camps. Once again, he made a feint at one camp while actually attacking the other. Seeing one of his camps was about to collapse, Guan Yu personally led 5000 cavalry and foot soldiers to the rescue. Xu Huang confronted them head-on and persevered on to a smashing victory. The siege of Fan was lifted, so gone was an imminent threat to Cao Cao’s capital.

In an official commendation, Cao Cao admitted that he had never seen another success in breaking an enemy line so deeply fortified the entire thirty years of his military exploits. Considering the situation of today’s Fan was even more critical than the sieges of yesteryears’ Ju and Jimo, it was probably no exaggeration for him to think that Xu Huang had indeed outperformed such Warring States military sages as Sun Wu and

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214 The captive was Yu Jin, one of the five highest-ranked Cao warriors who were unrelated to the clan.
The triumphant Xu Huang returned to the Cao’s headquarters where all the relief forces were present. A grand inspection by Cao Cao himself ensued. Many soldiers under the other talons and fangs left their columns for an up-close look at their king, only Xu’s troops remained in lines. Cao Cao was further impressed: “General Xu can be said to have embodied the spirit of Zhou Yafu徐將軍可謂有周亞夫之風矣.”

Xu Huang attained his highest office one year later when Cao Pi inherited the kingdom and promoted him to the General of the Right, or the seventh highest in the system. His marquisate eventually amounted to 3000 households under the third generation of the Cao’s regime. Sickness took his life in 230, and one of his wills was to be buried with plain seasonal clothing.

The last group of the Cao warriors appear together in an SGZ chapter titled the “Biographies of the Various Xiahou’s and Cao’s 諸夏侯曹傳.” They were all Cao Cao’s cousins and nephews, and more often than not entitled to prestigious generalships.

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215 Between 284–278 BC, the Warring States kingdom of Qi was near annihilation with all of its territory but the two forts of Ju and Jimo overrun by the northeastern kingdom of Yan燕. The Qi army, however, rallied around Tian Dan田單, a descendant of Rang Ju, and soldiered on to an almost impossible victory through a series of psychological warfare, political conspiracy, and tactical manoeuvre. See Crump, J. I. *Intrigues of the Warring States*戰國策, vol. 13. Sun Wu and Rang Ju, being some 200 years older, had nothing to do with the sieges of Ju and Jimo. They were rather referred to as model ancient generals for favorable comparison with Xu Huang.

216 See Introduction for disciplinary similarity shared by the troops of Xu Huang and Zhou Yafu.
somewhat inappropriate to their actual merits. The current essay will introduce the two cousins of Xiahou Dun and Cao Ren.

**Xiahou Dun夏侯惇 styled Yuanrang元讓 (died. 220)**

The author of the *SGZ*, Chen Shou never openly questioned Cao Cao’s shady family origin, nor did he say anything about the Xiahou’s being akin to the Cao’s. However, the fact that he devoted one chapter to the collective biographies of the various Xiahou’s and Cao’s, along with outright affirmations found in the interlinear commentaries by Pei Songzhi裴松之 (372 -451), all suggest that Cao Cao’s father, Song嵩 was originally a Xiahou but adopted by a eunuch, Cao Teng曹騰.217 Legend from Cao Cao’s hometown in modern Bozhou亳州, Anhui, also recalls him as a younger cousin of Xiahou Dun.218 The fact the *SGZ* placed Xiahou Dun’s biography ahead of all his cousins’ and nephews’ might well be an indication of his unmatched seniority. He died in bed in the summer of 220, just few months after Cao Cao’s death. All considered he could have been very close to Cao Cao’s age, or a generation of the 150’s.

217 Tombstones unearthed at the Cao’s hometown of Bozhou亳州 since 1974 have confirmed their genealogical connection with the Xiahou’s. Editor’s note to *SGZ*, ch. 1: 2.

218 Wang Yiqi王一奇: 369-71
Although a descendant of Xiahou Ying (died 172 BC), one of the founding members of the Han Dynasty, it seems unlikely that Xiahou Dun had lived a privileged early life. The clan must already have been in decline during the eclipse of the Eastern Han as famine had allegedly forced Dun’s younger cousin, Xiahou Yuan to feed the only daughter of his deceased elder brother at the price of starving his own son.\textsuperscript{219} Still, Dun managed to get some education and, at the age of fourteen, killed his first victim, someone who had insulted his teacher. This kind of homicide in the tradition of Dian Wei’s assassination, was again considered justifiable or quite heroic by their contemporaries.

Among the earliest cousin cohort who followed Cao Cao from day one, Xiahou Dun was probably the recipient of the best exceptional treatments from their lord. The services he rendered as told by his relatively short biography seem far from exceptional, however. The most detailed accounts deal with two incidents: one about a hostage experience, the other on how he lost one eye, neither victory-related.

The first incident took place in the spring of 194. Some spies made their way into Xiahou Dun’s quarter and caught him off guard. They demanded ransom. The troops were terrified. Han Hao, aide to Xiahou Dun, rushed to the scene after restoring camp order. He tearfully bid Xiahou Dun goodbye: “Sorry but state laws forbid me from saving you!”\textsuperscript{219}

\textsuperscript{219} Such tragedy reminds one of another famous epitome of the horrible Eastern Han famine: a hunger-stricken mother abandoned her baby by the roadside, from the \textit{Seven Sorrows} by Wang Can. \textit{SGZ}, ch. 9: 460 and Burton Watson: 35-37
and ordered immediate action against the kidnappers. Awed by Han’s zero tolerance, the enemy spies released Xiahou Dun but lost their heads nonetheless. Cao Cao took this incident a timeless example, and made it an obligation to all to attack future kidnappers without concern for hostages. There were no more hostage situations in his camp.

About one year after he walked out alive of his hostage crisis, Xiahou Dun lost his left eye from an arrow wound sustained during a defeat by Lü Bu. To identify him from his younger cousin Xiahou Yuan, the soldiers began to nickname him “the Blind Xiahou”盲夏侯. He had allegedly shattered every mirror with his reflection in it. Such madness is not only possible but also understandable considering he was likely in his prime when one-eyed and defaced.

Despite the lack of a splendid war record, Xiahou Dun already earned a large fief of 2500 households early in 207, almost a decade before Cao Cao even made to dukedom. In 216, he received prostitutes and female entertainers, a rare reward, for merits unknown. At the army gathering of 219 near the relieved city of Fan, Xiahou Dun was again honored with riding in the same chariot with Cao Cao and clearance in and out of Cao’s bedroom. No other warriors came even close to such intimacy with their king. The next king, Cao Pi continued the royal treatment by making him the first Regent

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220 See Ch. 2 for military prostitution.
Generalissimo 大將軍 of the Wei, but the much beloved Xiahou lived only few more months at this ultimate military office. He was a soldier for the most of his lifetime, still he personally invited scholars to teach him the classics. Known to be thrifty, he always shared extras with others, sought for government aid when he had shortages, therefore never accumulated much personal property. For all the exceptional favors his kings had bestowed upon him, this first Regent Generalissimo of Wei had indeed very few merits other than the price of one eye to justify his most prestigious office. He thus remained but an evidence of nepotism within the Cao’s meritocracy.

Cao Ren 曹仁 styled Zixiao 子孝 (168 – 223)

The second Regent Generalissimo of Wei, Cao Ren seems to be a worthier successor to Xiahou Dun. He was a younger cousin of Cao Cao and also one of his earliest followers since 189. The longest and perhaps the best known office he held, as referred to in Xu Chu’s avoidance of a chitchat with him, was the non-tenured General Who Conquers the South. It indeed epitomized his main duty and the height of his career at the southern front between 208 and 219.

The year 208 marked perhaps the bitterest defeat Cao Cao ever suffered, the battle of Red Cliff, at the hands of the Sun-Liu allies. The main force of Sun Quan continued a
northern invasion in the flush of victory. Ten thousands of them swarmed toward a stronghold which Cao Ren guarded. After a brief survey atop a watchtower, Cao Ren sent 300 daredevil recruits to contest the several thousand-strong enemy vanguards. Everyone around him was terrified when they saw their 300 dwarfed in seconds in the thickness of the enemy’s thousands. Cao Ren alone roared in anger: “My horse!” His aides all tried to stop him, reminding him to lose those 300 is nothing but to risk a commander’s life is everything. Cao Ren mounted in full armor nonetheless, and rode out with only scores of his best cavalrymen. They halted at the moat, about 100 paces from the enemy. Those on the walls thought Cao Ren meant just a show of support from a safe distance. To their surprise again, Cao galloped across the moat, charged into the melee, and brought out some trapped comrades. He returned for more until having saved all that was left of the 300 he sent. This is very much a smaller precedent to the battle of Hefei where Zhang Liao’s 800 terrorized 100000 of the same enemy from the south. Both exemplified forlorn hope heroism that the talons and fangs needed to survive their days.

The aforementioned siege of Fan, although lifted by Xu Huang, also bore testimony to the perseverance of the city guardian, Cao Ren, in his last year as the General Who Conquers the South. This time his situation was more desperate: the besiegers under the command of Guan Yu, Liu Bei’s seasoned warrior, had just annihilated a large relief force by induced flood from an advantageous elevation. Water at its highest measured only
feet below the city walls.\textsuperscript{221} The city was totally cut off from external aid by rings of enemy encirclement, with little food left, and forlorn hope for timely reinforcements. Before waves of attacks from the enemy now sailing in warships, Cao Ren encouraged his several thousand troops with moving speech of his determination to fight till death. None of his followers acted cowardly. All held fast until Xu Huang arrived in time, breached the siege in firm paces, and finally defeated Guan Yu in a fierce battle.

Judging from the two events above, it seems extraordinary courage was a distinct asset to Cao Ren. Cavalry warfare also appeared to be his forte as most of the actions he took part in were reportedly mounted. It could have been a family tradition that his younger brother, Chun 纯 happened to be the commander of Cao Cao’s elite Tiger and Leopard Cavalry \textit{hubaoji 虎豹騎} exclusive to the leadership of the Cao clansmen.

That said, sheer courage alone does not do Cao Ren full justice. In his youth he was some sort of a careless renegade, but as a grown-up officer he often carried legal scripts and was one of the best models for serious law-abiding conduct. He also noted the subtlety of psychological warfare, at least better than his cousin master, Cao Cao, a well-versed but cruel warlord notorious for civilian atrocities.\textsuperscript{222} Early in 203 Cao Cao

\textsuperscript{221} For the strategic use of rain and natural inundation, see Ralph Sawyer, \textit{Fire and Water: the Art of Incendiary and Aquatic Warfare in China}: 265-67.

\textsuperscript{222} The aforementioned warrior, Xu Huang had saved a whole town from Cao Cao’s routine massacre.
vowed again when attacking a stronghold that he will have everyone inside buried alive once the city fell. The siege dragged on for over a month, causing huge casualties. It was Cao Ren who convinced his lord into cancelling that murderous vow. The argument he used sounded like a combination of what Xu Huang and Zhang He had to say later under similar circumstances: “The besiegers must always show the besieged one chance for survival. Now Your Excellency has vowed to kill them all, leaving them no choice but to resist… Deploying soldiers under a stronghold to attack a hopeless enemy is not wise.” Cao Cao listened, so the city surrendered. It was probably more of such consideration for winning without fighting than raw courage, plus his royalty, that eventually favored Cao Ren with a sizable fief of 3500 households and the supreme position of Regent Generalissimo.

Due to space limitation, this chapter has left out four other talons and fangs that were most active in Cao Cao’s campaigns. They are: Xiahou Yuan, the foolhardy younger cousin to Xiahou Dun and one of the very few veteran commanders killed in action, Cao Hong, another younger cousin of Cao Cao, who made the second highest generalship, the

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223 Cao Ren has been one of the all time perfect examples of the *Sun Zi*’s teaching in action. His speech is probably more famous now than the original phrase it was based on: weishi bique 圍師必闕.

“Junzheng”軍爭, *Sun Zi*: 182.
Agile Cavalry, without many notable credits except having once saved Cao Cao’s life by risking his own,\textsuperscript{224} Yue Jin, an early 190’s recruit small in size but big in damages, and Xu Huang’s predecessor as General of the Right, Yu Jin\textsuperscript{224} (died 220), another early 190’s vassal who failed Cao Cao’s thirty-year-long trust when the first relief force to the siege of Fan, under his command, was destroyed by Guan Yu, with himself captured and forced to surrender.\textsuperscript{225} Nevertheless, their seven comrades-in-arms featured in this chapter have already epitomized several key attributes, some typical of the Cao warriors only, others universal to the soldiery of their time.

First, the order of the \textit{SGZ} biographies reflects both chronology and hierarchy. At the top of the Wei officialdom are the various Xiahou’s and Cao’s found in Chapter 9. The five non-royalty veterans with both combat and advisory calibers appear in Chapter 17, followed by the two mighty bodyguards in Chapter 18. Between Chapters 9 and 17 are seven chapters dedicated to Cao Cao’s civil officials, non clan-related, whose merits and seniority are comparable to their military colleagues in Chapter 17. What the author may have implied in this arrangement is that everything else being equal, the soldiery, even

\textsuperscript{224} During an early defeat in 190, Cao Cao’s horse was killed and himself in mortal danger. Cao Hong offered him his horse and fought on foot through a narrow escape for both. He also left one of the most famous quotes from the \textit{SGZ}, allegedly in response to Cao Cao’s initial decline of the offer: “The world goes on without a Cao Hong, but ceases if bereft of Your Excellency!” 天下可無洪，不可無君 \textit{SGZ}, ch. 9: 467.

\textsuperscript{225} \textit{SGZ}, ch. 17: 889
during wartime, was secondary to the civil bureaucracy. The civil-oriented Confucian tradition since early Han remained a continuity despite violent disturbance. Advisors whose job was to mastermind rather than direct action were more prestigious than generals whose job required some mind and mostly action, and generals than those all about action, such as a bodyguard. The Xiahou’s and Cao’s were prioritized not because of their military profession, but their relations with the Cao house.

Secondly, the eleven warriors were very close in age, mostly the generation of the late 160’s except perhaps Xiahou Dun. They won their greatest victories usually late in their 40’s or some even in their 50’s. This might seem a bit unexpected as a warrior’s performance was supposed to be age-affected. However, the best Cao warriors could have simply missed their physically fittest 20’s during which civil wars had barely started. Their opponents, especially those serving the Sun clan in the south, were often much younger.

Of the eleven talons and fangs, three were killed in action, one ended in captivity, the rest all died in peace. This is not too bad for a high-risk profession that routinely involved the primitive tactics of forlorn hope such as in the cases of Zhang Liao and Cao Ren. Casualty rate also tends to be low among the top warriors of the Liu and Sun warlord houses whose lives and deaths are found in the next two chapters. One explanation could be that high-ranking generals, for all their fearless disregard of the military classics’ prioritization of commander safety, were always the best protected link in a risky
movement, and the heroism they displayed in breaking the enemy lines more or less an exaggeration by future historians absent from the actual battle scenes.

Finally, there must have been something like an “area of specialization” when it came to who fought where: rather than running all over the place, warriors often specialized in certain battle zones where they were familiar with the topography, ambience, or the enemy. Therefore Zhang Liao would have frequented the eastern front, Cao Ren covered mainly the south, and Zhang He took care of the west. However, such disposition could have been a luxury affordable only to Cao Cao’s abundant manpower. The smaller forces of his two archrivals, Liu Bei and Sun Quan, sometimes would have to make-do with a different array of talons and fangs of their own.
Chapter 5

The Five Tigers

Nowhere in the SGZ can one find the phrase “Five Tigers” a collective term for Liu Bei’s five greatest warriors, except the fact they share one biographical chapter; meanwhile, no other warriors of the three kingdoms have ever outmatched their folk popularity largely due to romantic traditions that tended to sympathize with Liu Bei as the protagonist. The title of Chapter Five serves therefore a reminder of the complexities in dealing with individuals from a particular period in Chinese history that is probably more romanticized than any others.\textsuperscript{226}

Complexities in the study of heavily romanticized historical figures involve dramatization and preconception. The term Five Tigers is a common dramatization shared by the late medieval novels Sanguo yanyi or Romance of the Three Kingdoms and the roughly coeval Outlaws of the Marsh or Shuihu水滸, a legend of 108 bandits supposedly active in the early 1100’s.\textsuperscript{227} In the former’s case, it was probably meant to glorify the five sharpest talons and fangs of Liu Bei, namely Guan Yu, Zhang Fei張飛, Ma Chao, Huang

\textsuperscript{226} For instance, “if there is any literary work that captures the drama of Chinese history, it is the Three Kingdoms.” Moss Roberts: 937.

\textsuperscript{227} C. T. Hsia: 333.
Zhong黄忠, and ZhaoYun趙雲. Such dramatization often leads to a preconception of matchless power and valor that exceed these warriors’ historical proportions.

Another dramatization has to do with rankings among the five tigers themselves. The result is a much higher profile for the fictional representation of Zhao Yun, the last to be included in the group of five whose order of appearance in the SGZ is given above. The reasons for the historical person of Zhao Yun to be ranked the lowest are to be examined at the end of this chapter; so are the reasons why romances later promoted him to almost a culture hero. There are many more dramatizations resulting in widely accepted preconception of the five tigers. These will be incorporated into the following individual introductions.

Guan Yu關羽 styled Yunchang雲長 (162-219)

The problem with revisiting a much idolized historical figure like Guan Yu is that he is too popular and too famous. Preconception is almost inevitable when his name alone is evocative of such masculine qualities as righteousness, brotherhood, loyalty, and courage. Centuries of mass worship and official canonizations have escalated his posthumous titles from lord guangong關公, to king guanwang關王, then emperor guandi關帝, and
eventually sage guansheng, all more conveniently known than his real name.\textsuperscript{228} In the Taoist pantheon, Guan Yu has evolved from a patron deity of the soldiery into a multifunctional god who oversees the realm, protects men from evil, casts out demons, provides information about the dead, and predicts the future.\textsuperscript{229} His association with warlike functions stays strong, but the historical Guan Yu died a casualty of war and was thus by no means the mightiest warrior of all China, not even in his own time. The millions of cult admirers over the ages looked upon him as the ultimate embodiment of loyalty and brotherhood more than a mere military sage. That said, military sagehood is already no small achievement and Guan Yu, enshrined in thousands of temples throughout the Chinese world, mainland and overseas, easily rivals the cultural luminance of Confucius, the civil sage.\textsuperscript{230}

Western scholarship has already paid some attention to the cultural and religious legacies of Guan Yu, but so far an unbiased acquaintance with Guan’s original biography is still scarce. What follows is an attempt to fill this scarcity.

\textsuperscript{228} Lu Xiaoheng: 73

\textsuperscript{229} This is a good summary of Guan Yu’s international appeal, more religious than historical apparently. Rachel Storm: 440.

\textsuperscript{230} The official military counterpart of the civil sage, Confucius, was, since mid-Tang, always Taigong 太公, aka. Jiang Shang 姜尚 or Lü Wang 呂望, a semi-historical mastermind of the Zhou conquest of the Shang in the mid-1100’s BC. Folk tradition however seemed to have no problem with the conflict of Guan Yu and Taigong criss-crossing the Chinese military cult. David McMullen: 58-9.
Guan Yu was a fugitive when he met Liu Bei and Zhang Fei, the second of the five tigers, in Zhuo Commandery (near present-day Beijing). The three were like brothers, shared a bed in private, but in public Guan and Zhang always stood in attendance on Liu Bei. Between the two younger sworn brothers, Liu Bei apparently relied more on Guan Yu for covering his rear while himself away pushing for new territories. Twice he left Guan in charge of his two home bases, only to suffer the loss of both of which the second even cost Guan’s own life.

The rise of Liu Bei was the most difficult of the three warlord houses which were to become the subsequent three kingdoms. While the southern-based Sun Clan was geographically sheltered from the center of action, Liu Bei had to struggle hard for every inch of a foothold in the shadow of a much stronger player, Cao Cao, due to immediate territorial conflicts. Liu was frequently on the verge of homelessness. The only two sustainable homes he had acquired before founding his dynasty in the rather inaccessible southwest were the provinces of Xuzhou in 196 and Jingzhou in 208. In 200 Cao Cao seized Xuzhou, took Guan Yu a prisoner of war, and vanquished Liu Bei’s entire force. He had always held Guan Yu in great esteem and offered among other things, a deputy generalship rarely assigned to newcomers.\footnote{Other Cao warriors typically had a lower start at the ranks of commandant or colonel. See previous chapter.} Guan Yu however, made two things clear
through Zhang Liao, the aforementioned Cao warrior sent to test his will: one, he was bound by sworn brotherhood to rejoin Liu Bei someday; two, before doing so, he was also honor-bound to fulfill a worthy service as repayment for Cao Cao’s unusual kindness.

The worthy service Guan had promised was soon required and fulfilled during a preliminary skirmish before the all-out battle of Guandu. It was described in the *SGZ* as an almost effortless kill of a top enemy commander, that he just spotted his opponent under a canopy, galloped forth, thrust him, cut his head off, and sped away, all done unopposed in the thick of multitudes. Cao Cao became worried that Guan Yu having repaid whatever he considered himself owing would leave soon, yet he could do nothing other than indebted Guan with more rewards. Still, Guan Yu was set to leave for Liu Bei who was with the enemy at the time, and he did so in an honorable way by returning everything from Cao with a farewell letter. The Cao vassals wanted to pursue him, but Cao Cao must have some natural admiration for Guan that he simply let him go. This ended Guan Yu’s brief makeshift allegiance to Cao Cao and became one of the classic episodes in celebration of his deified personalities by popular cultures. Less celebrated is the more complicated character of Cao Cao, an otherwise ruthless meritocrat who did show here some sincere kindness unseen in his treatment of anyone else.

