

## A QUESTION OF LOYALTY

XUN YU, CAO CAO AND SIMA GUANG

In 212 AD, as the army of the great warlord Cao Cao 曹操 was moving south against his southern rival Sun Quan 孫權, there was a sad incident in the camp. Xun Yu 荀彧, a leading counsellor and one of Cao Cao's oldest supporters, died at Shouchun 壽春 city on the Huai 淮 River. There are varying accounts and opinions whether he died of natural causes or whether he killed himself, but Cao Cao was embarrassed and Emperor Xian of Han 漢獻帝, though close-held under his control, made a point of mourning Xun Yu.

Nine hundred years later, moreover, as Sima Guang 司馬光 of the Northern Song dynasty compiled his chronicle *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, he took the death of Xun Yu as the occasion for a powerful essay on proper conduct in troubled times.

The story of Xun Yu and Cao Cao, therefore, not only touches the tensions of loyalty and legitimacy between a falling dynasty and a rising power, it provided one of China's greatest Confucianists with a case-study for his moral teaching.<sup>1</sup> [31]

For two and a half thousand years since the time of Confucius, as rival states and succeeding dynasties have ruled in China, many men in public affairs have been forced into cruel choices of allegiance, and have been expected to maintain personal honour even at the cost of their lives.

There has always been conflict in the Confucian tradition between an individual's responsibility to private personal and family affairs when they are set against public loyalty to the state and its government. It is not always certain whether a true gentleman should involve himself in official life, seeking to promote the common good, or whether he should abandon the corrupted field of politics and maintain his own morality. Should he indeed take a public role, then he must decide whether his concern for the state and people can express itself through loyalty to a single ruler or through an eclectic choice among the policies and persons suited to the time.

Before the unified empire was established by Qin 秦 and confirmed by Han 漢, scholars and statesman might offer their talents to one ruler or another, and each party engaged in a personal contract of grace and fidelity. So the disciples of Confucius served many different rulers, and Mencius,

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<sup>1</sup> These events and their background are summarised and discussed in *ZZTJ* 66:2115-2116, translated by deC, *Establish Peace*, 439-442. The account is based primarily upon the biographies of Xun Yu in *SGZ* 10:307-21 and *HHS* 70/60:2280-91.

born in the state of Zou 鄒, had no hesitation in offering his services to rival kings of Wei 魏 and Qi 齊. Neither place of birth nor [32] allegiance to a teacher hindered a man from choosing his political master; the only requirement was that he should serve with honour and maintain his own integrity.

From the time of Qin and Han, however, the ideal of a unified, civilised empire became dominant. For generations of gentlemen, loyalty and service were expressed simply through relationship to the emperor and his government – though that by itself could create desperate and often fatal conflicts of conscience. In times of division, on the other hand, as rival warlords struggled for sovereignty, each of their followers had to decide their own allegiance and, sometimes, the conditions under which they might legitimately change it. And there were occasions when the critical choice had to be made as one dynasty took over from another, not always by external force of arms but often by internal political manoeuvre and coup d'état.

Many men would be faced with such decisions. In the middle of the third century, as the fragile state of Wei 魏 ruled by the Cao 曹 family was subverted by the powerful Sima 司馬 clan and its gentry allies, the poet Ruan Ji 阮籍, caught between factions, expressed his bitterness in coded verse