It took Liu Bei another eight years before he secured his second base in Jingzhou. From there he continued to expand into the southwestern province of Yizhou while leaving
Jingzhou to Guan Yu’s protection. His power sphere increased dramatically in 214 when the provincial capital of Yizhou succumbed to him as a direct result of his joining force with Ma Chao, a young noble warrior from the northwest whose name stirred fear across the realm. Guan Yu at the rear was obviously envious or unconvinced of the newcomer’s prestige. He wrote a letter to Zhuge Liang, Liu Bei’s military mastermind at the front, asking such questions as “in whose league can one find Ma Chao’s worth?”

The reply from Zhuge was a careful reassurance of Guan Yu’s ego: “…in the league of Zhang Fei, but still behind the nonesuch valor of Your Lordship the Handsome Beard.”

Guan Yu with his iconic handsome beard was so pleased that he showed those around him this letter. It may not be an understatement that he was too proud of himself, but he did boast some extraordinary heroism to deserve such pride. He once sustained a poisoned arrow wound to his left arm. A full recovery necessitated bone-scraping surgery. He simply let the surgeon cut open his arm and, despite spilling blood, kept drinking and chatting with his generals as if nothing was happening. This made him at least very close to a nonesuch in the age of unanaesthetized surgical

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232 The aging Guan Yu even had the thought of an actual match with his new colleague, some 15 years younger. SGZ, ch. 36: 1697
operations.\textsuperscript{233}

Nevertheless, Guan Yu still found himself in the same league of Zhang Fei and Ma Chao in 219 when all three attained respectively the permanent generalships of the Van, the Right, and the Left, following Liu Bei’s proclamation of kingship. His proudest victory came in the same year as he threatened Cao Cao’s capital nearby with the siege of Fan, and destroyed a large enemy relief force by working seasonal torrents and flood to his advantage. The whole central China was trembling under him 威震华夏. Before long, however, a series of adverse events had led to the dramatic fall of Guan Yu from the zenith of his military career to the nadir and finally his doom. The most decisive factor here was the joint effort of Cao Cao and Sun Quan, who had long coveted the province of Jingzhou despite nominal alliance with Liu Bei. As the protector of Jingzhou, Guan Yu was never on good terms with Sun Quan. His arrogance or simply too much pride had offended the latter on several occasions over the years. Sun Quan, of course, cared about territorial gain above all no matter what attitude Guan Yu gave him, so when the siege of Fan was undone by Xu Huang’s reinforcement, he wasted no opportunity for backstabbing a skin-deep ally. Guan Yu could have survived a failed siege, but Sun Quan’s coordinated strike at Jingzhou in his absence was a deathblow. Suddenly he had nowhere to retreat to, fell into an ambush set by

\textsuperscript{233} It is unlikely that the surgeon who operated on Guan Yu had access to the world’s first anaesthetics-like substance \textit{mafeisan} 麻沸散, an invention of Hua Tuo 华佗 (ca. 145-208) who died at least six years before Guan Yu’s surgery and left no prescription.
the Sun’s, and was killed at the age of fifty nine, along with his sons in a small town.

In the novel Guan Yu was given one last show of unwavering loyalty in front of his captor Sun Quan who tried to win him over, but only to be met with disdain.\textsuperscript{234} The distance between Sun Quan and the site where his troops ambushed Guan Yu was however too far for any meeting of the two.\textsuperscript{235} Other classic episodes and icons attributed to Guan Yu in romantic traditions, such as how he traveled through five passes and killed six Cao warriors on his journey back to Liu Bei, his emblematic steed Red Hare 赤兔 that accompanied him to death, and his heavy broadsword, could all have been something like imagined semi-historical extensions.\textsuperscript{236} They are not totally groundless. It was likely that he ran into some troubles out of Cao Cao’s domain, also likely was that Cao Cao had acquired the Red Hare from his earlier rival Lü Bu as a spoil of war and gave it away to Guan Yu, although this horse would have to have lived quite an equine longevity.\textsuperscript{237} The legendary

\textsuperscript{234} \textit{SGYY}, ch. 76: 401-06.

\textsuperscript{235} Sun Quan was in the capital, some 150 km from where Guan Yu was captured, too far for any mercy to reach Guan. \textit{SGZ}, ch. 36: 1699

\textsuperscript{236} For the folk imagery of Guan Yu, see Hong Shuling 洪淑苓’s article: \textit{Guan Gong minjian zaoxing zhi yanjiu} 関公民間造型之研究.

\textsuperscript{237} It was almost a 30-year-long active service of the Red Hare between Lü Bu and Guan Yu’s ownerships. Average lifespan of a horse is 20 – 25 years. Unusual longevities are in the 50 to 60-year-old range though. <\texttt{http://www.circlerranch.com/education/edu4.html}>
pole-saber known as the Green Dragon Crescent Moon Scimitar would fit better with popular medieval weaponry, yet unlikely in existence when Guan Yu was around.\textsuperscript{238}

The only semi-historicity is found in its alleged weight at eighty two jin, reminiscent of Dian Wei’s double halberds which weighed two jin lighter according to the army jingle of his days.\textsuperscript{239}

Whether and how faithfully romances have represented a historical celebrity like Guan Yu is subject to perhaps infinite debate. What may be better addressed through a glimpse of Guan’s rather laconic historical biography is the question since when and why he alone, not anyone else from the same era, would ascend to a godlike niche. The answer seems already given in the tone of the historian Chen Shou: his choice of words for a supposedly passionless biography, such as “nonesuch” and “the whole central China was trembling under him,” is a bit too passionate. The implication could be that Guan Yu was already no ordinary hero to the generation of the mid-late 200’s. Over the next 1000 years or so he stayed unforgotten, inspired legends, and eventually a religion. He died a victim of treachery. This tragic turn of events in addition to his tested loyalty and righteousness, even

\textsuperscript{238} This glaive-type weapon was classified as one of the “Eight Fine Sabers” in the post 1000’s Song Dynasty. Its earliest extant visual depiction is in the form of a late 1000’s painting titled “Guo Ziyi Sheds His Helmet to Meet the Uighurs” by the Northern Song master Li Gonglin 李公麟(1049 – 1106). Pei Xirong裴錫榮: 23 – 26.

\textsuperscript{239} See previous chapter: 137.
the very humane weakness of excessive pride, have all contributed to the timeless admiration from everyone sensitive to the beauty of tragedy.

Zhang Fei 張飛 styled Yide 益德 (167–221)

Second to Guan Yu in biographical order and folk popularity is his younger sworn brother Zhang Fei. The novel *SGYY* has the following description of his appearance:

pantherine head and round eyes, swallow’s heavy jowls and tiger whiskers, thunderous voice and prancing stance 豹頭環眼，燕頷虎須，聲若巨雷，勢如奔馬. Common assumption by literary critics is a rather simplistic view of this fearsome-looking warrior as bold and straightforward only. In popular culture, Zhang Fei is close to Guan Yu in fame and also subject to some temple devotion though with much less religious zeal. He fits a particular type of character found in various military romances that may be identified as physically sharp but mentally dull.²⁴¹ The formation of such a character would have to do with poetry and drama since the 800’s containing early references to such features as barbarian coarseness, dark complexion, and the weapon serpentine spear associated with

²⁴⁰ *SGYY*, ch.1: 3.

²⁴¹ For character analysis, see Andrew Plaks: 414-18.
Zhang Fei later on theatrical stage, in story-telling, vernacular novels, and most recent movies and video games.\textsuperscript{242} However, the historical Zhang Fei appeared to be a less coarse if not that refined a warrior.

Zhang Fei and Liu Bei were both natives of Zhuo Commandery where they met Guan Yu and started the trio of sworn brotherhood. According to Cao Cao’s senior advisors, both Guan Yu and Zhang Fei were tough enemies good for fighting one against thousands 萬人之敵, with the latter’s prowess slightly inferior.\textsuperscript{243} The Yuan-Ming novelists certainly held a different view that the younger must be stronger than the older in their subtle attempts to make the fictional Guan Yu a slower victor over the same opponent than Zhang Fei.\textsuperscript{244} For better or worse, Zhang Fei must have been quite an intimidating nightmare to his foes as seen in the following incident:

“[In the autumn of 208,] the First Ruler, [Liu Bei,] fled south. Lord Cao hunted him down to Steep Slope, (Changban 長阪, in present-day Dangyang 當陽, Hubei) in a hot

\textsuperscript{242} Zhang Fei’s earliest literary image, “Huo nue Zhang Fei hu”或謔張飛胡, or “Sometimes they would make fun of Zhang Fei’s coarseness,” was found in the poetry of Li Shangyin 李商隱 (813- 858).\textit{QTS:} vol. 541–85.

\textsuperscript{243} \textit{SGZ}, ch. 36: 1701.

\textsuperscript{244} The opponent used for this fictional reevaluation was Ji Ling 紀霏, Yuan Shu’s best general who survived a 30-bout duel with Guan Yu but died in less than ten bout with Zhang Fei.\textit{SGYY}, ch’s. 14, 21
pursuit by day and night. At the news of Lord Cao’s rapid arrival, [Liu Bei] abandoned his wives and son, and left Zhang Fei to cover the rear with twenty cavalrymen. [Zhang] Fei halted by a river, demolished the bridge and, eyes-widened and spear poised, snarled: ‘This is Zhang Yide. Come and fight to death!’ No one dared to approach him, thus [Liu Bei] was able to escape.”

Were there an intact bridge, some of Cao Cao’s best talons and fangs might have just crossed the river and fought. Still, for one lone spearman to intimidate a whole army into even minutes of hesitation would have taken phenomenal awe. Thunderous voice and barbarian coarseness therefore all seem to be reasonable imaginations by future generations to fit Zhang Fei’s awesome disposition.

The two decisive campaigns that won Liu Bei a solid dynastic foundation in Yizhou and Han Zhong proved Zhang Fei more than a warrior of awesome appearance, but a capable commander in his own right. In 213 he sailed upstream through the Three Gorges to rendezvous with Liu Bei in Luo (present-day Guanghan 廣漢, Sichuan). Among the many walled towns he conquered along the voyage was Jiangzhou (near present-day
Chongqing 重慶 Sichuan) where he captured the local administrator Yan Yan 嚴顏. He yelled at his captive: “How dare you not surrender to my grand army but resist?” 大軍至，何以不降而敢拒戰 Yan retorted: “You people are boldfaced invaders. You can only find headless generals in our commandery, but never a spineless one!” 卿等無狀，侵奪我州，我州但有斷頭將軍，無有降將軍也 Zhang Fei flared up and readied his executioners. Yan did not even turn a hair: “Take my head, what is all this fuss!” 斬頭便斬頭，何為怒邪 Zhang Fei was moved by such heroism. He released Yan Yan and made him a retainer. Most likely thanks to Yan’s local connections, Zhang Fei managed a rather swift conquest of the remaining obstacles in his way to joining forces with Liu Bei.

The next fierce competition between Liu Bei and Cao Cao over the Hanzhong region actually began with a match of two Zhang’s: Zhang Fei and Zhang He, one of the five ablest non-royalty warriors of the north. Zhang He initiated the offensive in 215 by forcing civilian emigration from the enemy frontier under Zhang Fei’s protection. For over fifty days the two Zhang’s were locked in a seesaw, then Zhang Fei took a detour with 10000 elite troops and surprised Zhang He on a narrow ridge. The treacherous terrain prevented Zhang He’s men from covering each other at both ends. They were quickly put to rout. Zhang He had to abandon his horse and escape through a mountainous path with a dozen followers. As a result of Zhang Fei’s victory, not only did his people on the borderland reclaim peace, but Liu Bei was also able to concentrate on his campaigns
elsewhere till returning to the Hanzhong theatre in 219 for a final showdown with Cao Cao.

It was no nepotism coincidence that two years later Liu Bei appointed Zhang Fei, among those top meritorious vassals to be rewarded at the beginning of his new dynasty, as General of Chariots and Cavalry and Colonel Director of the Retainers. The two appointments were in fair recognition of Zhang Fei’s military and administrative capacities, as the latter was equivalent to provincial inspectorate over the kingdom’s capital region.\(^\text{245}\)

So far the gentlemanly refinement and successful field maneuver that Zhang Fei showed during operations in Sichuan and Hanzhong should have added some new dimensions to his much simplified transformation in popular culture. As for his awesome look, there were reasons discussed earlier for a coarse imagery, but again awesomeness can be imagined in different ways. Those responsible for creating the various barbarian elements, tiger whiskers, dark complexion, etc, would have agreed that he could not have been too coarse or unsightly had they cared more about his daughters in official histories.

One commentary to the *SGZ* claimed that in 200, Zhang Fei ran across a fourteen-year-old niece of the Cao warrior Xiahou Yuan, and took her for a wife. This marriage complicated the relationship between the rival warlord houses of the Cao’s and

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\(^{245}\) The Colonel Director of the Retainers was much like a policing authority and surveillance agency over the entire officialdom within the capital region. An office with real power, it existed for some 400 years from Wudi’s reign till the Eastern Jin. See CH. 1 Han Military Institutions and also Xu Tianlin徐天麟: vol. 19-33.
Liu’s. Xiahou Yuan was Cao Cao’s younger cousin and Zhang Fei the youngest sworn brother of Liu Bei. Lady Xiahou had a daughter whom, in succession with another daughter of Zhang Fei, later married Liu Bei’s successor Liu Chan 刘禅 (207–271). This second generation marriage eventually made the two archrivals Cao Cao and Liu Bei, now both deceased, sort of uncle and nephew-in-laws, without their consent, of course. The chances for the half-sister empresses Zhang to have been both cosmetically unpresentable victims of political marriage were slim, so for their father to have failed an average gentleman’s appearance.

For all his greater-than-presumed generalship and possibly better-than-average look, Zhang Fei still failed to survive one fatal personality flaw. Contrary to his elder sworn brother Guan Yu who was kind to the low ranks but arrogant toward the elites, Zhang Fei was respectful toward the gentlemen but abusive to his inferiors. Liu Bei often warned him: “Your punishments are excessive. You too often whipped officers while still keeping them close afterwards, this invites danger.” 弛刑殺既過差，又日鞭撾健兒，而令在左右，此取禍之道也。 Zhang Fei did not reform, though. On the eve of Liu Bei’s vengeful invasion into the southern Wu, two disgruntled subordinates assassinated Zhang Fei and defected to

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246 SGZ, ch. 9: 463; ch. 34: 1644

247 SGZ, ch. 36: 1701.
the enemy with his head. While arrogance alone did not cost Guan Yu’s life, Zhang Fei paid the price of violent death for his abusive temper. Neither lived up to the standards for ideal generalship prescribed in Zhuge Liang’s dissertation and translated in Chapter 3, even farther were they from godlike omnipotence. Nevertheless, the outspoken comments on their shortcomings are a welcomed humane touch to their otherwise flawless and heroism-filled biographies. The two sworn brothers each with the strength of 10000 men had their share of human weaknesses and more or less died for it. Such down-to-earth tragic heroism, in combination with the traditional folk sympathy for Liu Bei, made them the best known and most romanticized tiger warriors not only of their own time, but probably of all China.

Ma Chao 马超 styled Mengqi 孟起 (176–222)

Among the five tigers of Liu Bei, Ma Chao had five “most:” the youngest, the shortest-lived, of the noblest birth, the latest acquisition, and the miserablest. He was a generation of the late 170’s while the others were from the 160’s and earlier; he died of illness at the age of 47 while the others all neared or passed their sixtieth. He submitted to

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248 Both failed the third requirement for ideal generalship. See the partial translation of Zhuge Liang’s *Military Essence* in CH. 3.
Liu Bei in 214, five years later than the second last submission Huang Zhong, and decades after Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, and Zhao Yun had met their lifelong master. Apparently in Ma Chao’s case, seniority was not a determinant at all when he ranked the third of the five tigers in their SGZ biographies.

In 219, Liu Bei afforded the first major rewards to his vassals on the occasion of him proclaiming the King of Hanzhong. With the appointment as General of the Left, Ma Chao found himself, a relative newcomer, in the same league of Liu Bei’s two sworn brothers and an envy to the proud Guan Yu in particular. Within two years, Liu Bei’s ascension from king to emperor of the continuous house of Han in the western Shu warranted yet another round of major rewards from which Ma Chao acquired the second highest military office, General of Agile Cavalry. Even Zhang Fei’s generalship of Chariots and Cavalry was slightly lower if not for his second appointment as Colonel Director of the Retainers. Guan Yu unfortunately died before a second promotion so his envy of Ma Chao would have to become postmortem. The fact he remained the first tiger in biographical order is evidence to some consideration of seniority when the historian’s overall preference was still based on official ranks. When it came to his two other senior colleagues, Huang Zhong and Zhao Yun, Ma Chao outshone them both while the third highest ranked tiger Huang Zhong died a General of the Rear and Zhao Yun with no tenured generalship at all.

At first Ma Chao’s superiority might seem undeserved for a newcomer, but it could have
been a reflection of Liu Bei’s bias toward his noble eminence as well as a due recognition of his irreplaceable contribution to the surrender of Chengdu, provincial capital of Yizhou.

Nothing seemed more timely to Liu Bei than the offer of allegiance from a well-established warrior like Ma Chao, that he exclaimed the second he heard that Ma was joining him: “Now Yizhou is in my hands!” Prior to this, the provincial capital had already been under siege for almost a year and would probably have resisted longer were there no new enemy blood. However, Ma Chao’s reputation, noble or horrible or both, must have been so overwhelming that his siding with the invaders became the last straw to the city defenders. Within ten days the city surrendered and Liu Bei’s conquest of Yizhou, a rich and mountain-screened province ideal for a dynastic base, was made complete thanks to Ma Chao’s timely allegiance.

Unlike his four tiger colleagues of relatively humble origins, Ma Chao joined Liu Bei a noble-born and very much an established warlord of his own. The Ma clan of the northwest prospered since the generation of Ma Yuan 馬援 (14 BC–49), the Ocean Tamer General *fubo jiangjun* 伏波將軍 whose expeditions traversed the lands of the northern Xiongnu to the southern Vietnam.²⁴⁹ Ma Chao’s father, Teng was a dominant warlord west of the Yellow River loop. He retired in 208 on account of old age. Cao Cao had always worried about Ma Teng’s influence, so he assigned Teng to the emeritus office of

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²⁴⁹ Yu Ying-shih: 212.
Commandant of the Guards and relocated him with his whole family except Ma Chao to the capital as unannounced hostages.

Ma Chao took over his father’s domain and stayed behind at the rank of Deputy General. He, of course, understood well the hostage situation but could not just sit and wait till Cao Cao’s eventual encroachment upon his home provinces. In 211 he rallied a massive rebellion with the combined forces of his own and those of his father’s associates. This offered Cao Cao a pretext to conquer the northwest. The confluence of the Yellow River and the Wei River provided the primary arena. There was once a field meeting between the leaders of the two opposing armies where Ma Chao contemplated a surprise abduction of Cao Cao by superior prowess, but the presence of Xu Chu, the aforementioned tigerish bodyguard, discouraged him from any false move. On this day the valiant Ma Chao could have rewritten history, but because of another strongman probably his equal history stayed where it was. His rebellion ended in bitter defeat as a result of Cao Cao’s creation of discord between his alliances. He attempted a few more comebacks, mainly around the northwestern provinces of Liang and Bing and, but was again defeated by local supporters of Cao Cao and finally ousted from his homeland.

What made Ma Chao the miserablest of the five tigers was a clanwide extermination during his exile. According to Ma’s deathbed petition to Liu Bei, Cao Cao was responsible for the murder of some 200 members of his family. The victims were not limited to those
hostages held in the capital, and included those closest to Ma Chao such as his women and children who were left behind wherever he fled from, and consequently killed or captured. In the end, Ma Chao left with one son, one daughter who married a half-brother of the emperor Liu Chan, and a younger cousin Ma Dai. He named Dai in his death will the only surviving relative to continue the Ma’s line and petitioned for Liu Bei’s proper care. This seems a contradiction as the SGZ specified just a few lines under its full record of Ma’s farewell petition that his son, Cheng, was the legal inheritor. Neither the author nor future commentators had given any explanations why Ma Chao left the continuation of his line to a cousin when he still had a son, or they just felt needless to say this son must have been born without a father. In that case Ma Chao would have been blessed with a posthumous relief after all the miseries of losing virtually his entire family in his lifetime. There was little dramatization or fictionalization about him except the reasonably famous tale of “Night Joust with Zhang Fei” in which the two drew a 300-round spear match. Legends like this are apparently imagined extensions of Guan Yu’s historical questioning: “In whose league can one find Ma Chao’s worth?”

Huang Zhong 黃忠 styled Hansheng 漢升 (died 220)

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250 The Night Joust was one of some sixty Yuan dramas with a Three Kingdoms theme. It remained a popular episode in storytelling and fictions. Cai Dongzhou 蔡東洲: 299–307
Old age is always the first folk impression of Huang Zhong, greatly due to the novel’s portrayal of him as a tiger never giving in to his years. No one was born old of course, though he must have been considerably older than Guan Yu whose pride again ran into trouble with him in 219. When notified of Huang Zhong’s meteoric rise to an office parallel to his own, though himself already nearly sexagenarian, Guan Yu complained: “A proud warrior does not go with an old soldier!” 大丈夫終不與老兵同列 251

The novel SGYY had taken a good guess at Huang Zhong’s age together with a dramatization of his natural death into a casualty of war: in spring, 222, Huang Zhong was dying from a mortal arrow wound and told Liu Bei: “I am only a soldier with undeserved kindness from Your Majesty. Now at seventy five, I have lived long enough. I pray Your Majesty will keep his sacred person safe for the future conquest of the northern heartland！臣乃一武夫耳，幸遇陛下。臣今年七十有五，壽亦足矣。望陛下善保龍體，以圖中原!” 252

Huang Zhong otherwise would not have been an instant subject to the mockery of an aging Guan Yu, it is therefore reasonable to presume him to have been some ten years older or a contemporary of his original master, Liu Biao. 周(144–208). A somewhat

251 This quote from the biography of Fei Shi 費詩 was key to the folk imagery of an old Huang Zhong. SGZ, ch. 41: 1833.

252 SGYY, ch. 83: 433.
underestimated warlord, Liu Biao was celebrated more for his kindheartedness and royal refinement than military competence. Legend had it that, when his tomb was damaged some eighty years after the interment, his corpse and that of his wife were undecayed, with an aroma that scented the air to a mile or more and did not dissipate for over a month.\(^{253}\)

That said, Liu Biao was no petty warlord: it was his troops who killed Sun Jian, ancestor to the Three Kingdoms state of Wu; his territory, Jingzhou, was one of the largest Han provinces with eight commanderies.\(^{254}\) Huang Zhong had held a couple of entry-level generalships at Changsha (present-day provincial capital of Hunan), one of the southern commanderies until he paid homage to Liu Bei in 209.

It was a transitory period that had seen the death of Liu Biao, the brief occupation of Jingzhou by Cao Cao, and its division by Liu Bei and Sun Quan, all in rapid succession. This also marked the beginning of a golden age for Liu Bei’s enterprise which thrived in the next ten years with his victories in Sichuan and Hanzhong. Huang Zhong’s timing for service was perfect. Given the chance as one of the most active vassals to assist Liu Bei’s invasion into the southwest, he defied his old age with numerous forlorn hope attacks. The ultimate service that would entitle him to be counted as one of Liu’s five tiger warriors was

\(^{253}\) This miracle was recorded in the prose-like work of geography, *Shuijing zhu* (水經注) by Li Daoyuan (466 or 472–527), cited in Paul W. Kroll: notes 24 to ch. 2: 27.

\(^{254}\) For a recent article on Liu Biao, see Chittick, Andrew. “The Life and Legacy of Liu Biao: Governor, Warlord, and Imperial Pretender in Late Han China.” *Journal of Asian History* 37.2 (2003):155-86
done in 219 when he, possibly already a septuagenarian, confronted the Commander-in-Chief of Cao Cao’s operation in Hanzhong, Xiahou Yuan at Mt. Dingjun 定軍山 (present-day Mian County 勉縣, Shaanxi).

“Xiahou Yuan commanded an elite force. Huang Zhong took a firm approach, consolidating each movement and encouraging his own men. The sounds of horns and drums were sky-renting, war cries earthshaking. In a flash Huang’s troops had killed Xiahou Yuan. Yuan’s army suffered a crushing defeat.”

Liu Bei was about to promote Huang Zhong to General of the Rear for the unprecedented kill at Mt. Dingjun, but Zhuge Liang cautioned him: “The reputation of Huang Zhong and those of Guan Yu and Ma Chao are never in the same class. Now if you rank them the same, Ma [Chao] and Zhang [Fei] might understand as they are nearby and have witnessed [Huang Zhong’s] deserving merits, but I am afraid Guan Yu will be displeased when learning of this from a distance. Isn’t such placement inappropriate?”

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255 SGZ, ch. 36: 1705.
Liu Bei assured Zhuge that he would offer Guan Yu an explanation himself and went ahead with the planned promotion. As predicted, Guan Yu rose in defense of his pride again. He might have every right to challenge the equality between a newfound elder colleague and himself whom had accompanied Liu Bei through thirty years of fire and water, but Huang Zhong was no opportunist headhunter either. The head he took belonged to Xiahou Yuan, one of Cao Cao’s veteran cousins and also his maternal cousin-in-law. As General Who Conquers the West and the northern commander-in-chief at the Hanzhong theatre, Xiahou Yuan was the highest ranked officer ever to have fallen in action. Famous Cao warriors like Zhang He and Xu Huang were both Yuan’s subordinates at the time of their Mt. Dingjun fiasco. Zhang He died twelve years later from an arrow wound as another General Who Conquers the West but at least with his body retrieved intact. The Wei lüe text attributed Xiahou Yuan’s entombment by Liu Bei to the petition of Zhang Fei’s wife, who happened to be a niece of Xiahou Yuan. In summary, the victory at Mt. Dingjun credited to Huang Zhong was easily Liu Bei’s greatest victory ever: it inflicted upon his archrival

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256 SGZ, ch. 36: 1706.

257 Xiahou Yuan’s wife was Cao Cao’s maternal younger cousin. SGZ, ch. 9: 460.

258 Pei’s commentary to SGZ, ch. 9: 463.
the greatest loss of talons and fangs. Just as Guan Yu had the right to defend his ego, so did Huang Zhong to pride himself in the tireless vigor of a senior tiger.

Zhao Yun 趙雲 Styled Zilong 子龍 (died. 229)

The last of the five tigers in official history is the third in folk traditions. The romantic transcendence of Zhao Yun is perhaps second only to that of Guan Yu, and remains largely under-explored. Literary critics observed that, compared to Guan Yu and Zhang Fei whose historically imperfect heroism never evaded attention of novelists, the fictional representation of Zhao Yun stands as a somewhat flawless model for soldiery. Such comparison is based on Zhuge Liang’s attitudes toward the trio in accordance with their varying individualities: he wheedled the arrogant Guan Yu out of an internecine duel with Ma Chao, guided the hot-tempered yet occasionally shrewd Zhang Fei to his scheming potential, but simply counted on Zhao Yun for his perfect embodiment of the best of both worlds: spearheading audacity and painstaking attention to details. The novelist bias is also evident in Zhuge Liang’s reaction to Zhao Yun’s death in 229: he stamped his feet and

259 Zhao Yun’s name is found in the titles of five SGYY chapters 41, 52, 61, 71, and 92, one and three more than those with the names of Huang Zhong and Ma Chao. This gives an idea of his proportion in a fiction with thousands of characters. The character of Zhao Yun is also the third most popular theatrical representation of the five tigers. Siu Wang-Ngai with Peter Lovrick: 83–95.
wailed: “Alas, in Zilong the empire had a pillar, and I, a limb!” In contrast, to Liu Bei’s mourning for the loss of Guan Yu, he just shrugged: “Guan’s arrogance brought upon himself disaster…we must slowly seek revenge.”

On the stage of a Beijing opera, Zhao Yun’s characteristic appearance is that of a handsome young warrior categorized as wusheng. This agrees with his physical description given in a supplementary text to the SGZ as eight-span tall and awesome looking, but disagrees with the fictional guess of his age which would necessitate him to have been Liu Bei’s senior. At least one temple was dedicated to Zhao Yun in present-day Sichuan, the province once home to Liu Bei’s kingdom. In 1871 a Chinese ilex was planted to commemorate this third century warrior in the park Steep Slope, Dangyang, where he almost singlehandedly saved Liu Bei’s infant heir apparent along with the mother from an enormous enemy force. Seldom noted though, is the fact the historical prototype of such a beloved fictional character and folk celebrity was the only one without a tenured generalship and therefore ranked the last of the five tigers in their original biographies. Two

260 SGYY, ch’s. 78-97.

261 Casts in a Beijing opera typically belong to five types of roles, of which the wusheng is often identified as a mustacheless acrobat. Elizabeth Halson: 13.

262 The novel made Zhao Yun a septuagenarian in 227 or 228 even though his age remained a mystery in all historical records. SGYY, ch. 92: 514.

key factors seem to have determined his lack of comparable prestige: timing and placing.

To be sure, Liu Bei had good feelings about Zhao Yun not much unlike Zhuge Liang’s enthusiasm. Zhao Yun was one of his early acquaintances who met him in 190. History recalled their comradeship as a preordained one: they met early but parted soon because Zhao Yun was homebound to his elder brother’s funeral. Zhao left with a promise of future service when they held hands at the parting. For nine years they remained separated, then reunited in a permanent lord and vassal relationship. Another nine years brought them to the trial at Steep Slope where Liu Bei was never this close to annihilation by Cao Cao had it not been for Zhang Fei’s heroic stand and its temporary confusing effect. Rumors said Zhao Yun had defected to Cao Cao, but Liu Bei threw a handy halberd at the rumormonger in disbelief: “Zilong will never betray me!”

At this moment Zhao Yun was fighting alone with Liu Bei’s one-year-old son beneath his breastplate, cutting a blood swath through the enemy lines. The baby under his protection was indeed Liu Bei’s first son begotten at forty-seven after several miscarriages. To have saved this precious future successor to the throne was no ordinary achievement. Furthermore, Zhao Yun doubled this merit with yet a second recovery of the same child from an attempted kidnap in 213. The only problem with his blood-and-sweat

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264 Liu Bei’s early years of struggle for survival not only cost him several unborn children en route of horsebound wanderings, but also the death of his first wife, Lady Mi湍 (died 208). SGZ, ch. 33: 1621.
services was untimeliness: the first rescue of the future crown prince came in a time when Liu Bei was barely managing his own survival; the second occurred within a safer context, but still too early for the kind of rewards Liu could afford as a king six years later.

Convinced of Zhao Yun’s conscientious and meticulous personality, Liu Bei entrusted him with the specialty of inner affairs which typically involved attendance on Liu’s womenfolks and children. This was a logical assignment for Zhao Yun, who had proved himself earlier a capable guardian of the baby master and his mother. The downside was of course remote chances for active duty at the front where better rewards awaited. As Liu Bei’s power increased, so did the safety of his family. Naturally frontline service became more important and relevant to him than babysitting and housekeeping. Unfortunately Zhao Yun spent his worthiest efforts at a wrong time and more or less because of such proven worth, was again assigned to a wrong place.

Besides timing and placing, personal limits could also have been to blame. Despite his specialty at the rear, Zhao Yun did have chances in the campaigns of Sichuan and Hanzhong. Both campaigns turned out a springtide for Liu Bei’s tiger warriors to collect feathers in their caps: Ma Chao contributed to the final conquest of Sichuan, Zhang Fei consolidated the northern frontier of this newly acquired province by defeating Zhang He, Huang Zhong killed the enemy commander-in-chief, Xiahou Yuan, driving Cao Cao out of the Hanzhong region, Guan Yu ensured Liu Bei several years of full concentration at the
front of expansion by safeguarding his rear, the province of Jingzhou. Only Zhao Yun wound up with no considerable merits except a brief revival of his forlorn hope heroism during the struggle for Hanzhong. He once ran into a superior enemy force under Cao Cao’s personal command, with only a handful of cavalrymen. Having alone charged in and out of the enemy hordes a few times, he retreated into his camp but left the gate open to a dead silence. Cao Cao dared not enter for fear of an ambush. Zhao Yun then broke the silence with sudden drumbeats and crossbow volleys. The enemy was put to disarray and stampede that drowned numerous in the nearby Han River. The next day Liu Bei arrived for a camp inspection and praised Zhao as “a man of guts through and through.”一身是膽 The soldiers also dubbed him the General of Tiger Valor 虎威將軍. 265

Zhao Yun’s stratagem of a vacant camp, which might have downgraded Zhuge Liang’s famous stratagem of a vacant city 空城計 to a reenactment, remained however indecisive to the outcome of the Hanzhong campaign. 266 It demonstrated rather the ability to minimize and sustain an inevitable defeat, something that seemed to involve Zhao Yun often. He was last seen in action during Zhuge Liang’s failed northern expedition in 228.

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265 General of Tiger Valor was an official Eastern Han appointment once awarded to the Cao veteran Yu Jin, but in Zhao Yun’s case it was more likely a nickname. Xiong Fang熊方, ed.: 1261.

266 The “vacant city” 空城 was a fabrication by a diehard fan of Zhuge Liang in the early Jin or late 200’s. SGZ, ch. 35: 1663.
The entire operation suffered setbacks and Zhao Yun’s troop, left to deal with a much larger enemy force, was no exception. On the brighter side, he was the only commander to have personally covered the rear of his retreat, reformed ranks behind a new strategic barrier, and thus sustained a potentially much worse defeat without significant loss of men and supplies. He died of old age the next year with the two offices of General Who Supervises the Election of Military Officers zhonghujun中護軍, and General Who Rallies the Armies zhenjun jiangjun鎮軍將軍. The latter was, as the text told, a demotion from his earlier impermanent office of General Who Fortifies the East due to his defeat the year before.267

All considered this last of the five tigers did more damage control under unfavorable circumstances than inflicting active damage when opportunities called, so his historical rank was likely just a fair measurement of what he had done. What inspired his rank-defiant popularity in folk traditions is unlikely war performance, but good personality traces found throughout the original records. He once refused a marriage proposal by a new ally also surnamed Zhao on behalf of his widowed sister-in-law. The given excuse was possible incest in remarrying one’s genealogically related, but his real misgiving was

267 The General Who Fortifies鎮 was a wartime guardian of one of the four fronts, similar in prestige to the General Who Conquers征. Whether the Three Kingdoms General Who Supervises the Election of Military Officers still commanded the imperial guards, handled officer election nationwide or in the central government only is still open for debate. See Tao Xinhua陶新華’s article Guanyu weijinnanchao zhonghujun zhu guanguanxuan de jige wenti.
intimate connection with a newcomer of untested loyalty while “women are not a shortage under Heaven 天下女不少.” The Zhao matchmaker did become a turncoat later, and Zhao Yun stayed a clean outsider.

After the conquest of Sichuan, Liu Bei was about to reward his meritorious vassals with luxury residences in the capital. Zhao Yun persuaded him from indulging in such excess too soon, quoting the famous line of the Western Han general Huo Qubing: “No home for me until the Xiongnu have been exterminated 匈奴未滅，無以家為.” Before Liu Bei’s invasion into the south, Zhao Yun reckoned such move imprudent as it jeopardized the priority of a united front with the Sun’s against their common archenemy in the north. He voiced his concern again, but this time he failed to convince. His last war activity ended in defeat in 228, but his men and supplies survived exceptionally intact and even with surplus which Zhuge Liang allowed them to share for a reward. Zhao Yun, however, saw no reason to reward a defeated troop and proposed all surpluses to be stored for due wintertime governmental reserve. Such thoughtfulness pleased Zhuge Liang greatly.

In summary, Zhao Yun’s personality seemed to fit the type that did not make mistakes but without surprising accomplishments either. He actually shared certain meticulous traits with Zhuge Liang whose characteristics were well summarized by the

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268 SGZ, ch. 36: 1707.

269 ibid.
historian Chen Shou: “…he rewarded every act of good no matter how small it was and
pardoned not one single evil regardless of it being minor… a real talent for government, he
might be rated second only to Guan Zhong 管仲 and Xiao He (illustrious ministers for the
early 600’s BC marquisate of Qi and the Supreme Ancestor of Han respectively). Yet for
years of manpower waste in militarism that all came to no avail, could it not be that
quick-witted generalship is out of his forte?” 善無微而不賞，惡無纖而不貶…可謂識治
之良材，管蕭之亞匹矣。然連年動眾，未能成功，蓋應變將略非其所長歟

It is thus a logical guess that the novelists portrayed Zhao Yun as Zhuge Liang’s best beloved of the
five tigers. This must have served a substantial boost to the folk enthusiasm about Zhao Yun,
who could have deserved couple historical ranks higher.

Three outcomes set the experiences of the five tigers apart from their opponents in
Cao Cao’s camp. First, their biographies in Volume 2, SGZ, on the second of the three
kingdoms, Shu, appear next only to Zhuge Liang’s but way ahead the rest of Liu Bei’s
entire officialdom, civil and military. Those listed below them include Pang Tong 龐統
(179–214), the mastermind but also a casualty of Liu Bei’s Sichuan campaign who in his
short lifetime ranked the same as Zhuge Liang. However, this does not necessarily

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270 SGZ, ch. 35: 1678.

271 At the time of Pang Tong’s death, he and Zhuge Liang both held the office of Director General of the
Hosehold.軍師中郎將 SGZ, ch. 37: 1720.
present a special case for Liu Bei’s camp where postmortem recognition seemed to have preferred the military. The first two of the five tigers were Liu Bei’s sworn brothers and also the earliest in his service, so they were some kind of royalty, too, just like Cao Cao’s cousin cohort. The other three tigers shared similar deeds and offices, so their priority probably means nothing more than the high place assigned to the biographies of the various Xiahou’s and Cao’s.

Next, the kind of area of specialization attributable to the Cao veterans was either an unaffordable luxury to Liu Bei’s limited manpower, or an unnecessary deployment for his cornered position. Rather than specializing in one battle zone, most of the five tigers, namely Zhang Fei, Huang Zhong, and Zhao Yun had to follow their master’s expeditions in virtually all directions. Thanks to the make-do Sun-Liu alliance however, Liu Bei’s eastern front stood trouble-free for the better part of the tripodal rivalry except the conflicts over Jingzhou. His southwestern kingdom was also home to some of the most insurmountable natural barriers in premodern China; thus the five tigers did somehow specialize in fighting enemies from the north only. On average they outmatched their northern opponents: Guan Yu captured Yu Jin and almost caught Cao Ren in the siege of Fan, Zhang Fei wiped Zhang He out of the northern borderland, and Huang Zhong eliminated Xiahou Yuan from the Hanzhong theatre.

Lastly, all five tigers attained nobility in addition to bureaucratic offices, but unlike
the Cao’s military aristocracy, their lordships in official records lacked specified size of enfeoffment in numbers of households. Besides the presumption that Chen Shou, a Jin historian, had better access to official documents from the direct predecessor, Wei, another possibility is simply a matter of affordability: Cao Cao could afford his talons and fangs the best rewards under the full institutions of the Han military aristocracy because of his central authority and lion’s share of registered population. On the other hand, vassalage under Liu Bei meant both slow and less material gains on par with his slow rise and less sphere. The five tigers could have owned real fiefs with taxable households, but official record of further details was unlikely a matter of confidence under the Shu-Han aristocracy.272

The five tigers evoked folk fascination like no other warriors of the era. Anyone of the current generation would probably find it a hit-and-miss to try an unbiased evaluation of their personalities, how such personalities affected their lives and deaths, and from a greater historical perspective, epitomized the vicissitudes of the ancient Chinese soldiery. Perhaps the epilogue to the group biographies of the five tigers by Chen Shou, an approximate contemporary, serves the best conclusion to the current chapter:

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272 Same as the Shu-Han, records of the Wu aristocracy indicated titles only but no specified size of fiefs. The terms *xufeng* 虛封 or “nominal enfeoffent” and *yaoling* 遙領 or “remote entitlement” were commonly applied to the Shu-Han vassals when the fiefs attached to their noble titles were still in enemy domains. It is possible that they did receive income from taxable households, but compared to the resourcefulness of their northern rival, sizable fiefs were a shy to the Wu and Shu-Han regimes so they would rather not disclose such information. Yang Chen楊晨: ch. 10: 185–200.
“Author’s comments: Guan Yu and Zhang Fei were both said to be tiger vassals of the age with the strength of 10000 men. [Guan] Yu repaid Lord Cao’s favor, [Zhang] Fei released Yan Yan out of righteousness. Such deeds befit stately gentlemanship. However, [Guan] Yu was stubborn and arrogant, [Zhang] Fei hot-tempered and unkind. It is indeed common logic that their shortcomings cost them lives. Ma Chao suffered clan-wide extinction as a result of foolhardy reliance on personal valor and the support of the northwestern tribes, how pitiful! Still, was he not wiser having finally reached prosperity through all his miseries? Huang Zhong and Zhao Yun were both mighty valiant talons and fangs, were they not the kind of Guan Ying and Lord Teng?”

評曰：關羽張飛皆稱万人之敵，為世虎臣。羽報效曹公，飛義釋嚴顔，並有國士之風。然羽剛而自矜，飛暴而無恩，以短取敗，理數之常也。馬超阻戎負勇，以覆其族，惜哉！能因窮致泰，不猶愈乎！黃忠趙雲強驚壯猛，並作爪牙，其灌騰之徒歟？
Chapter Six

The Southerners: Last But Not the Least

Leaving the talons and fangs of the south the last under the current review is in compliance with the conventional order ascribed to the three kingdoms. In no way does it imply any less importance of the southerners. Official histories alternated their circumstantial sanctions of legitimacy between the Wei and Shu Han, preferring the former under the regime of its direct descendant or others with dynastic resemblance, but in general sympathizing the latter after the loss of traditional territories in the north followed by refugee government in the south became a recurring theme of post-Tang China. 274 This legitimacy issue remained central to later romantic traditions which simplified the total war of the three kingdoms into the dramas of two warlord houses only: the usurper Cao Cao against the protagonist Liu Bei. In both legacies of the three kingdoms, official histories and romances, the southern state of Wu has been reduced to the last as well as the least power. Modern scholarship is reasonably aware of the injustice in such treatment, and De Crespigny’s *Generals of the South* in particular stands out as an insightful reevaluation of the historical dimensions and unique characters of this “third” kingdom.

274 Sympathy toward the Shu-Han regime became something like a historical orthodox since the time of the ZZTJ.
One easy justification for the conventional placement of Wu as the third kingdom is the fact that it did proclaim sovereignty the last in the year 229, eight years after the Shu Han, and nine years after the Wei. Nonetheless, the kingdom of Wu also outlived both of its rivals by more than fifteen years.⁵ The foundation and early history of this southern regime are about the story of how one family in one region rose to local military power within a rather short time-span.⁶ Among the three warlord houses, the Sun clan was the least privileged. The father of a future dynasty in the south, Sun Jian, emerged as an undistinguished local officer. Even the remote descendancy he claimed from the master Sun Zi, alleged author of China’s greatest military classic, paled in comparison to Liu Bei’s imperial lineage and Cao Cao’s not-too-distant connection with Cao Shen, the second prime minister of the Western Han. Sun Jian started off as a nobody from a peripheral province, yet his two sons, Sun Ce and Sun Quan eventually triumphed in the art of the possible with the foundation, establishment, and management of a regional power so strong that it outlasted all the other warlord regimes.

In terms of size, the Wu indeed ranked the second of the three kingdoms. At its height it consisted the best of Han China’s three provinces, 杭 (the southeast), Jing (the

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⁵ The kingdom of Wu (229–280) lasted 17 years longer than the Shu-Han and 15 years longer than the Wei.

⁶ De Crespigny, Generals of the South:
mid-south), and Jiao (the extreme south). The Sun’s native province of Yang housed the state capital, and was once home to the first regime named Wu in Chinese history, a late 1000’s–473 BC principality whose assumption of kingship under the Zhou Dynasty pioneered the same peripheral defiance. Despite its brief rise to quasi-hegemony, the ancient state of Wu never quite succeeded in closing the cultural gap between the south and China’s traditional center in the north. During the Eastern Han, the southern provinces remained an underdeveloped periphery. It was not until the success of the three kingdoms state of Wu that this region began to grow with extended borders, refined culture of its own, and thriving economy all leading to the future prosperity of Southeast China.

The “generals” of the South, as in the title of Rafe De Crespigny’s book on the Wu kingdom, is a generic term that identifies the warrior founders of Sun Jian and Sun Ce, the military masterminds of the Sun’s enterprise like Zhou Yu, Lü Meng, and Lu Xun, as well as men of action who served strictly as their talons and fangs. The scope of the current

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277 Wu was one of the oldest Zhou principalities, founded by the brother of King Wen of Zhou. Its official rank was viscount 吳子, after the formal establishment of the Zhou Dynasty by King Wu. However, in 584 BC, Wu became the fifth maverick feudal state to usurp the title of king, followed by Yue 越 (ca. 21st century – 222 BC) in 504 BC. Wu of the Three Kingdoms encompassed mainly the former territories of four of those ancient usurpers, Xu 徐 (ca. 21st century–512 BC), Chu 楚 (ca. 1000’s–223 BC), Wu, and Yue. For the origins and history of Wu and Yue, see Zhao Ye 趙曄 (died. 80)’s Wuyue chunqiu 吳越春秋 and for a list of kingship usurpation, “Zhoudai zhuhouguo chengwang qingkuang yilan” 周代諸侯國稱王情況一覽: 5 April. 2005. <http://www.zgxqs.cn/bbs/archiver/?tid-4854.html>
essay is limited to the last group. It is true that most Wu warriors lived with lower official ranks than those of the Cao’s and the Liu’s, many never even made to general in a literal sense. Sizable enfeoffment were also a rarity to them. The second-class offices and nobilities, predictated by the Sun’s humble origin and late dynastic claim, do not however automatically translate into second-class performance. Under the leadership of young and brilliant commanders-in-chief, namely Zhou Yu, Lü Meng, and Lu Xun, the southern warriors outmatched many higher-ranked and reputedly stronger enemies in several decisive battles of the era. They taught Cao Cao the hardest lesson of defeat at Red Cliff, deprived Liu Bei of his proudest tiger Guan Yu by surprise, and dealt another deathblow to the subsequent retaliation mounted by Liu Bei himself. For all the nightmares they gave the other two “primary” states, these talons and fangs of the third kingdom have been subject to the least recognition both in terms of popularity and historiography. This chapter will introduce six of them in an attempt to illuminate and hopefully raise some awareness of how the southerners, traditionally underestimated, completed the soldiery experiences during the Han to Three Kingdoms transition.

Taishi Ci 太史慈 styled Ziyi 子義 (166–206)

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278 Details of these battles are in Ch. 1 or Li Ying 李英: 287-89, 292-94.
Unlike most of his comrades-in-arms in the Sun’s camp, Taishi Ci was not a southern native. He came from the northern province of Shandong where he acquired a solid education and served the local commandery as a secretarial aide. At the age of twenty one, he was sent to the capital Luoyang to deliver an indictment over a contentious case between the commandery and the province. The Eastern Han litigation always favored earlier submission, and the provincial dispatcher was ahead of Taishi Ci at his arrival in Luoyang. Not knowing the other was the commandery courier, he was trapped into giving Taishi the provincial indictment to check the official seal. Taishi Ci scrapped the document, revealed his identity, and threatened the provincial dispatcher to escape together from the crime of negligence and vandalism. The two fled the next day, but Taishi Ci sneaked back to the capital and submitted the commandery indictment. The province lost the lawsuit as a result. This incident made Taishi Ci famous, but also forced him into a real flight to the northeast from the hatred of his home province.

The Chancellor of Beihai (present-day Wei濰, Shandong), Kong Rong孔融 (153–208), a descendant twenty generations removed from Confucius, held Taishi Ci in great esteem and often looked after his home-alone mother. In 194, a group of the Yellow Turbans rebels attacked Kong Rong at a garrison within his jurisdiction. Taishi Ci was visiting home the first time in eight years. His mother told him about Kong Rong’s

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279 *HHS*, ch. 70: 641.
kindness all these years which behooved a repayment, so he sneaked into the besieged walls where Kong’s position hung in the balance. As the siege intensified, Kong Rong was desperate for external aid from Liu Bei. No one but Taishi Ci volunteered to risk leaving. Kong Rong warned him of the impossible mission to break through the enemy lines, but he insisted: “…now everyone says it is impossible, if I also say the same, can this be an answer to Your Excellency’s kindness and what my mother has sent me here for？”

To accomplish this mission impossible, Taishi Ci feigned exercises of marksmanship just outside the city gate for three days until the rebels relaxed. On the fourth day he made the real breakthrough and hurried to Liu Bei for help. After a moving speech of solicitation, he returned with a 3000-strong elite troop. The rebels lifted the siege at the news of reinforcement. Honored by the relieved Kong Rong as a much younger friend, Taishi Ci only went home to his mother. The madam cheered: “I am so glad that you have done Chancellor Kong a worthy service.”

Sometime during Taishi Ci’s brief home visit, a commandery fellow man Liu You received the imperial appointment as Inspector of the southeastern province of Yang. Taishi Ci was then 29-year-old and still masterless, so he went south to try Liu’s patronage. Yang province at that time was a white-hot battle zone overrun by the rapid expansion of the young warlord Sun Ce. Someone suggested Liu You use Taishi Ci as the
provincial general-in-chief in charge of defense. Liu You, however, underestimated Taishi’s potential and only used him as a scout.

One day Taishi Ci along with one fellow mounted scout ran into Sun Ce and thirteen of his senior commanders in Shenting（神亭，present-day southern Zhenjiang, Jiangsu). Despite overwhelming odds, Taishi Ci charged. The nine years younger Sun Ce took on him singlehandedly. The duel ended indecisively with Taishi Ci’s horse wounded, the auxiliary halberd on his back taken, and Sun Ce’s helmet stripped off. This rather violent acquaintance of the two future lord and vassal is also one of the highlighted episodes in fiction.280

Liu You was unable to stop Sun Ce’s penetration into the Yangzi Delta and had to retreat farther south where he died soon after. Taishi Ci did not follow him but instead gathered an aboriginal tribal force of his own and continued local guerrilla resistance. Before long Sun Ce had flushed his last hideout, capturing him in the process. Their second historical meeting as captor and captive was nothing less dramatic. A handsome young warrior with a sense of humor, Sun Ce personally untied Taishi Ci and held his hands: “Remember our moment at Shenting? Had you got me there, what would you have done to me?” 宁识神亭时邪？若卿尔时得我云何 “It is hard to tell” was the reply 未可量也.

280 SGYY, ch. 15: 76-80.
Sun Ce had a hearty laugh.

The two warriors were equal in martial prowess and probably fine appearance as well: Taishi Ci stood 175–180cm tall, boasted a beautiful beard, and apelike arms ideal for archery.²⁸¹ Besides these similarities, he and Sun Ce must have shared a kind of faith and trust only comprehensible between men who had the closest encounter even though violent, and so congenial that their camaraderie seemed almost preordained.

The first task Sun entrusted Taishi Ci was to recall the thousands of leaderless soldiers left by the death of Liu You. Those around Sun Ce all worried that once gone, Taishi Ci would never return. Sun Ce knew better though: “If Ziyi leaves me, who else can he go to?” 子義捨我，當復與誰 He had a farewell feast with Taishi Ci at the Chang Gate 閶門 of his capital, Wu 吳 (present-day Suzhou 蘇州) and asked about the anticipated return date. Taishi Ci promised him no more than sixty days and did come back in time.

Prior to 208 the Sun’s archenemy was Liu Biao whose troops had killed the clan patriarch, Sun Jian, in an ambush in early 193.²⁸² When one of Liu Biao’s nephews repeatedly attacked from the southwest, Sun Ce established a dependant state on the border


²⁸² There has been some confusion whether Sun Jian died in 192 or 193. I am inclined to 193 as dated in the Records of Heroes英雄記 by Wang Can. Of all the supplementary documents to the SGZ and HHS providing different versions of how and when Sun Jian died, Records of Heroes is the oldest and its author was with Liu Biao in the early 190’s and therefore the closest to the event in question. See Pei Songzhi’s commentary and Wang Can’s biography in SGZ, ch. 46: 2006.
and appointed Taishi Ci as its Chief Commandant, a military office equivalent to commandery head. The enemy stopped harassing ever after.

Under the reign of Sun Quan, Taishi Ci remained in service at the southwestern frontier. His fame traveled far and wide to the admiration of Cao Cao, who sent him a parcel with no letter enclosed but some Chinese angelica or danggui 當歸, homophonous to the word homebound. The underlying message was an invitation to Taishi Ci, a northern native, to come home and serve the north. Far from his homeland, Taishi Ci stayed a loyal servant to the Sun’s nonetheless. He died young at the age of forty one, and allegedly left one of the most evocative speeches of his days: “A strongman, born into an age of troubles, must carry a seven-span sword and prove his worth at the service of the Son of Heaven. My ambition is left unfulfilled, let death come!”

Dong Xi 董襲 styled Yuandai 元代 (died 216)

Chen Wu 陳武 styled Zilie 子烈 (177–215)

Dong Xi and Chen Wu were the only two casualties of war out of the Sun’s twelve talons and fangs gathered in Chapter 55, SGZ. Both were of noteworthy height compared to

283 Wu shu 吳書, Pei’s commentary to SGZ, ch. 49: 2158.
their contemporaries; they paid homage to Sun Ce between 194 and 195 when his territory expanded into their native commanderies, and both died in action at the rank of Deputy General between 215 and 216.

At first sight Sun Ce was impressed by Dong Xi’s gigantic stature and made good use of him in a series of conquests near the mid-Yangzi valley. At the time of Sun Ce’s early death, his widowed mother, the matriarch of Wu, consulted Dong Xi among other closest vassals for the survival and future of her clan. Dong Xi reassured her with an encouraging speech:

“The disposition east of the Great River is one fortified with mountains and valleys…Zhang Zhao 張昭 (156–236) will assist the successor to the late lord in administrative matters, I and my likes act as his talons and fangs. This is indeed a time with the perfect combination of geographical advantages and people’s support. There is absolutely no need to worry.”

A senior advisor of Sun Ce and Sun Quan, Zhang Zhao was also the patriarch of one of the so-called “Four Greatest Clans of the Wu Commandery” 吳郡四姓: Zhang, Zhu朱, Lu陸, and Gu顧. The Zhang’s were noted for civil virtues 文, the Zhu’s for military talents 武, the Lu’s for loyalty 忠, and the Gu’s, honesty 厚. *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語: 393.
Eight years later in 208, the successor to the lordship of Wu, Sun Quan mounted his third offensive against Liu Biao’s position at the middle reach of the Yangzi near present-day Wuhan. The enemies had blocked the narrow entrance to the Yangzi River with two *mengchong* warships or armored breakers, both anchored with boulders on palm hawsers. Aboard the ships were 1000 archers who rained down crossbow volleys. Dong Xi was one of the Sun’s two vanguards who, each followed by a daredevil corps of 100, all double armor-clad and aboard large patrol boats, boarded the enemy armored breakers. He personally cut loose the two hawsers, thus removing the warship blockade. The main force under Sun Quan breached in and killed the enemy commander in flight. During a feast the next day, Sun Quan offered Dong Xi a toast: “Your hawser-severing feat has made today’s celebration possible 今日之會，斷繩之功也.”

In the winter of 216, Dong Xi was left in charge of a fleet of five-deck battleships at the mouth of Ruxu濡須(east of present-day Wuwei無為, Anhui) to ready for a massive invasion from the north. 285 A violent storm struck at night and toppled many five-deckers. To his lieutenants’ call for lifeboat boarding, Dong Xi retorted in anger: “By the command of His Generalship, I am here to watch the enemy. How can I excuse myself to run? Whoever speaks of running again will lose his head 受將軍任，在此備賊，何等委去也，

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285 The five-decker, at about 25-meter-high, was the largest Han battleship ever recorded. *HS*, ch. 24: 436-44.
No one dared ask him again. He remained on duty until the storm destroyed his flagship and drowned him.

The other casualty of war, Chen Wu was 18-year-old when he volunteered to join Sun Ce’s troop. With a selected following of his fellow commandery men, he ran unopposed on every battlefield. His famed generosity had won him enormous popularity and some unrivalled favors by his second master Sun Quan, who reassigned him to head the Five Regiments, one of the Wu’s special units responsible for the safety of Sun Quan.\(^\text{286}\)

For a military officer, Chen Wu was an envy even to his civil colleagues.\(^\text{287}\) Also noted in his \textit{SGZ} biography is the several home visits Sun Quan paid him, obviously a remarkable treatment. Still, the most remarkable treatment, if not so enviable now and then, was one Chen Wu never lived to enjoy. During the battle of Hefei where Sun Quan twice evaded captivity by the Cao veteran warriors like Zhang Liao, Chen Wu fought till death presumably from protecting Sun as the commander of his bodyguard regiments.

\(^{286}\) This unit, later renamed to Five Battalions \textit{五营}, was an adaptation from the Eastern Han Five Regiments. See CH. 1; for other special units in the Wu military system such as the \textit{wunan} 五難, \textit{jiefan} 解煩, \textit{raozhang} 繞帳, etc., see Gao Rui 高銳: vol. 1, 327 – 29.

\(^{287}\) Such envy is usually taken as evidence of a normal bias towards the minds, that the talons and fangs as a norm were a less beloved, although probably more powerful subject. Driven by constant international and civil wars, militarism was nothing short of a priority between the Qin-Han empire and the Three Kingdoms, but the Chinese emperors and warlords did not necessarily like their warriors. Shen Guoqing: 145-47.
mourned the loss of his favorite general so much that he went to the extreme of offering the human sacrifice of Chen’s dearest concubine at the funeral. This incident, which saw the reversion to a long officially abolished custom of barbarism, was subject to scholarly criticisms not too distant from Sun Quan’s time. Meanwhile, the evidence of diehard human sacrifice under exceptional circumstances, in addition to the indication of civil superiority over the military as a norm within the wartime Han bureaucracy, makes the current inquiry into the life of an otherwise nameless warrior from southern China worthwhile.

**Gan Ning 甘寧 styled Xingba 興霸 (ca. 180–222)**

The life of Gan Ning probably served the best example of military stardom achieved by someone of unconventional background. A native of the southwestern province of Sichuan, the youthful Gan Ning spent his gifted brawn in knight-errantry and was once the ringleader of a delinquent band armed with bows and adorned with bells. The neighbors

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288 Human sacrifice marked the darkest page of Shang civilization. Excavations have revealed thousands of victims, of both sexes, ranging from elderly to infants. *Shangzhou kaogu* 商周考古 106–18, 215–8; official abolishment of human sacrifice came in 384 BC, but occasional reversion continued well into the pre-modern era. Huang Zhanyue 黃展岳 42-109. The mid-300’s historian Sun Sheng 孫盛 argued that this kind of rare savagery made Sun Quan and his entire southern regime unworthy. *SGZ*, ch. 55: 2349.
could tell his presence at the sound of his bells. Local county officers who treated his band
goodly were not always in trouble with higher crime rate in their jurisdictions and very often accusations of incompetent law enforcement.

The outlaw phase lasted well into Gan Ning’s 20’s. After some self-education in
the various classics, he moved east to Liu Biao’s camp but remained unnoticed for a few
years. In 203, Sun Quan expanded westward to Liu Biao’s east waterfront at the entrance to
the mid-Yangzi. Gan Ning was then a nobody behind the waterfront defense which almost
collapsed under the Sun’s initial attack. Nonetheless he had a run for his demonic archery
that might have killed a dashing Sun warrior, Ling Cao淩操, and left one of his future
colleagues, Ling Tong淩統(189–217) fatherless.289 Despite his show of valor, Gan Ning
remained a nobody in Liu Biao’s service. Disappointment finally pushed him to the
opposing side and thanks to the recommendations of Zhou Yu and Lü Meng, Sun Quan
treated him the same as other senior vassals.

Sun Quan attempted two more raids into Liu Biao’s eastern border and succeeded
the third time in 208, more or less due to Gan Ning’s prewar encouragement. During the
battle of Red Cliff the same year, Gan Ning again acted as one of the point-men under Zhou

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289 The Book of Wu or Wushu呉書, a lost text dated to the 230’s–260’s, indicated the arrow that killed
Ling Cao was from Gan Ning. The author of the SGZ apparently did not accept the claim that one can
precisely fingered the killer of someone who died in potshots, so he left this information out. SGZ, ch. 55:
2355.
Yu whose brilliant generalship, among other key factors as Liu Bei’s alliance, weather conditions, and a disease-stricken enemy, inflicted upon the north its worst defeat. The victorious Sun-Liu alliance, however, soon deteriorated from conflicts of interest over the province of Jingzhou, a large territory with seven commanderies all recovered but one from Cao Cao’s brief pre-Red Cliff occupation. Liu Bei alone had acquired five of the six commanderies under the promise of a fairer redistribution between the allies after his conquest of Yizhou. He never fulfilled this promise. Sun Quan was enraged and also concerned with the potential horizontal threat from his yesterday’s ally who had now grown too strong with the entire province of Yizhou plus the lion’s share of Jingzhou, so he resorted to arms in 214 and seized three commanderies from Liu Bei. This hostile move incurred an immediate retaliatory deployment of Guan Yu, Liu Bei’s senior tiger warrior, with an allegedly 30000-strong-force.

The successor to Zhou Yu’s command, Lu Su 魯肅 (172–217) confronted Guan Yu across a river. Gan Ning was Lu’s subordinate with a mere following of 300. Learning that Guan Yu had taken a picked detachment of 5000 to a shallow crossing upstream, he volunteered to intercept: “Give me 500 more troops and let me deal with him. I guarantee [Guan] Yu dares not cross the river at the sound of my move. Should he cross, I will capture [Guan] Yu dares not cross the river at the sound of my move. Should he cross, I will capture

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200 For the advantages of upstream as well as upwind deployment in ancient warfare, see Qian Kun: 102–4.
him for sure 他果然帶五百人來，關羽知道，不敢涉水，涉水即是吾擒。”

He left with 1000 more soldiers in the night. Guan Yu heard of his coming and instead of crossing, camped in full alert. His campsite was since then named Guan Yu Shoal Guanyulai 關羽瀨. Gan Ning meanwhile earned himself the protectorate of a small commandery for his defiance of a far better established enemy veteran.

In the next two years, three more battles all against the north witnessed the quick rise of Gan Ning to one of the sharpest talons and fangs the south ever boasted. When Sun Quan was attacking the town of Wancheng 皖城 (present-day Qianshan 潛山, Anhui) adjacent to his northern border, Gan Ning was the first to ascend the walls on a strip of hardened fabric as climbing tool. Along with the conquest of this first outpost on the northern bank of the Yangzi also came the capture of the Grand Administrator of the local commandery. This was a significant victory for the south and for Gan Ning, it brought his first full generalship as the General Who Resists Assaults zhechong jiangjun 逐衝將軍.

The fall of Wancheng had cleared the path to Hefei, the largest stronghold at the Cao’s southeast front guarded by Zhang Liao and two other backbone veterans of the north. Already blunted by the surprise raid of a mere 800-strong-regiment, Sun Quan’s invasion was further jeopardized by a camp-wide epidemic disease in the summer of 215. A full retreat ensued, but Sun Quan had fallen behind near a ford with only 1000 of his elite bodyguards and several top warriors including Gan Ning. Zhang Liao took the opportunity
to strike with a superior force. All of a sudden Sun Quan was caught in the most critical situation in his whole life. He would most likely have ended in captivity were it not for the exertion of Gan Ning and other heroic vassals. In a desperate fight to cover his lord, Gan Ning kept shooting and yelled in bloodthirsty excitement why the Wu military band had stopped war drums.

The SGZ does characterize Gan Ning as a coarse and bloodthirsty man, that is, on top of his open-minded personality, advisory capacity, and magnetic leadership. In the winter of 216, war clouds again gathered over the mouth of Ruxu where the south prepared for Cao Cao’s large offensive in response of its aggression the previous year. Gan Ning was deployed at the van with the task of a demoralizing raid similar to what Zhang Liao did at Hefei. Before the action he feasted some 100 of his brave companions with wine sent by Sun Quan. The chief of this company, afraid of the odds of their mission, hesitated at the toast. Gan Ning drew a blade, put it on his lap, and raised voice: “Between you and me, who does His Lordship value more? Even I do not stint my life, why do you alone fear death?”

Awed by Gan Ning’s expression, the chief dried one silver bowl of wine and everyone followed him with a bowlful.

At nightfall Gan Ning led his company near the Cao’s camp, each with wooden gag to prevent noise. They smashed the antler-shaped barricades, threw the unprepared
enemy into cacophonous confusion, and triumphed with scores of freshly severed heads. The demoralized invaders from the north retreated shortly afterwards. Sun Quan was so elated with this successful night raid that he equated having Gan Ning at his disposal a tit for tat resistance against Zhang Liao at Cao Cao’s service. This should have been a more than fair evaluation considering Gan Ning surprised a larger enemy camp than the one Zhang Liao did a year ago, with one eighth the striking force of the latter’s 800. Both camps, the north and the south, had been the beneficiary and victim of small daredevil surprises, a common tactic of the age, and both bore testimony to how such small tactics could affect much larger operations.

How Gan Ning died was a mystery in historical records. All we are told is that a colleague took over his troops after his death sometime before Liu Bei’s invasion in 222. His only son died in exile for committing a crime, something reminiscent of the father’s early banditry. In the novel SGYY, the death of Gan Ning is a somewhat inglorious one although with a romantic touch: he encountered a tribal contingent under Liu Bei in 222 while recuperating from an ailment. For all his lifelong heroism, he fled but was still mortally wounded by a shot to the skull. With the arrow unremoved, he sat down beneath a tree and died. Hundreds of ravens flew out of the branches and circled his corpse. Again,

291 The colleague was Pan Zhang who will be introduced later. There was no major operation between 219 and 222, so Gan Ning most likely died of natural cause. SGZ, ch. 55: 2358.
whether the novelists meant to glorify Gan Ning with the sidelight of his bewitching ghost, or belittle him as a defeated enemy of the protagonist Liu Bei, remains a mystery.\footnote{The tomb of Gan Ning in Fuchi富池, Hubei province is datable to the Southern Song南宋(1127 – 1279), during which he and Guan Yu received official posthumous deification. Ravens frequented his temple and were regarded as the divine ravens of the king of Wu wuwang shenya吳王神鴉. In this case as well as a ghost story by the Qing novelist Pu Songling蒲松齡(1640 – 1715), the king of Wu really referred to the deified Gan Ning. The author of the SGYY apparently incorporated such folklore. “Zhu Qing”竹青, Liaozhai zhiyi聊齋志異: ch. 11; SGYY, ch. 83: 434.}

**Ling Tong 淵統 styled Gongji 公績(189–217)**

According to the *Wu shu*吳書, a lost text whose fragments survived in the interlinear commentaries to the slightly later *SGZ*, among those Wu attackers shot dead by Gan Ning when defending the mid-Yangzi waterfront of his first master, Liu Biao, was a colonel Ling Cao. The victim left a 15-year-old son, Tong, whose hatred toward his patricidal foe and future colleague never subsided. The dances with some most popular weapons of the era aforementioned in Chapter 3 indeed coincided with one recorded attempt of revenge, initiated by Ling Tong’s saber dance, heightened by Gan Ning’s double halberd dance in self-defense, and disengaged by Lü Meng’s saber-and-shield dance.\footnote{For Han–Three Kingdoms weaponry, see Ch. 3.} The author of the *SGZ*, Chen Shou apparently opted for the exclusion of such materials
probably due to disbelief in the conviction that one could precisely finger the killer of Ling Tong’s father who perished in potshots. What he presented was a somehow less dramatic but realistic story of an orphan’s rise to military eminence.

At the age of fifteen, Ling Tong succeeded the troops of his late father with the office of acting commandant, one rank below a colonel. His first assignment was to participate in a subjugation of some 10000 mountain bandits. On the eve of the scheduled full attack, the commander-in-chief, Chen Qin 陳勤 invited all his subordinates, Ling Tong included, to a drinking spree, but upset everyone with insufferable bossiness. When Ling Tong refused an uncalled-for toast, Chen Qin cursed him and his late father in wrath. The teenager orphan endured such insult in tearful silence. The party was dismissed, but Chen Qin waylaid Ling Tong and resumed the abuse. This finally pushed Ling Tong into deadly reaction with his saber. Chen was mortally wounded and died in a few days.

On the actual day of the attack, Ling Tong was determined to fight to the death as atonement for his murder of a superior officer. He charged at the forefront of his personal unit, bore the enemy volley of arrows and rocks, and tore apart the side of the bandit defense assigned to his unit’s offensive on time. The audacious breakthrough he made, followed by his comrades-at-arms, pioneered a smashing victory. After the operation, he went straight to the court of martial law or junzheng 軍正 for punishment. Sun Quan admired such uprightness and pardoned Ling Tong’s crime in view of outstanding battle
performance.

In the spring of 208, the 20-year-old Ling Tong along with Dong Xi spearheaded the final destruction of Liu Biao’s position at the mid-Yangzi entry after two indecisive previous attempts, the first of which responsible for Ling’s orphanage. Although much younger than most of his colleagues, he was similarly experienced through participation in virtually every decisive battle the south ever fought, at the Red Cliff, under the walls of Wancheng, and finally at the ford Xiaoyaojin 逍遙津 of Hefei where he sustained critical wounds for saving his lord.

The disastrous retreat from Hefei in 215 was a meat grinder to Sun Quan’s talons and fangs that consumed the life of Chen Wu, one of his dearest warriors, and drove Gan Ning, Ling Tong’s alleged foe, into bloodthirsty war cry for wilder drumbeats. At the time Ling Tong was chief commandant of the Sun’s right wing. When Sun Quan was intercepted by the northern veteran Zhang Liao near Xiaoyaojin, outnumbered with his main force already gone and irretrievable, Ling Tong brought him out of the enemy encirclement with a commando of 300. The enemy had torn down the only bridge, but thanks to his horse Sun Quan made it across the ford on an extraordinary prance. Ling Tong stayed behind to cover Sun’s escape. None of his 300 companions walked out alive. He killed scores of enemy, himself badly wounded, and left only until assured of Sun Quan’s safety. Without a passable bridge nor walkable land route, he swam in armor and fortunately was recovered
aboard a ship that already carried Sun Quan. The loss of many companions at once caused him uncontrollable grief, but Sun Quan, all joyful of an almost impossible reunion with his loyal vassal, comforted him: “Gongji, the dead are already dead. As long as you are still alive, what is to worry about no followers?” 公績，亡者已矣，苟使卿在，何患無人 To materialize this comfort he promoted Ling Tong to deputy generalship and doubled the numbers of his personal troops.

For a professional soldier, Ling Tong could pass for a gentleman of the state guoshi 國士 with pronounced generosity, integrity, and respect for scholarship. There was once an official recommendation for someone from his hometown said to be even worthier than him. Sun Quan summoned the candidate to a night audience, with a conservative hope for him to be just as worthy. At the news of his townsfellow’s arrival, Ling Tong was already in bed. He dressed up anyway and hand in hand, presented the candidate before Sun Quan. This told a great deal of his immunity to jealousy when it came to admiration for the worthies.

Sway over a then underdeveloped region necessitated the three kingdoms state of Wu more active in search for new resources and manpower, the objective of Ling Tong’s last mission. In 217 he was commissioned to recruit the far eastern mountain natives.

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294 A major source for new manpower was the Shanyue 山越 people, believed to be mountain-dwelling and tribal in nature. Zhang Dake: 154 – 8.
with full accommodation by local authorities to whatever he required before reporting to Sun Quan. The recruitment yielded some 10,000 men and allowed a stopover at Ling Tong’s hometown of Yuhang (present-day Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province) where he saluted local officials and relived his childhood with relatives and friends. He never made a return to duty though as an abrupt illness took him at the mere age of twenty nine. His sudden death left two orphaned boys, both a few years old only, and left Sun Quan in such grief that he reduced meals for days. The two orphans grew up under Sun Quan’s personal guardianship. A junior lordship in remembrance of Ling Tong’s past services along with the inheritance of his personal troops quota first went to the elder son and eventually the younger when criminal offence removed the elder’s entitlements. The experience of the three generations of the Ling’s bore witness to the practice of inheritance at least in the southern regime of Wu: Ling Tong inherited his father’s rank, so did his two sons. However, inheritance was no guarantee for exemption from the laws. One could be born into nobility and office, but could also fall out of them as in the case of Ling Tong’s elder son, as well as the only son of Gan Ning, the alleged killer of his father.

Pan Zhang 潘璋 styled Wengui 文珪 (died 234)

Pan Zhang appeared the second last in the SGZ’s collective biographies of twelve
fiercest warriors of the south. Their order of appearance was loosely by age or official ranks. Pan Zhang, however, must have been older than Ling Tong whose biography precedes his as he joined Sun Quan in 196 when Ling was 10-year-old. In terms of official rank, Pan Zhang attained the second highest office of the twelve probably because he lived the second longest. His low profile in official history seems to be the result of more than usual personality flaws and possibly historian disfavor as the captor of Guan Yu, heroic in his own time and godlike in posterity. Nonetheless, it is exactly the capture of Guan Yu, more than anything else that calls for a special note of Pang Zhang in the current essay.

As a youngsters Pan Zhang was notorious for two of men’s worst addictions: gambling and drinking. Worse still was his habit of free drinking on credit. Whenever came the debt collectors, he told them to expect payment the day he became rich and famous. Whatever the indication of such reply, true ambition or empty promise, somehow impressed Sun Quan who was 15-year-old at their acquaintance. After a successful recruitment with more than 100 men, Pan Zhang found himself a regular military office in the Sun’s camp. Over the next decade he established a reputation mainly for efficiency in putting down

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295 Normally the order of biographies is by seniority, but Ling Tong was exceptionally accomplished at a young age.

296 One had to live long enough for the state to afford him the ultimate reward. For that matter Ding Feng 丁奉(died 271) became the highest-ranked of the twelve veterans, with the appointments of Grand Marshal of the Right 右大司馬 and Director General of the Left 左軍師 in 264, thirty years after Pan Zhang died. SGZ, ch. 55: 2378.
bandits, and was well on his way to the kind of affluence and fame he had envisioned in his intoxicated youth.

The twentieth year of his service to the Sun’s saw Pan Zhang, among others left behind and unprepared for a lightning counteroffensive by the Wei veteran Zhang Liao, struggling for a safe passage out of Hefei. One of his comrades, Chen Wu, had just fallen in action, two others were pulling back. Pan Zhang rode forth from the rear and cut down two soldiers under those fleeing comrades, everyone thus persevered fighting. Death to cowards was a routine enforcement in warfare of the era noted in Cao Cao’s “Codes of Battle on Land.” It worked probably at a no better time when Sun Quan’s rear, outnumbered and trapped in sudden desperation, needed a forced boost to morale the most. The reward to Pan Zhang was quite generous: a deputy generalship and replacement for Chen Wu as the head of Sun Quan’s elite escorts, the Five Regiments. Apparently he won a sweeter deal than his young colleague Ling Tong, who barely survived the Hefei bloodbath and earned himself a promotion to the same rank yet without a prestigious reassignment. This could have been an exceptional case in which killing one’s own men at the right moment outdid fighting one’s enemy hard.

After all, Pan Zhang was no lesser talons and fangs incompetent in fighting tough enemies. In 220, one of his otherwise nameless lieutenants, Ma Zhong 马忠 captured Guan

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297 See Ch. 3: 122-3
Yu in the final stage of the south’s sneak attack upon Jingzhou. Although his godlike
canonization came centuries later, Guan Yu was already the toughest enemy warrior the
state of Wu ever destroyed in action. As the one who brought this future god of war down
to his knees, Pan Zhang climbed the ladder fast to full generalship plus commandery
governorship, lordship over a taxable fief, and new acquisition of troops from the late Gan
Ning. He achieved further glories during the war against Liu Bei’s retaliatory invasion
while those under him killed another high-rank enemy commander, though much less
known than Guan Yu. By the time Sun Quan proclaimed himself emperor, Pan Zhang
finally became the first of all the famous southern warriors grouped in the same SGZ
chapter to hold a tenured generalship under the new dynasty, General of the Right, more
than fulfilling the kind of fame an addicted drunkard and gambler had promised his debt
collectors almost thirty years ago.

Whether this first tenured talons and fangs of the south had actually paid off the
debt of his inglorious youth remained a mystery. The historian would probably have
guessed no, based on an unpromising personality that he revealed in clear disapproval. Like
his shipmate Gan Ning of bandit origin, Pan Zhang was described as a coarse and violent
type, cumeng粗猛, and fond of extravagance. His troops numbered several thousands the
most, but appeared as if ten thousands wherever they went. One lucrative activity unique to
them was a military market at each stop of their marches. Other troops, without a similar
establishment, often had to rely on their excesses.\textsuperscript{298} Pan Zhang was most certainly one of the richest warriors of his time, but instead of generosity, wealth only brought him insatiable greed, especially in his twilight years. He treated himself with regalia and other apparel exclusive to the emperor’s use only, and even murdered well-off subordinates just to take over their property. Several criminal charges were laid against him, but Sun Quan dismissed them all on account of his past merits. After Pan Zhang died of natural causes in 234, his son was convicted of some immoral conduct and exiled.

In his conclusion to the group biographies of the twelve so-called “tiger vassals beyond the Yangzi” \textit{jiangbiao huchen}江表虎臣, the historian argued that tolerance for personality flaws of which Pan Zhang stood out as the worst epitome, was a patent asset to Sun Quan’s magnetic leadership.\textsuperscript{299} Apparently Pan had come down to official history an unloved man. In popular culture he is an even more obvious antagonist. The novel, well-known for its seventy percent history and thirty percent fiction, spent a wilder part of that thirty percent in its fictionalization of Pan Zhang’s death. As a result the fictional character of Pan Zhang died a casualty of war twelve years sooner and at the very hands of

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{298} See Ch. 2 “Military Market”
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{299} Gan Ning and Ling Tong were among the other occasional lawbreakers that escaped due punishments. Whether tolerance of misdemeanors magnetized leadership or encouraged more misdemeanors could be confusing. \textit{SGZ}, ch. 55: 2379.
\end{flushright}
Guan Yu’s younger son.\textsuperscript{300} The cause of the early death of Lü Meng, the southern commander-in-chief who plotted the backstabbing of Guan Yu, was also exacerbated from what official history gave as an abrupt illness into a haunting by Guan’s angry ghost.\textsuperscript{301} Whereas the negative overtone in Pang Zhang’s biography seems to have been due to his own personality flaws rather than the fact that he simply messed with a popular enemy and therefore, harmless to historiographical objectivity, medieval romances needed no excuses other than the murder of a by then godlike Guan Yu to offer their readers some closure by sparing none of those responsible from fictional revenge.\textsuperscript{302}

The six warriors above were a clear reminder of the regime they served as the least privileged of the three principal warlord houses and the latest of the future three kingdoms. Only one advanced to permanent generalship, most died without a full improvisional generalship, and some not even a deputy general. Their opponent analogues usually crowned at permanent generalship, the highest military office technically inaccessible until

\textsuperscript{300} \textit{SGYY}, ch. 83: 435.

\textsuperscript{301} Much shorter and slightly earlier than the \textit{SGYY} was the \textit{Sanguo zhi pinghua}三國志平話, a storytelling version of the Three Kingdoms saga. It took no fictional revenge against Lü Meng, whose character continued a haunting-free life. The ghost story of Guan Yu was either an \textit{SGYY} invention or adoption from other vengeance folklores. \textit{SGYY}, ch. 77: 406.

\textsuperscript{302} No proof of Guan’s godlike niche since medieval times is better than the fact he was the only character in all extant forms of romance, drama, storytelling, and novel alike, to go by posthumous title as Lord Guan. No one else is subject to personal name taboo.
one’s lord had ascended yet one rank higher to the zenith of governmental hierarchy: emperor. Sun Quan proclaimed sovereignty eight to nine years later than Liu Bei and Cao Pi. He was meanwhile one generation younger than his two archrivals Cao Cao and Liu Bei, and commanded an overall more youthful band of warriors than those under the other two. However, shorter average lifespan meant over seventy-five percent of the best Sun warriors never lived long enough to benefit from their lord’s ascension.\(^{303}\)

Less obvious but more important is how one may interpret the Sun warriors’ experiences in the greater context of southeastern culture and regime in third century China. For all the social, political, and economic developments that came with the success of a local clan, the southeast remained a cultural periphery with aspects of darkness yet unlit by China’s traditional center in the northern heartland. One horrifying instance of such cultural darkness was the human sacrifice with which Sun Quan honored his beloved fallen vassal, Chen Wu. On this land where the Warring States of Chu, Wu, and Yue once set free their heroism and romance, and songs attributed to Qu Yuan (ca. 339 –278 BC), a native poet, echoed with passions, unconventional defiance was always a legacy.\(^{304}\) The regime of

\(^{303}\) Nine out of the twelve tiger vassals of the south died before they saw a kingdom of their own.

\(^{304}\) The foreign-ness of pre-Qin South China is documented for examples, in the “short hair and body tattoo” 斷髮紋身 custom of the Yue people and the self-identification as “barbarians” 我蠻夷也 by Xiongqu 熊渠, the first viscount of Chu who attempted usurpation of kingship in the early 800’s BC. SJ, ch. 31: 1305; ch. 40: 1550-53. The Songs of the South, or Chu ci 楚辭 differed from those of northern
Sun Quan continued a kind of outsider regionalism marked by his patronage of retro-barbaric custom as well as old-fashioned but effective leadership. He treated his talons and fangs more like members of a triad society than military personnel subject to martial laws. Besides the notoriously guilty but regardlessly acquittable Pan Zhang, Gan Ning was another violent and coarse troublemaker in the habit of disobeying higher commands and acting on his own. As much as he would like to discipline, Sun Quan tolerated such nuisance in view of Gan’s otherwise rare valor. The same tolerance also exempted the teenage Ling Tong from possible capital punishment for his murder of a superior officer. In contrast, the mostly northern-origin warriors of the other two dominant warlords were more law-abiding. The most legalist of the three was likely Cao Cao, who would even have forsaken the life of his kidnapped cousin Xiahou Dun, and endorsed zero tolerance in hostage situation as one of the many harsh laws his army was subject to. In the camp of Liu Bei, lawful behavior was under reasonable control largely thanks to his tireless director general Zhuge Liang. It would have been a rarity, if not a non-existence ever for those frequent lawbreakers of the south to walk free were they soldiers of their western and northern rivals.

origin by high romanticism and freer semantics with three to eight syllables than the predominantly tetrasyllabic form of the north.

SGZ, ch. 55: 2357.
Moreover, none of the Cao and Liu warriors, although often described as valiant and awesome, had anything to do with coarseness in historian’s characterizations. Their offspring while never repeating the kind of glories they had achieved, seldom brought upon themselves disgrace either. On the other hand, the lawless Pan Zhang and Gan Ning who in their lifetime had enjoyed immunity thanks to Sun Quan’s triad-like leadership, both left behind talentless yet similarly lawless sons to lose everything they earned with blood and sweat. Three of their equally meritorious comrades from the group biographies of the twelve Wu veterans suffered similar consequences.\textsuperscript{306} Sun Quan may be blamed for being too spoiling a leader, but a probable link between the relative wildness of the southeast and the worse-than-usual lawlessness of the local soldiery is also worth considering.

That said, the state of Wu did have the allegiance of Taishi Ci, an almost perfect embodiment of valiant warhorse and moral high horse. Again, he came a long way from the home province of Confucius in northern China, and was a friend of Confucius’ twentieth generation descendant. His biography is one of the most detailed in the \textit{SGZ} and, unlike those of his aforementioned five colleagues, it was not grouped in the same chapter most likely because he only served the south a quarter of his lifetime.\textsuperscript{307} Therefore the case of

\textsuperscript{306} The other criminal descendants were the sons of Ling Tong and Han Dang\textsuperscript{韓當}(died 223), and a grandson of Jiang Qin\textsuperscript{蔣欽}(died 219). \textit{SGZ}, ch. 55: 2345-46.

\textsuperscript{307} Taishi Ci did not live long enough to become another true “tiger vassal beyond the Yangzi,” who were almost life-long talons and fangs. \textit{SGZ}, ch. 49: 2157.
Taishi Ci is rather exceptional to than representative of a general profile. Overall the Sun warriors appeared somewhat unrestrained or less-disciplined than their enemies but competitive enough to survive their regime the longest.
Chapter Seven

History and Romance

Two primary sources promoted the talons and fangs of the Eastern Han warlords to celebrity status in Chinese tradition: history and romance. The historical source consists of historical records of varying natures and some are, to say the best, semi-historical. The kind of romance dealt with here is mainly textual in form, ranging from folk sayings, legends, poetry, storytelling, to the most influential vernacular novels. Romances more associated with visual experience, such as dramas, paintings, modern comics, epic films, and video games suit the subject of art history better and therefore will not take much space of the current essay.

The most important historical source is the Sanguo zhi, dated to the 280’s. The author, Chen Shou, was a talented writer with rigorous training in historiography. He experienced the vicissitudes through three dynasties, the Shu Han, its conqueror the Wei, and two years later the Jin, usurper of the Wei. His career in the civil service was never a successful one, or not as successful as his rare literary talent should have promised. Under the Shu Han, he had problems getting along with a powerful eunuch; within the notoriously corrupt bureaucracy of the Jin, he again suffered discrimination against those survivors like

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308 For Chen Shou’s biography, consult Huayang guozhi, ch. 11: 184-5
himself from the old enemy state.

Besides the *SGZ*, the only other extant text attributed to Chen Shou was the *Anthology of Zhuge Liang*, or *Zhuge Liang ji* 諸葛亮集, dated to 274. It consists of twenty-four chapters of virtually every word ascribable to Zhuge, written and spoken. Traditional scholarship acclaimed Chen Shou for a kind of sincere objectivity that he demonstrated in his overall evaluation of Zhuge Liang as a politician, economist, and director general. While supposedly a necessity for any historian, such objectivity was somehow remarkable to Chen Shou, whose father had suffered some due penalty for involvement in a major setback during Zhuge’s first northern expedition. The fact that Chen Shou seemed to have treated his father’s punitive superior more with admiration than grudge consolidated his credibility as a historian, and in turn the authority of his masterwork, the *SGZ*. The only complaint so far is centered on biased legitimization. Again, there was little Chen Shou could have done to equalize the three kingdoms while a direct successor to one of them sponsored their official histories. In what seems to be an unbiased celebration of Zhuge Liang, possibly the worst nightmare to the northern regimes of the Cao’s and later the Sima’s, Chen Shou had already done his best to suffice a true historian of conscience.

The *SGZ*, covering roughly the century between the fall of the Eastern Han and the

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309 For Chen Shou’s reputation, see Yang Yaokun 楊耀坤: 78–85.
end of the three kingdoms, is the third oldest in the series of twenty four official histories of China.\textsuperscript{310} It ranks favorably as one of the six greatest Chinese historical canons of all time.\textsuperscript{311} Unlike the typical layout of Annals \textit{benji}, Biographies \textit{liezhuan}, Tables \textit{biao}, and Treatises \textit{zhi} found in most of the twenty four official histories, the \textit{SGZ} contains sixty five chapters of annals and biographies only, all dedicated to some 529 noteworthy individuals of the period in question except for one of nine foreign states. Six imperial annals were made exclusive to Cao Cao, the father of the Wei Dynasty, and its five future emperors. The two emperors of the Shu Han and four of the Wu were “demoted” to the entries of biographies only, apparently for legitimacy concerns discussed in the previous chapter.

Those more fitting for a traditional biography which accommodates everyone else except legitimate rulers make up the bulk of the \textit{SGZ}. They feature: 20 women, all queens and principal consorts of the three kingdoms, 44 princes, 19 independent warlords, some 30 foremost statesmen active in military decision-making but never involved in direct action, about 60 typical talons and fangs, 7 men with what were considered at the time as

\textsuperscript{310} The \textit{SGZ} is the fourth by dynastic chronology, but the official history of the Eastern Han, the \textit{HHS} was compiled some 170 years later.

\textsuperscript{311} The other are the \textit{Zuo zhuan}, \textit{Shi ji}, \textit{Han shu}, \textit{Houhan shu}, and \textit{Zizhi tongjian}. Zhou Pengfei 周鹏飛 ed.: 3.
unconventional or extracurricular skills, *fangji* 方技, such as medical science and sorcery, and over 300 literati officials and local administrators. These numbers alone do not do justice to the talons and fangs who, account for a mere twelve percent of all the *SGZ* entries. Two additional observations are required for a fair evaluation of their textual percentage which could reflect their historical proportions because the author was only two generations younger.

First there is the discrepancy between the numbers of biographical entries and the actual volume they share in the *SGZ*. Despite its coverage of 529 individual lives between the 180’s and the 280’s, the majority of the *SGZ* is really about an epoch-making minority whose words and deeds dominated the four decades of the Eastern Han to Three Kingdoms transition. The annals and biographies ascribed to the three dynastic founders are almost equal in volume to those of their nine successors. The proportions of historical events and personages were made more obvious by later popular romances, namely the novel *SGYY* where pre- and post-220 narratives account for eighty and forty of its 120 chapters. In this regard the title “three kingdoms,” either for the official history or the novel, is even inappropriate. A more appropriate title should be something like “the last of the Eastern Han.” Among those vassals to the Eastern Han warlords who spent their better years before the official era of the Three Kingdoms, the talons and fangs, as opposed to their less physical colleagues, were a more symmetrical presence in the original text. In terms of
sheer epoch-making caliber, however, these men at the forefront of every decisive battle, subject to all the uncertainties of immediate actions, were almost dominant historical figures even though their accounts might not always be as voluminous as those of the better educated who often left long speeches or memorials for the record.

Secondly, the arrangement of biographies in the *SGZ* is loosely chronological and indicates only a subtle prioritization of brain over brawn. There was broad division between generations that spanned some 100 years, but within each generation there was no strict placement of the older before the younger. Top on the list of Cao Cao’s vassals are his veteran cousins and their noteworthy offspring, most of whom were still in the military. Next are the group biographies of his three senior masterminds, Xun Yu荀彧(163-212), Xun You, and Jia Xu賈詡(147–224). At the bottom of the same generation of officialdom in the service of Cao Cao are a dozen or so military backbones whose accounts are preceded by several chapters on a galaxy of their civil colleagues.312 Similar arrangement applies to the Sun’s vassals as well: the talons and fangs appear under most of their advisory contemporaries although not at the very bottom. Every one of the six veterans of the south introduced earlier is subject to this treatment except for Taishi Ci, who found his

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312 These warriors were assigned to ch’s. 17 and 18. Before them are seven chapters to their contemporary civil colleagues.
way to a higher category. In Liu Bei’s case, however, such a pattern might be problematic: his famous five tigers were placed right after the venerable pillar of the Shu Han regime, Zhuge Liang, but ahead of other brilliant minds like Pang Tong and Fa Zheng (176–220). Possible consideration could have been given to the unmatched seniority of Guan Yu and Zhang Fei as well as their brotherly affinity to Liu Bei. These top two tigers to Liu Bei were like those warrior cousins to Cao Cao, so the prestige of the five tigers as a group was probably more by virtue of affinity than professional priority. Again, were there any historian’s downplay and, due to his proximity to the period in question, historical downplay of the military around third century China, such downplay remained implicit and largely circumstantial.

One last point of interest is the disparity between rewards for civil and military services in terms of enfeoffment. Below is a list of everyone from the Wei section of the SGZ with recorded fiefs larger than 1000 households, royalty excluded because of nepotism as noted earlier in Chapter Four. It goes by the sizes of fiefs in descending order with highest offices held to identify civil or military specialty:

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313 Taishi Ci was assigned to the same chapter with his former master Liu You. This is an odd placement, probably because he died early with an office too low to be placed alongside the twelve tiger vassals of the south who all made at least a deputy general.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and Dates</th>
<th>Size of fief in numbers of households</th>
<th>Highest office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Deng Ai 鄧艾  
(197–264) | 20000 | General Who Conquers the West 征西將軍  →  Grand Commandant 太尉 |
| Zhong Hui 鈡會  
(225–264) | 10000 | General Who Fortifies the West 鎮西將軍  →  Minister Over the Masses 司徒 |
| Man Chong 滿寵  
(162–242) | 9600 | General Who Conquers the East 征東將軍  →  Grand Commandant |
| Wang Ji 王基 (died. 259) | 5700 | General Who Conquers the South 征南將軍 |
| Wang Chang 王昶  
(died. 259) | 4700 | General of Agile Cavalry 驃騎將軍  →  Minister of Works 司空 |
| Zhang He 張郃  
(died. 231) | 4300 | General of Chariots and Cavalry Who Conquers the West 征車騎將軍 |
| Guanqiu Jian 毅丘儉 (died. 255) | 3900 | General Who Fortifies the South 鎮南將軍 |
| Zang Ba 臧霸  
(died. 227) | 3500 | General Who Fortifies the East 鎮東將軍 |
| Zhuge Dan 諸葛誕  
(died. 258) | 3500 | General-in-Chief Who Conquers the East 征東大將軍 |
| Xu Huang 徐晃  
(died. 230) | 3100 | General of the Right 右將軍 |
<p>| Guo Huai 郭淮 | 2780 | General of Chariots and Cavalry 車騎將軍 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Liao</td>
<td>2600</td>
<td>General of the Van 前將軍</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(169–222)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen Tai</td>
<td>2600</td>
<td>General Who Rallies the Army 鎮軍將軍 → Executive State Secretary shangshu puye 尚書仆射</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ca. 200–260)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang Guan</td>
<td>2100</td>
<td>Minister of Works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xun Yu</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>High Counselor Imperial Households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(163–212)</td>
<td></td>
<td>guanglu dafu 光祿大夫</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wen Pin</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>General of the Rear 後將軍</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(died. 226)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhong You</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>Grand Tutor 太傅</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(151–230)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang Ling</td>
<td>1350</td>
<td>General of Chariots and Cavalry → Grand Commandant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(171–251)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hua Xin</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>Grand Commandant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(175–231)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yue Jin</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>General of the Right 右將軍</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(died. 218)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yu Jin</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>General of the Left 左將軍</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(died. 221)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang Lang</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>Minister of Works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(died. 228)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The right column is almost a pageful of generals. The Three Excellencies, Zhong You, Liu Xin, and Wang Lang all died around the same year as Zhang He, but with less than half of his 4300-household fief. Even Zang Ba, at the lower rank of General Who Fortifies the East and dead one to three years earlier, almost doubled their feudal income. Needless to emphasize, the largest fiefs all went to the military, in true spirit of the original Qin-Han military aristocracy. With their seemingly inadequate representation in official history in mind, it is only fair to say the talons and fangs in death could despair of a higher postmortal appreciation, but in life they had already enjoyed the most enviable material gains. There were seldom coexistences of many monstrous-sized fiefs at one given time, although an elite few could still have fed on an appalling percentage of the entire population.\textsuperscript{315}

The above methodology of statistical analysis combined with interpretative reading indicates at the very least a solid profile of the Eastern Han to Three Kingdoms war

\textsuperscript{314} Information are collected from \textit{SGZ}, ch’s: 10–28.

\textsuperscript{315} The Sima clan at the death of its patriarch Sima Yi in 251 was entitled to income from at least 50000 households. \textit{Jin shu}: ch. 1: 3. The numbers from fiefs attached to the Wei imperial house should be close or even more. These in addition to yet thousands of households to the names of other nobilities by the early 260’s would lead to a disturbing probability, that a few powerful clans were worth more than 10% of the kingdom’s registered population, estimated at about one million households or four millions individual lives. For population figures, see Ch. 2.
heroes. Such indication is, of course, dependent on the SGZ’s reliability as a core reference. Fortunately, a dedicated author and a painstaking commentator more than one century apart had both contributed to the SGZ’s reputation as not only reliable but also one of the highest quality official histories of China. Dozens of similar undertakings slightly predated, coincided, or came shortly after the SGZ. None of them survived in whole. The only proof of their existence is a vast number of fragmentary citations by the commentator to the SGZ, Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (372–451). His voluminous commentaries were a much welcomed finishing touch to the otherwise stylishly laconic writing of Chen Shou, and have remained an integral part of the SGZ up to its current circulation. Pei Songzhi drew from some 210 sources, minus etymological and didactical references there were about 150. The most frequently cited are the following, all of historical nature:

*Annals of Wu* or *Wuli* 吳曆 by Hu Chong 胡沖(ca. 200–ca. 280)

*Beyond the Yangzi River* or *Jiangbiao zhuan* 江表傳 by Yu Fu 虞溥(active in mid–late 200’s)

*Biography of Cao Man* or *Cao Man zhuan* 曹瞞傳(anon. Wu Dynasty)

*Book of Wei* or *Wei shu* 魏書 by Wang Shen 王沈(died. 266)

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316 Wu Yechun伍野春’s calculation is between 140–200 texts, probably based on the approach of differentiating historical from non-historical sources: 247 – 60.
Book of Wu or Wu shu 吳書  by Wei Zhao 韋昭 (ca. 204–273)

Records of Heroes or Yingxiong ji 英雄記  by Wang Can 王燦 (177–217)

Records of Shu or Shuji 蜀記  by Wang Yin 王隱 (ca. 270–ca. 340)

Spring and Autumn between Han and Jin or Hanjin chunqiu 漢晉春秋  by Xi Zaochi 習鑿 (died. 383)

Spring and Autumn of Emperor Xian or Xiandi chunqiu 献帝春秋 by Yuan Wei 袁暐 or Ye 暐 (Eastern Jin)

Spring and Autumn of the Han and Wei or Hanwei chunqiu 漢魏春秋  by Kong Yan 孔衍 (268–320)

Spring and Autumn of the Nine Provinces or Jiuzhou chunqiu 九州春秋  by Sima Biao 司馬彪 (died. 306)

Spring and Autumn of the Wei or Weishi chunqiu 魏氏春秋  by Sun Sheng 孫盛 (ca.306–378)

Wei Lüe 魏略  by Yu Huan 魚豢 (Wei Dynasty)

All works listed above, like most others from the annotated SGZ, have long been completely or partially lost, perhaps as long as since Pei Songzhi’s time. Their failure to survive is a repeated historiographical theme as in the more familiar case of the Houhan shu 後漢書, the fourth oldest in the series of China’s twenty four dynastic histories. In
addition to this official history of the Eastern Han by Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445), there had existed at least ten other texts on the same subject with the same or very close titles. They faded, except one, into secondary status and eventually oblivion within a historiographical tradition that seems more ready for orthodoxy than diversity. The SGZ was allegedly coupled with an almost simultaneous project by a Xiahou Chen 夏侯諶, but the author quit half way through when convinced of his inferior scholarship compared to Chen Shou’s.

The majority of the lost texts spanned from the late 200’s to the early 400’s, and shared a possible disinterest in Three Kingdoms militarism. They are seldom referred to by the SGZ in the biographies of the soldiery, but mostly cited for verbose court memorials and other supplementary documents for just about everyone else. This concurs with what the original text of the SGZ reflects as a somewhat inadequate representation of the soldiery in the historical records of a supposedly war-torn era. Again, current historians should be cautious to suggest anything too speculative, that such inadequacy occurred when the writers’ topic, a stormy past, contradicted with the temporary peace they had probably become more used to under the Jin Dynasty, the least politically accomplished Chinese

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317 The only survivor is Yuan Hong 袁宏 (328 – 376)’s Houhan ji 後漢紀, a thirty-chapter chronicle of the Eastern Han as opposed to Fan Ye’s biographical history. For a review of the other lost texts, see Mansvelt: 38-9.

318 Jin shu: ch. 82: 2137.
empire ever yet one of the most culturally splendid. On the other hand, certain cited texts such as the *Discourse on War* or *Zhanlüe* by Sima Biao, and the anonymous *Records of Heroes* were dedicated to military topics. The earlier and more frequently cited *Records of Heroes* covered strictly pre-Three Kingdoms warlords and warriors. The last of Liu Bei’s five tiger warriors, Zhao Yun also inspired a stand-alone work in the form of a supplementary biography or *biezhuan*, typically compiled by those close to someone of particular fame or interest. Of the several contemporary celebrities with supplementary biographies found in Pei Songzhi’s commentaries, Zhao Yun was the only military professional.

In any case, the Han to Three Kingdoms talons and fangs appear in third to fifth century historiography as a less visible topic. The reason was, however, not necessarily prejudicial. Other considerable factors include wartime ambiguity of civil and military endeavors when everyone participated in wars one way or another, and the likelihood for men of action to have been shorter on words hence not having as much to be written about as the more eloquent scholar officials. In all fairness the Chinese masters of words never

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319 The Jin Dynasty was founded by usurpation, destroyed by alien invasion, and followed by centuries of disunion. However, this political loser did usher in the splendor of early medieaval Chinese literature. Chang, Kang-I Sun: sp, xi.

320 Pei’s commentaries quoted from some fourteen *biezhuan* and the similar *jiazhuan* which were composed by relatives only.
forgot their brothers who lived and died as someone’s talons and fangs. If they had failed to provide a proportionate historical recollection of those at the battlefront of the Han-Three Kingdoms transition, their admiration for personal valor is pronounced in other forms of writing, notably poetry, drama, and fiction.

In dealing with the romantic traditions of the three kingdoms, the single most overwhelming material is of course the novel, or the *yanyi* version. It is overwhelming to the extent that it might actually misguide a cross-disciplinary study by serious historians for two reasons: 1. its historical content outweighs its fictionality; 2. the general public could easily confuse a novel of such immense popularity with the primary source it derived from, the strictly historical SGZ.\(^{321}\) The current essay would rather leave such bigger issues to the expertise of literary criticism. It will concentrate on the more relevant evaluation of the talons and fangs of the Eastern Han warlords in their fictional representation and transformation, and how they served as some role models for characters in a series of more Chinese military romances to come.

The novel is now commonly dated to the Yuan-Ming transition, therefore one could expect some fictional resemblance between two military forces more than 1100 years apart: second to third centuries and late fourteenth century.\(^{322}\) Such resemblance is found in

\(^{321}\) Winston L. Y. Yang: 49.

\(^{322}\) The commonly accepted author was one Luo Guanzhong, last reported alive in 1364; the first
equipment and methods of operation, in both cases historically inconsistent. First there is an imagined armory of the Han-Three Kingdoms warriors which I suggested in Chapter 3 would not possibly have been available to them. One good example is the novel’s portrayal of Lü Bu, a traditional antagonist and the mightiest warrior of his time. He was described as a handsome man of imposing stature, wearing a gilded coronet and a suit of golden interlocking chain armor beneath a florid-patterned battle gown, riding a legendary warhorse named the Red Hare, and wielding a figured halberd.\textsuperscript{323} So iconic was this appearance that one may find in the character of Yuwen Chengdu, a similarly mighty villain supposedly 400 years later from another military romance, \textit{Shuo Tang}, almost its reincarnation with the only exceptions of weapon and horse.\textsuperscript{324} The historical Lü

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\textsuperscript{322} Luo Guanzhong was to say the least an elusive dramatist and novelist, also possibly among those frustrated civil service examinees that harbored dynastic ambition during the fall of the Mongol empire.\textsuperscript{322} If he ever had anything to do with this novel \textit{SGYY}, then mid-late fourteenth century seems a likely timeframe for its origin, not too long after the storytelling manuscript, the \textit{Sanguo zhi pinghua}, known to have been in circulation in the early 1320's.\textsuperscript{322} Between the mid-late 1300’s and the 1522 print of the earliest extant edition was roughly a 150 years’ gap, during which any revision was possible. For background scholarship, see C. T. Hsia: 8, Wang Liji: 240 – 65, and for the pre-Ming illustrated \textit{pinghua} edition, see Robert E. Hegel: 23 – 24.

\textsuperscript{323} \textit{SGYY}, ch.5: 26-27

\textsuperscript{324} The \textit{Shuo Tang} is an anonymous eighteenth century military romance of low literary quality. Its popular highlight is an ensemble of eighteen mostly fabled warriors during the Sui-Tang transition, of
Bu was older than Liu Bei and twice reported as a lancer.\textsuperscript{325} The golden interlocking chain armor, or \textit{huangjin lianhuan suozijia} 黃金連環鎖子甲, was a regular in what seems to be a generic description of battle gear fit to warrior characters of all ages by the medieval Chinese novelists. Almost identical outfits also applied to the twelfth century heroic bandits from the other premorden classic, the \textit{Water Margin}, or \textit{Shuihu}. Archaeological findings, such as the pair of the Ming stone figurines of guardian generals, attest to the popularity of the interlocking chain armor around the heyday of vernacular novels; surviving woodblock prints and paintings indicate an even earlier Song prototype, but to the Eastern Han old-timers such refined armory was still a futuristic development.\textsuperscript{326}

Next to the mismatched armors in the \textit{SGYY} are weapons, and the most problematic ones belong to Liu Bei’s two sworn brothers: Guan Yu and Zhang Fei. The myth of the Green Dragon Crescent Moon Scimitar which, among other things, has emblematized Guan Yu as a cultural hero to nowadays, was already noted in previous chapters. To conclude here, this giant saber mounted on a shaft was unlikely an Eastern Han

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\textsuperscript{325} \textit{SGZ}, ch.7: 382
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\textsuperscript{326} For figures and descriptions of the more elaborate medieval armors found on Ming sculptures, see William Watson: 134-35.
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existence. Its alleged weight, some eighty jin acceding to the novel and other folk traditions, could have derived from a historical reference to the weight of the two halberds that armed Dian Wei, Cao Cao’s first tiger guard. Official history witnessed a similar shafted saber, much lighter though, during a Southern Song military review, and the earliest imagination of Guan Yu’s weapon as a massive scimitar probably came in the form of Yuan drama, namely the *Dandao hui*單刀會.\(^{327}\) The drama itself was based on a historical event found in the *SGZ* which saw Guan Yu attending a diplomatic banquet with his opponents from the south, all armed with one saber *dao* only但諸將軍單刀俱會.\(^{328}\) The Six Dynasties Taoist Tao Hongjing陶弘景(456–536) also ascribed two famous *dao* to Guan Yu and one to Zhang Fei in his *Catalogue of Sabers and Swords* or *Daojian lu*刀劍錄.\(^{329}\) These two earlier sources, however, seem to mean the shorter saber which was a popular close-quarter weapon since the Western Han. For any mid-range cavalry weapon Guan Yu might have wielded, the most likely candidate was the spear or halberd which would match the *SGZ*’s

\(^{327}\) A light shafted saber was presented at a parade in 1166. *Song shi*宋史: 4869. *Dandao hui* is one of the best-known and studied Yuan dramas. William Dolby: 40–45.

\(^{328}\) *SGZ*, ch. 54: 2311

\(^{329}\) Tao’s catalogue is an anecdotal record of all the finest Chinese swords and sabers from immemorial antiquity to his time. Its mentioning of the perfusing steel method or *guangang*灌鋼 dates the earliest use of such technology in Chinese swordsmithery to the 500’s.  Tao Hongjing: *Daojian lu*. 9 July. 2005. <http://www.xycq.net/forum/archiver/tid-30687.html>
description of a thrusting movement that had killed one of his strongest adversaries.\textsuperscript{330} As for the serpentine spear integrated into the fictional icon of his brother-in-arms, Zhang Fei, there is official historical proof that Zhang did once astonish a whole army with a furious display of his spear, but the serpentine particular along with its extraordinary length was probably an afterthought from an eleventh century poem.\textsuperscript{331} In both cases, the heavy shafted saber and the long serpentine-tip spear were fictional creations during the Song-Yuan era. This was a time of ever diversified and refined Chinese weaponry in response to unprecedented border conflicts with the Khitans, Tibetans, Jurchens, and Mongols. Storytellers, poets, and novelists were fascinated by heroic tales distant or present, and they simply adorned their favorite characters with the best battle gear to their knowledge.

The fictionalization of Guan Yu and Zhang Fei, among a few other Three Kingdoms figures, went far beyond weapons and armor only. Sometimes it equates a wholesale of stereotypical personalities in later Chinese novels who may be identified with some role models from the Three Kingdoms reborn. Zhang Fei had his counterpart, Li Kui

\textsuperscript{330} The word used is \textit{ci}刺, an action normally associated with a straight sword or spear. \textit{SGZ}, ch. 36: 1696.

\textsuperscript{331} The Song lyricist Zhou Bangyan周邦彥(1056 – 1121) was the first writer about a four-meter-long serpentine spear in his \textit{Xuehou ma}薛侯馬, or \textit{The Horse of Lord Xue}. Zhang Tingjie張廷傑: 5–13.
李逵, a bandit also known as the Black Tornado 黑旋風, in the Water Margin to share with him a rough but cute type of literary character; Guan Yu’s journey through five hostile passes to a reunion with Liu Bei was reenacted in the seventeenth century Romance of Deification or Fengshen yanyi 封神演義, by one of its otherworldly characters Huang Feihu 黃飛虎 who did the very same en route his escape from tyranny; Zhao Yun, another much beloved tiger warrior, and an imaginary hero supposedly 400-years younger, Wu Yunzhao 伍雲召 from the military romance Shuo Tang, both exemplified a sort of trademark lone heroism with one spear and one sword against overwhelming odds. These analogues indicate that the popular culture of China had its versions of classic valor, often embodied in a simple-minded soldier, a persevering wayfarer, a lone daredevil running unopposed in the multitudes. As China’s oldest extant epic novel, the SGYY was a definite influence on folk perception of individual military heroism. On the other hand, the real warriors of the Han-Three Kingdoms era, for all the popularity of their future literary representations, lived only about one twentieth the longevity of imperial China with a heroic proportion neither unprecedented nor unsurpassed. If there was anything special about them, it would have to be either the intriguing historical contexts of their exploits

332 Wei Juxian 韋聚賢: 22–23.

333 Hou Hui 侯會: 212-27; 239-43
which made them captivating characters for romanticization, or simply thanks to the genius of playwrights and novelists, or both.

Finally there is an interesting term *huihe* 回合, or bout often used to describe duels in the *SGYY* and every other premodern Chinese military romance. A vastly outclassed opponent could be killed in one bout whereas close matches allegedly lasted up to 300.\(^{334}\) This is not to be confused with a round boxed between two contemporary welterweights. A 900-minute-long non-stop joust is just physically unsustainable for anyone of flesh and blood. The most probable count for a *huihe* would have to be just a quick clash of the weapons, which would make a 300-bout fight between armor-clad cavaliers not prohibitively time-consuming. Official history contains only one reference to this term in the records of an early seesaw between the troops of Cao Cao and Lü Bu that turned to the former’s disfavor after “dozens of bouts from dawn to dusk”\(^{335}\) 自旦至暮數十合.” This is however, not a case of an individual duel. No less than five times the novel *SGYY* told stories of duels over 100 bouts along with many lesser engagements. The narratives might well be the reflection of a regular occurrence in actual Yuan-Ming warfare. Nonetheless, tireless bout counting seems to serve the ultimate purpose of ranking warrior characters in

\(^{334}\) A few gruesome duels are found in *SGYY*, ch. 59: 306–11; ch. 65: 342-48.

\(^{335}\) *SGZ*, ch. 18: 924.
regard to their martial prowess. This is indeed one of the most successful novelist devices for battle depictions as the authors through reasonable imagination and meticulous calculation brought life to some 1200-year-old action without mismatching characters to the wrong time and wrong places according to official histories. The result was an ageless military romance well balanced in literary creativity and historical faithfulness.

What appeared in the *SGZ* as a disproportionate representation of the strictly talons and fangs was also rectified in the novel. Laconic biographies of most warriors were elaborated into episodes throughout the first eighty chapters, or two thirds of the novel up to the formal demise of the Eastern Han. Most episodes, such as Xiahou Dun’s swallowing of his wounded eye, and a 200-bout duel between Ma Chao and Xu Chu were likely exaggerations of less dramatic historical events.336

Prior to the novel, earlier literature in celebration of the three kingdoms had already come a long way in other forms like anecdotes, essays, miscellanies, and poetry. A general pattern in the popularity of the three kingdoms as an inspiration to literature is that it increased over times. Among the volumes Pei Songzhi quoted for his commentaries to the *SGZ*, few were fictional in nature, such as Gan Bao干寶 (died 336）’s *Soushen ji*搜神記 and Liu Yiqing劉義慶 (403–444）’s *Shishuo xinyu*世說新語, two early texts with good

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336 Xiahou Dun in official history did lose one eye but did not necessarily swallow it afterwards; Ma Chao and Xu Chu had some stare-and-glare meeting but no physical action. *SGZ*, ch. 9: 458; ch. 18: 924.
collections of three kingdoms anecdotes. As for warriors in particular, an army fanfare, titled “Guan the Unworthy” Guan beide關背德 from the series of Drum and Trumpet Songs of the Wu吴鼓吹曲 portrayed Guan Yu in a negative light.\(^\text{337}\) Next was the Shiyi ji拾遺記 by the Taoist Wang Jia王嘉(died 390), which contained a legend of Cao Hong and his heavenly white horse that had saved his cousin Cao Cao from an enemy onslaught early in 189.\(^\text{338}\) Since Wang Jia’s death it would take another 360 years or so before China’s future military sage, Guan Yu, appeared in a mid-Tang pentasyllabic poem by Lang Shiyuan郎士元, a jinshi進士 candidate of the Tianbao天寶 reign (742–756), and in an essay by Dong Ting董侹 around 802. Both pieces observed Guan as an enshrined hero.\(^\text{339}\) His sworn brother, Zhang Fei, also became featured in another pentasyllabic quatrain by Yin Yaofan殷堯蕃(780 – 855), Temple of Zhang Fei張飛廟, confirming his established niche

\(^{337}\) Older than the SGZ, “Guan the Unworthy” is attributed to Wei Zhao, author of the Wushu and composer of the Drum and Trumpet Songs of the Wu. It is the earliest extant piece of literature with reference to Guan Yu and, representing the view of the enemy state that destroyed him, is perhaps the only Chinese work of literature ever in open disdain of him. Guo Maoqian郭茂倩: 230.

\(^{338}\) Wang Jia: 173.

\(^{339}\) Lang’s poem is titled “Seeing Off Magnate Gao to Jingzhou Outside the Temple of Guan Yu.”関羽祠外送高員外之荊州 Dong’s essay is titled “On the Occasion of the Restoration of the Temple of Emperor Guan.”重修關帝廟記 The dates of these two were likely not too far apart, indicating a somewhat unsettled mid-Tang cult for Guan Yu either as a commemorable mortal known by his personal name or a full-fledged religion with the title of emperor, three ranks above his historical lordship. Chen Changan陳長安: 90-100.
around the ninth century.\textsuperscript{340} Other than their enshrinement, however, the two brothers seemed no more admirable, at least statistically from extant Tang poetry, than some of their contemporary rivals. There was the \textit{Song of General Lü} 呂將軍歌 by Li He 李賀 (790–816) in admiration of Lü Bu, the physically invincible but morally despicable champion of the Eastern Han civil wars, and four seven-syllable quatrains by Sun Yuanyan 孫元晏 featuring a quartet of southern warriors, Taishi Ci, Gan Ning, Zhou Tai 周泰 (died 230), and Xu Sheng 徐盛. Nothing is known about Sun except the inclusion in the \textit{Compendium of Tang Poetry} or \textit{Quan Tang shi} 全唐詩 of his seventy five poems all of which allude to southern culture and history.\textsuperscript{341} He was therefore most likely a southerner and possibly a descendant of the imperial house of Wu either by fact or self-perception, which explained his preference for warriors of the south.

Literature during the Song Dynasty showed a steady increase of reflection on the three kingdoms due to widespread storytelling.\textsuperscript{342} Under the Song imperial patronage, Guan Yu ascended twice in posthumous ranks, first from lord 侯 to duke 公, then to king 王.\textsuperscript{343} He

\textsuperscript{340} Zhu Yixuan 朱一玄: 67.

\textsuperscript{341} \textit{Quan Tang shi}: vol. 393–36; vol. 767–4, 5, 12, 14.

\textsuperscript{342} Gu, Mingdong: 80.

\textsuperscript{343} Although the name Emperor Guan 關帝 might have a late 700’s to early 800’s origin, highest official promotion of Guan Yu’s status during the Song was to kingship and in 1594, emperor. See Note 317 and also Huangfu Zhongxing 皇甫中行: 165–7.
was now the indisputable central figure for literary celebration, with at least one pentasyllabic poem, one trisyllabic song, one memorial on the renovation of his temple in Shaoxing (present-day Hangzhou) by named authors, and one anonymous tetrasyllabic song.\textsuperscript{344} His second, Zhang Fei, was entitled to one sacrificial oration by the master scholar Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072). The only other talons and fangs subject to the interests of Song scholarship were Taishi Ci in an essay by Hong Mai (1123–1202), which dated his posthumous lordship to 1165 – 1170, and Yu Jin, one of Cao Cao’s five ablest commanders, in a verbose seven-syllable poem titled \textit{General Yu} by Kong Pingzhong.\textsuperscript{345} The latter recalled Yu’s shameful surrender to Guan Yu after a crushing defeat in 219, though, so the allusion to him could be read both ways: either a lament of his lion-in but lamb-out career, or another tribute to Guan’s heroism.\textsuperscript{346}

Into the Yuan-Ming transition, a literary milestone was set by the introduction of the novel \textit{SGYY}. Throughout late imperial China, the popularity of the three kingdoms as a subject of all forms of romanticization reached its all-time high. For tributes to the talons

\textsuperscript{344} About the Temple of Guan in Shaoxing 紀紹興廟.

\textsuperscript{345} Gan Ning was the other Wu warrior subject to deification during the Song despite the lack of literati celebration. Kong Pingzhong was Confucius’ forty-seventh generation–descendant and a \textit{jinshi} candidate of the year 1065. Zhu Yixuan ed.: 111-2, 120.

\textsuperscript{346} The capture of Yu Jin marked the height of Guan Yu’s exploits, See Ch. 5: Guan Yu.
and fangs in particular, though, they had only become an even clearer one-man-show: hundreds of odes, poetic or not, flourished in praise of the now godlike Guan Yu. Zhang Fei continued to evoke some admiration, but was numerically dwarfed. Oddly enough among the very few other unforgotten warriors was again Lü Bu, the controversial embodiment of second-to-none manly prowess but unmanly mind, who inspired a short essay with two poems by Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521–1593), one of the greatest Ming writers, painters, and calligraphers.\(^3\)\(^4\)\(^7\)

A broader variety representing the Han-Three Kingdoms soldiery took the less scholarly form of drama. In the days of the Yuan dramatists, such as Guan Hanqing 關漢卿 and Wu Hanchen 武漢臣, the theatrical theme of the three kingdoms featured some forty catalogued plays with most military reenactments limited to the dramas of Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, and Lü Bu.\(^3\)\(^4\)\(^8\) This tradition would eventually grow to over 140 plays in the Beijing opera alone according to an exhaustive list of all three kingdoms inspired dramas regularly played or rarely seen on Chinese stages up to the 1950’s.\(^3\)\(^4\)\(^9\) More than half of these were

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\(^3\)\(^4\)\(^7\) The novel *SGYY* with its portrayal of Lü Bu as a faithless champion began its circulation in the 1520’s at the latest. Nonetheless, Xu Wei did not buy such notion, and stayed neutral in his essay, titled *The House of Lü Bu* 呂布宅. For a brief introduction to Xu’s works, see Yoshikawa Kojiro: 170, 179-80.

\(^3\)\(^4\)\(^8\) Yang, Gladys: 2–5.

episodes of warrior adventures. While Guan Yu remained under the traditional spotlight, his historical equals if not more competent colleagues and enemies, men like Zhao Yun, Ma Chao, Huang Zhong, Taishi Ci, Gan Ning, Zhang Liao and others also had their share of dramatization as central characters in a significant number of plays.

Between the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, mainland China published its longest and arguably best comic series ever, the *Three Kingdoms* which was a visual rendition of the classical novel. The complete series of sixty comic books with nearly 7000 illustrated pages all executed in the traditional ink-drawing style is a modern classic in its own right. Reprints have run throughout the late 70’s to the present. Total numbers of circulation, domestic and overseas combined, are in the multi-millions and counting.³⁵⁰ For the immediate post-Cultural Revolution generation, whose attachment to traditional operas had otherwise diminished, this comic series, along with other media, has been a major influence to their continuing familiarity with the military romance of the Three Kingdoms. Technologies in the new millennia brought no diversion of interest from the youngest generation. Instead the Chinese classic made its way into the worldwide web and video games, expanding its popularity to an international phenomenon.³⁵¹ At the present the

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³⁵⁰ Fang Xiao方曉: 20.

³⁵¹ Some fifty political and military simulation games based on the Three Kingdoms saga in PC, PSP and X-Box versions have seen worldwide success since the mid-1990’s; the bestselling series are the *Dynastic Warriors, Kessen, Fate of the Dragon, and Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. At the present
international director John Wu is working on the largest production ever of the Chinese film industry, the *Red Cliff*, an epic movie scheduled for completion in 2008 in time for the Beijing Olympics.352

In the common opinion of historians, the three kingdoms era pales in comparison to the significance of more defining periods like the Han and Tang. So insignificant that it often seems negligible. The romantic legacy is, however, a different story. To say its cultural proportions are phenomenal is an understatement. Beyond all comparison is more accurate. No other ancient Chinese era, however aloft for academic study, has left as many household names to the knowledge of the everyday Chinese population as the Three Kingdoms, not only names worthiest of a usual historian’s attention like Cao Cao and Guan Yu, but also dozens more of their contemporaries especially the talons and fangs. The brilliance of one novel is certainly accountable for the timeless folk fascination with an otherwise secondary realm of historiography. Nonetheless, for a historical novel with only

there are numerous online forums and websites devoted to the Three Kingdoms for both academic and entertainment interests. One of the highest-rated TV programs in mainland China for the first two seasons of 2007 was a talk show hosted by a university professor Yi Zhongtian whose vernacular introduction of the Han to Three Kingdoms official histories with a subtle sense of humor overwhelmed an enormous audience.  http://kongming.net/games/#rot3k and http://yzt.21pxw.com/07/20/2007.

30% fiction to be so popular, there must be something enchanting about the other 70%, or the very history that inspired the imagination.

From a thematic perspective, dynastic China recycled around unification, deterioration, occasional restorations, and inevitable disintegration. For about once every 700 years, three official periods of disunion disrupted the status quo of a continuous empire which for the better part of its duration, owed much of its continuity to the Confucian ideal of harmony and hierarchy. These were the pre-Qin Warring States (475–221 BC), the post-Han division of the north and the south (220–569), and the post-Tang Five Dynasties (907–960). The Three Kingdoms were a stepping stone to the second despite their elimination by the short-lived Western Jin, which existed more as an introduction to imperial China’s greatest period of disunion than a practical unifier. This observation is reinforced by the terminology of Six Dynasties, often used to identify literatures in south China during the second disunion and beginning with the Three Kingdoms state of Wu.353

All three periods of disunion were blood-soaked with violent destruction: the name Warring States itself is self-explanatory, the Eastern Han ravaged by provincial warlords, and the Five Dynasties a rampage of the late Tang military governors, or *jiedushi*節度使.354

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353 For more discussion on the historical pattern of post-Han China, see Mark Elvin: 30–39.

354 On the Tang military governors, see Edwin G. Pulleyblank: 40.
On a brighter note, though, periodic destruction of the old orders always revived fresh energies that could have lain dormant after centuries of orderly boredom, and cleared the way to the ultimate construction of a new era. Above the ruins of the Warring States rose the first united Chinese empire, through the darkness of its longest disunion imperial China ascended to its golden age, the Tang, and out of the chaos of the post-Tang anarchy came the cultural splendor of the Song. Within this cycle of destruction and reconstruction, or many other yinyang analogues for the matter, the fall of the Eastern Han represented China’s failure to perpetuate its first long-lasting united empire run by a centralized government. Equally represented was a first free-for-all opportunity to contest and share the Mandate of Heaven, whose earthly representation had been one emperor at any given time since the Western Han. The change from one to three coexisting emperors was more than a mere tripartition: it widened the interpretations of legitimacy, and set precedent for future recurrence of simultaneous claims to the Mandate.

To be precise, the house of Han already suffered a loss of the Mandate to Wang Mang’s usurpation, which turned out to be a violent yet survivable disruption. The permanent breakdown of an empire whose name would identify the Chinese nation and its culture was the work of warlords, the first of their kind on the political landscape of China. Their future counterparts, in the persons of frontier generals and provincial military

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355 For the Han reinterpretation of the Mandate, see Zhou Liangxiao: 25–34.
governors, would throw the second proudest Chinese empire, the Tang, into another civil war, and once again, kept republican China practically disunited for almost the first half of the twentieth century until the Communist victory.\textsuperscript{356} Ironically, the Eastern Han warlords, being the archetype of a recurrent threat to the unity of China, were also the original embodiments of the closest Chinese equivalent to the word hero, or \textit{yingxiong英雄}.\textsuperscript{357} In etymological terms, the earliest typical Chinese hero was thus a warlord, or the combination of lordship over a sizable territory with resort to violence for defense and expansion. A heroic warlord boasted talons and fangs, or his \textit{zhao}ya who were also characterized by the use of violence. The introduction to the current essay has already noted a dramatic change of meaning for the term \textit{zhao}ya, that its modern usage would suit some henchmen of an evildoer. However, its original meaning was quite the opposite: the armed attendants of a hero. Between the “heroic” warlords and their talons and fangs, one striking resemblance was their benefit from periodic military outbursts, an opportunity for men of action to live out loud in a culture where their warlike instincts were normally suppressed.

Broadly speaking, traditional China was always a hybrid myth: a culture of the

\textsuperscript{356} For a historical and etymological definition of the Chinese warlords, see Chris Peers: 8.

\textsuperscript{357} Wang Can was probably the inventor of the word \textit{yingxiong} which he incorporated into the title of his volume on the last Han warlords, \textit{Records of Heroes}. The \textit{SGZ} continued the usage in a famous episode when Cao Cao tested the heroism of a then powerless Liu Bei: “Now the only heroes under heaven are none but Your Excellency and me.” 今天下英雄，唯使君與操耳\textit{SGZ}, ch. 32: 1600.
scholars, as well as an empire of the soldiers. Any single-sided attempt to characterize it as civil or military will soon be stuck in its length and breadth. This old civilization, responsible for the world’s first and arguably most enduring centralized bureaucracy, was perhaps precocious when it came to balancing mankind’s bipolar natures: civil refinement or wen, and military adventures or wu. The horrible meat grinder of the Warring States must have taught the Chinese so well how disastrous military aristocracy could become that they chose to outgrow it from a rather early age. The Qin-Han empire, built on a sophisticated network of central and local governments, took the new form of administrative geography. Minus the fact that the Chinese source of legitimacy never had anything to do with an election, this governmental system was quite modern indeed. The state’s well-being was in the care of a salaried bureaucracy where one’s office-holding came before his nobility, if any. With bureaucracy came the more conscious division between civil and military services, which might explain why imperial China never went into extended period of militarism.

In the strong feudal traditions of medieval Europe and Japan, officialdom was never something as defined and developed for a variety of circumstantial reckonings:

358 For the semantic ranges of wen and wu, see David Schaberg: 58–64.

359 See Tien, Chenya’s note on “a culture without soldiers:” 54, 67.
population, land mass, productivity, religions, technologies, historical experiences, etc. Very often the dominant class in each case, the knights or the samurai acted as a two-in-one solution for both civil and military matters. On the other hand, maintaining a vast empire like China with all sorts of complexities dismissed any simple solution. Although the best of both worlds, a cultured warrior and an armed scholar, was nothing foreign to the Chinese ideal, the reality often agreed with a less exceptional stereotype of the unrefined men of action versus the passive men of letters. Over the ages when more lessons of disunion and reunion, war and peace were learnt, the Chinese continued to balance their pursuits of wen and wu with increasing adaptability. Mass weapon confiscation, cutback on conscript training, and the restriction of permanent generalships all pointed to a constant official concern with domestic troubles as a side effect of militarism.

Did traditional China ever hesitate to flex its muscles while its sheer size, manpower, and various advancements could have promised further military conquests? Or is an empire approximately the size of Europe already the most ancient China, much smaller than today, could have grown into and kept united? What occasioned the Chinese military examination, a much later and easily forgotten addition to the world-famous civil

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360 Stephen Turnbull: 28–43.
service examination? Was there ever such a pattern as a steady decline of militarism throughout imperial China? Or whether characterizations like military passivity really reveal the truth in the first place? Or did passivity and activity represented circumstantial choices only? These are all big questions that invite even bigger questions like the Confucian resistance to dynamic changes. What the current essay has to offer is but one glimpse into a topic much broader than its scope, which is the rise of the soldiery at the fall of one dynasty.

Any study of the soldiery, regardless of what era, could use a good grain of salt because they were an underpowered subject in historiography, always recalled in the voice of the better educated but never their own. The last warriors of the Han Dynasty, whose actual roles could have been far greater than what may be gathered from official histories, already denied any intrinsic disdain of the military by the government. For the better part of its existence, the Han bureaucracy culminated at the military office of the Regent Generalissimo, although usually a peacetime sinecure. The realities seemed to suggest a rather logical and practical Chinese mind, that they would assign make-do generalships whenever emergencies called, dismiss them when no longer required. Under this kind of

361 The first Chinese military examination took place in 629, but regular practice did not start until the early 700’s thanks to Empress Wu’s patronage. Li Xinda: 125–30.

362 One of the Three Excellencies, the Grand Commandant, or taiwei, was a largely honorific military office although officially ranked higher than the Regent Generalissimo. See Ch. 1: 42.
cost-effective government, the military profession was a conditional prospect. Nothing could have been done to make Han China an evergreen land for the soldiery, where feudal military aristocracy had long succumbed to civilian-oriented bureaucracy. The only condition a warrior could hope for was right timing. An age of troubles, as in the dying words of Taishi Ci, provided the perfect condition for the talons and fangs to live out their loudest. For better or worse, the contestable Mandates of Heaven, sometimes coexistent, coupled with prolonged disruptions to imperial unity and a utilitarian official culture all sharpened an otherwise rusty Chinese military. The Cao warriors’ unmatched noble entitlements, the Five Tigers’ priority in official history, and the controversial human sacrifice to Chen Wu were just a few testimonies to the Chinese flexibility with circumstantial civil or military inclination.

To conclude, the military force at the end of the Eastern Han had undergone over 100 years of reduced conscription and downsizing across the realm. Nonetheless, as China became increasingly consumed by civil wars, such shortcomings were quickly remedied with new institutions, nationwide mobilization, and some forms of discipline and training. Plenty opportunities awaited all walks of life whose worth could be best utilized as someone else’s talons and fangs. Wandering swordsmen, bandits, gamblers and others had their chances for official military appointments sometimes with sizable fiefs. There was a good variety of personalities as well as physical and mental assets: some were simple
warriors of sheer courage and striking power, others more balanced between the body and
the mind. Aside from their internal differences, what this professional group did share in
common are: 1) Under circumstances, they did not hesitate to rely on the primitive tactics
of forlorn-hope; 2) they were longer on action than words and usually richer in personal
wealth than historical fame; 3) most importantly, they were active history-makers whose
performance determined the outcome of battles big or small and, in accumulation, directly
contributed to the rise and fall of the warlords.

The last talons and fangs of the Han were also the first literally heroic warriors of
all imperial China. They paid a dear price for their heroism: be it a wounded eye or a
severed head, there was nothing short of the bloodcurdling Warring States savagery. More often than not, winning without fighting or the preference for preservation of lives
over deadly operations remained an ancient textbook ideal. After some 700 years of
civilization from the age of the Sun Zi, the norm of Chinese warfare persisted in the forms
of forlorn hope, raw duels between talons and fangs rather than minds, and protracted
sieges often with the threat of civilian massacre. Individual valor in combination with sheer
luck frequently outdid what was supposed to be in theory coordinated group efforts of the
nameless mass.

363 For examples of Warring States casualties, some still debated, and routine brutalities, see Derk Bodde in Cambridge History of China: vol. 1, 38 – 44.
This essay has unveiled but one utilitarian attitude of traditional China, bloodthirsty at its wit’s end and adaptive to occasional militarism. Scholar officials could always sanitize histories with power of words, but the military had their moments of economic power and political dominance. The refinement of Chinese culture is ageless, so is the reality that such refinement, much like the universal experience of war and peace, often accumulated over lessons of blood. A closer look at China’s violent past will also disillusion any optimism for the kind of bloodless warfare found in the abundance of ancient Chinese military texts. The Eastern Han warlords for one knew better: they hardly won any battle without their talons and fangs.

Appendices
1. Two passages from Cao Cao’s *Junce ling* 軍策令:

   [In 189,] I was at Xiangyi 襄邑 (present-day west Sui 睢, Henan province) and about to raise an army. I was forging a short saber with a sword smith. There was a Sun Binshuo 孫賓碩 of Beihai 北海 (present-day west Changle 昌樂, Shandong Province) who came to visit, and he derided me: “You should aspire to something greater, why are you making saber with a sword smith?” I retorted: “Able to accomplish things big or small, what is wrong with that?”

   孤先在襄邑，有起兵意，與工師共作卑手刀。時北海孫賓碩來候孤，譏孤曰：“當慕其所大者，乃與工師共作刀耶？”孤答曰：“能小複能大，何苦!”

   Yuan [Shao] (Cao Cao’s opponent at the battle of Guandu) had ten thousand sets of armor, I had twenty sets of grand armor; he had 300 sets of equine armor, I had under ten. I thus gave up my shortage, and defeated him by surprise movement. Back then the soldiers were few but well-trained, unlike nowadays.

   袁本初鎧萬領，吾大鎧二十領；本初馬鎧三百具，吾不能有十具。見其少遂佈施也，吾遂出奇兵破之。是時士卒精練，不與今時等也

2. Selections from Zhuge Liang’s *Junling* 軍令
None axes from the last two orders could be used. Our troops were in Wudu （present-day Xihe, Gansu 甘肅西河） for one day, and the enemy’s antler-shaped barricades damaged more than one thousand of our swords and axes. Fortunately the enemies already retreated. Had they not, we would have had nothing to fight them with. I had once ordered several hundred axes from the armory. There was no damage after 100 days of use. I therefore know the keeper of the armory must have been negligent. He should be punished accordingly. This is no trivial business. In real hostilities such negligence could jeopardize an entire operation. 前後所作斧，都不可用。前到武都一日，鹿角壞刀斧千餘枚，賴賊已走。若未走，無所復用。間自令作部刀斧數百枚，用之百餘日，初無壞者。餘乃知彼主者無意，宜收拾之，非小事也。若臨敵，敗人軍事矣

The armory must make 500 daggers to equip the cavalry. 作匕首五百枚，以給騎士

The instruction to the armory is to make five-layered steel armor and test them with spears double the strength. 敕作部皆作五折剛鎧。十折矛以給之

The current province of Jingzhou does not lack population, but registered
population. If we levy from the current registered households, the mass will be displeased.

We can instruct the General Who Fortifies the South to increase manpower by forcing the wanderers within the kingdom to self-supply, and complete legal registration. 今荊州非少人也，而著籍者寡，平據發調，則人心不悅；可語鎮南，令國中凡有遊戶，皆使自實，因錄以益眾可也

In battle array, all soldiers mounted or on foot, must wear helmets. 軍列營步騎士以下皆著兜鍪

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Glossary

andong/xi/nan/bei jiangjun 安東/西/南/北將軍
Anhui 安徽
bahe 拔河
Bai Qi 白起
Baidi 白帝
Ban Gu 班固
Bei Zhan 卑湛
Beihai 北海
beijun 北軍
beijun zhonghou 北軍中侯
Beitang shuchao 北堂書抄
benji 本紀
biao 表
biaoji jiangjun 驃騎將軍
Bielu 別錄
biezhuan 別傳
Bing 並
Bing jia 兵家
Bing zhi 兵志
Bingyao 兵要
bozhang 軍張
Bozhou 亳州
bubing xiaowei 步兵校尉
buqu 部曲
Buzhan ling  步戰令
caiguan  材官
cao    曹
Cao Cao  曹操
Cao Hong  曹洪
Cao Man zhuan  曹瞒傳
Cao Pi  曹丕
Cao Ren  曹仁
Cao Teng  曹騰
Cao Zhi  曹植
Chang'an  長安
Changban  長阪
changdao  長刀
Changsha  長沙
changshui xiaowei  長水校尉
chehou  徹侯
cheji jiangjun  車騎將軍
Chen  陳
Chen An  陳安
Chen Lin  陳琳
Chen Qin  陳勤
Chen Shou  陳壽
Chen Tai  陳泰
Chen Wu  陳武
Chen Yulan  陳玉蘭
cheng  丞
chengmen xiaowei  城門校尉
chengxiang  丞相
Chenliu  陳留
chi  尺
Chibi  赤壁
Chongqing  重慶
Chu  楚
Chu ci  楚辭
Chuanzhan ling  船戰令
Chuping  初平
cishi  刺史
cuju  蹴鞠
cumeng  粗猛
Dajianguan  大將軍
Dandao hui  單刀會
danggui  當歸
Dangyang  當陽
dao  刀
Daojian lu  刀劍錄
dasima  大司馬
datong  大同
Deng Ai  鄧艾
Dian Man  典滿
Dian Wei  典韋
dianjun xiaowei 典軍校尉
Ding Feng 丁奉
Ding Yuan 丁原
Dingjun 定军山
Dong Ting 董挺
Dong Xi 董襲
Dong Zhuo 董卓
Dou Xian 簞憲
doujian 鬥艦
dudu 都督
duliao jiangjun 度遼將軍
dutinghou 都亭侯
duwei 都尉
e-shaonian 惡少年
Fa Zheng 法正
Fan 反，樊
Fan Kuai 樊噲
Fan Ye 范曄
fangji 方技
Fei Shi 費詩
Feng Tang 馮唐
fengjian 封建
Fengjie 酆界
Fengshn yanyi 封神演義
fubo jiangjun 伏波將軍
Fuchi    富池
Fuhao(zi) 婦好
Gan Bao 干寳
Gan Ning 甘寧
gansi   敢死
Gansu 甘肅
Gaozu 高祖
Geng Kui 耿夔
Gongsun 公孫
Gou Jian 句踐
Gu    滑
guan beide 關背德
Guan Hanqing 關漢卿
Guan Ying 灌嬰
Guan Yu 關羽
Guan Zhong 管仲
guandi 關帝
guandong yishi 關東義師
Guandu 官渡
guanduwei 關都尉
guangang 灌鋼
Guanghan 廣漢
guanglu xun 光祿勳
guangong 關公
Guangwu 光武
guannei hou  關內侯
Guanqiu Jian  卜丘儉
guansheng  關聖
guanwang  關王
Guanyulai  關羽瀨
guguan zhonglangjiang  五官中郎將
guo  國
Guo Huai  郭淮
guoren  國人
guoshi  國士
Han Dang  韓當
Han Fei Zi  韓非子
Han Hao  韓浩
Han Xin  韓信
Han  漢
Hangu  函谷
Hangzhou  杭州
Hanjin chunqiu  漢晉春秋
Hanwei chunqiu  漢魏春秋
Hanzhong  漢中
He Jin  何進
Hedi  和帝
Hefei  合肥
Heifu  黑夫
Henan  河南
henanyin  河南尹
Hong Mai  洪邁
hou  侯
Houhan shu  後漢書
Hu Chong  胡沖
Hua Tuo  華佗
Hua Xin  華歆
Huang Feihu  黃飛虎
Huang Zhong  黃忠
huangjin  黃巾
huangjin lianhuan suozija  黃金連環鎖子甲
Huayang guozhi  華陽國志
hubaoji  虎豹騎
Hubei  湖北
huben  虎賁
huchi  虎癡
huihe  回合
huji  胡騎
huji sima  胡騎司馬
hujun  護軍
Hunan  湖南
Huo nue Zhang Fei hu  或譏張飛胡
Huo Qubing  霍去病
husheli  虎射吏
hushi  虎士
huwei 虎衛
huwei jiangjun 虎威將軍
huya 虎牙
ji 銃
Ji Ling 續霛
Jia Xu 賈詡
jiabing 家兵
jiaji juzhuang 甲騎具裝
jian 劍
Jian’an 建安
Jiang Qin 蔣欽
Jiang Wei 姜維
Jiang yuan 將苑
jiangbiao huchen 江表虎臣
Jiangbiao zhuang 江表傳
Jiangjun 將軍
Jiangsu 江蘇
Jiangxia 江夏
Jiao 交
jiao 教
jiazhuan 家傳
jiedushi 節度使
jiefan 解煩
jiji 技擊
Jimo 即墨
Jin 晉

Jin shu 晉書

Jin Zhuge Liang ji biao 進諸葛亮集表

Jing 驚

Jingzhao 京兆

Jingzhou 荊州

jinshi 進士

Jinyang 晉陽

Jiu zhao chun qiu 九州春秋

Jizhou 冀州

Ju 莒

juedi 角抵

jüe 爵

jue zhang 蹴張

Jun Chen 軍鑯

Jun ling 軍令

jun shi 軍市

jun 郡

Junce Ling 軍策令

junguo 郡國

junshi 軍師

junshi jiangjun 軍師將軍

junshi zhong lang jiang 軍師中郎將

junzheng 軍爭，軍正

Juyan 居延
Ke Ling  柯霛
ketou ruishi  科頭銳士
Koguryo  高句麗
Kong Pingzhong  孔平仲
Kong Rong  孔融
Kong Yan  孔衍
Lang Shiyuan  郎士元
li  礼，里
Li Daoyuan  郦道元
Li Dian  李典
Li Gonglin  李公麟
Li Guang  李广
Li Guangli  李广利
Li He  李贺
Li Kui  李逵
Li Ling  李陵
Li Yong  李永
Liang  晁
liangdang kai  兩當鎧
liezhuan  列傳
Lin Xiangru  藺相如
ling  令
Ling Cao  涙操
Ling Tong  涙統
Lingdi  靈帝
lingjun 領軍
linjia 鱗甲
Liu Bang 劉邦
Liu Bei 劉備
Liu Biao 劉表
Liu Chan 劉禪
Liu Xi 劉熙
Liu Xiang 劉向
Liu Yan 劉焉
Liu Yiqing 劉義慶
Liu You 劉繇
Liu Zhang 劉璋
Liyang 黎陽
Longshang 隴上
louchuan 樓船
louchuanshi 樓船士
Lu Su 魯肅
Lu wen 魯問
Lu Xun 陸遜
Lü Bu 呂布
Lü Meng 呂蒙
Luhun 陸渾
Luo 雛
Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中
Luoyang 洛陽
luoyangling  洛陽令
Luoyouguan  裸游館
Ma Chao    馬超
Ma Dai     馬岱
Ma Su      馬謖
Ma Teng    馬騰
Ma Yuan    馬援
Ma Zhong   馬忠
mafeisan   麻沸散
Man Chong   滿寵
taoyun     矛
maotu      冒突
mengchong   蒙沖
Mi        糜
Ming      明
mingguang kai  明光鎧
Miu Xi     謝馥
Mo Zi      墨子
mu        牧，募
Mulan      木蘭
muxin      母辛
nanjun     南軍
Nanyang    南陽
nu         奴
Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修
Pan Zhang  潘璋
Pang Tong  龐統
Pei Songzhi  裴松之
Pian Po  廉頗
pianjiangjun  偏將軍
Pianyi shiliu ce  便宜十六策
pijiangjun  裨將軍
pili che  霹靂車
pingdong/xi/nan/bei jiangjun  平東/西/南/北將軍
Pu Songling  蒲松齡
Puyang  濮陽
Qiai  七哀
qian/hou/zuo/you jiangjun  前/後/左/右將軍
Qiang  羌
qiangou  牽鉤
Qiao  譙
qiduwei  騎都尉
qifu  祈父
Qin  秦
Qing  清
qingche  輕車
qinjin  親近
Qinling  秦嶺
qishi  騎士
qu  曲
Qu Yuan  屈原

*Quan Tang shi*  全唐詩

quan  全

Rang Ju  穰苴

raozhang  繞帳

Ren Shang  任尚

ruishi  銳士

Ruxu  濰須

sanfu  三輔

*sangong jiuqing*  三公九卿

*Sanguo yanyi jingxi kao*  三國演義京戲考

*Sanguo zhi*  三國志

*Sanguo zhi pinghua*  三國志平話

*Sanguo zhi yanyi*  三國志演義

*Sanguo zhi zhuan*  三國志傳

Shaanxi  陝西

Shandong  山東

*Shang shu*  尚書

*Shangjun shu*  商君書

*shangjun xiaowei*  上軍校尉

*shangshutai*  尚書臺

Shanyue  山越

Shao Hu  召虎

Shaoxing  紹興

Shenting  神亭
shesheng xiaowei 射聲校尉

shi 石

Shi ming 释名

shi nong gong shang 士農工商

shidafu 士大夫

shigou 施鉤

Shiji 史記

shijia 士家，世家

Shijing 詩經

Shishuo xinyu 世說新語

Shiyi ji 拾遺記

shizu 士族

shouji 手戟

Shu 蜀

shu 庶

shuguo 屬國

Shuihu 水滸

Shuijing zhu 水經注

Shuiji 蜀記

Shundi 順帝

shuo 櫟

Shuo tang 說唐

Sichuan 四川

sikong 司空

sili xiaowei 司隸校尉
simā 司馬
Sima Biao 司馬彪
Sima Qian 司馬遷
Sima rangjiu bingfa 司馬穰苴兵法
Sima Yi 司馬懿
situ 司徒
sizhèn 四鎮
sizhèng 四征
Song 宋
Song shì 宋史
Song Shū 宋書
Soushen jì 搜神記
Sui 睢，隋
Sun Binshuo 孫賓碩
Sun Ce 孫策
Sun Jian 孫堅
Sun Quan 孫權
Sun Sheng 孫盛
Sun Wu 孫武
Sun Yuanyan 孫元晏
Sunzi 孫子
taibao 太保
taifu 太傅
Taiping Dao 太平道
Taiping Yulan 太平御覽
taishi 太師
Taishi Ci 太史慈
taishou 太守
taiwei 太尉
Taiyuan 太原
taju 踏鞠
Tang 唐
tang 鏡
Tao Hongjing 陶弘景
Teng 膝
Tianbao 天寳
tianshi 天師
ting 亭
tinghou 亭侯
Tong dian 通典
Tong Pass 潼關
tonggong 彤弓
tongxiu kai 筒袖鎧
tun 屯
tunji xiaowei 屯騎校尉
waijun 外軍
Wancheng 皖城
Wang Can 王燦
Wang Chang 王昶
Wang Ji 王基
Wang Jia 王嘉
Wang Jian 王翦
Wang Lang 王朗
Wang Ling 王凌
Wang Mang 王莽
Wang Shen 王沈
Wang Yin 王隱
Wei 魏，衛，渭，濮
Wei Jiang 魏絳
wei jiangjun 衛將軍
Wei Lüe 魏略
Wei Qing 卫青
Wei shu 魏書
Wei Xiao 隗囂
Wei Yan 魏延
Wei Zhao 韋昭
Wei Zi 微子
weishi bique 围師必闕
Weishi chunqiu 魏氏春秋
weiwei 衛尉
Wen Pin 文聘
wen 文
Wendi 文帝
Wu 吳
wu 武
Wu Hanchen 武漢臣
Wu Qi 吳起
Wu shu 吳書
Wu Yunzhao 伍雲召
Wudi 武帝
Wuding 武丁
wudoumi jiao 五斗米教
Wudu 武都
Wuhan 武漢
Wuhuan 烏桓
wuku 武庫
Wuku Fu 武庫賦
Wudi 吳曆
wunan 無難
wushang jiangjun 無上將軍
wusheng 武生
wuwang shenya 吳王神鴉
Wuwei 無為
wuwei jiangjun 武衛將軍
wuwei zhonglangjiang 武衛中郎將
wuweiying 武衛營
wuxiao 五校
wuying 五營
Wuzi 吳子
wuzu 武卒
Xi Zaochi  習鑿齒
xia  俠
Xia  夏
Xiahou Chen  夏侯諶
Xiahou Dun  夏侯惇
Xiahou Ying  夏侯嬰
Xiahou Yuan  夏侯淵
xian  縣
xianhou  縣侯
Xianbei  鮮卑
Xiandi  献帝
Xiandi chunqiu  献帝春秋
xiang  鄉
xianghou  鄉侯
xiang  相
Xiang Yu  項羽
Xiangfan  襄樊
xiangpu  相撲
Xiangyi  襄邑
xianwei  縣尉
xianzhen  陷陣
Xiao He  蕭何
Xiaoting  豺亭
Xiaoyaojin  逍遙津
Xin  新
新唐書
匈奴
西園八校尉
許, 徐
徐晃
許升
徐盛
徐渭
玄甲
許昌
薛侯馬
虛封
荀攸
荀彧
荀子
顏師古
荀彧
楊幹
陽城
演義
遙領
野人
邑
宜昌
Yin Yaofan 殷堯蕃
ying 营
yingji 营妓
yingquan 鷹犬
yingxiong 英雄
Yingxiong ji 英雄記
Yizhou 益州
Yong 雍
Youfufeng 右扶風
Yu Fu 虞溥
Yu Huan 魚豢
Yu Jin 于禁
Yuan Shao 袁紹
Yuan Shu 袁術
Yuan Wei 袁暐
Yue 越
Yue Jin 樂進
yueji xiaowei 越騎校尉
Yuejue shu 越絕書
Yuhang 餘杭
yulin 羽林
yunleizhang 雲壘長
yushi dafu 御史大夫
Yuwen Chengdu 宇文成都
Zang Ba 臧霸
Zhengzi tong 正字通
Zhenjiang 鎮江
zhennjun jiangjun 鎮軍將軍
zheyi 赭衣
zh 齒
Zhi Guangling yu mashang zuoshi 至廣陵於馬上作詩
zhijinwu 執金吾
Zhong 衷
Zhong Hui 鍾會
Zhong You 鍾繇
zhonghujun 中護軍
zhongjun 中軍
zhonglangjiang 中郎將
Zhongmou 中牟
zhongwei 中尉
Zhou Bangyan 周邦彥
Zhou Tai 周泰
Zhou Yafu 周亞夫
Zhou Yu 周瑜
Zhou 周，紘
Zhuge Dan 諸葛誕
Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮
Zhuge Liang ji 諸葛亮集
Zhuo 涿郡
Zizhi tongjian 資治通鑑
zouge  走舸
Zubing  足兵
Zuo gangkai jiao  作剛鎧教
Zuopingyi  左憑翊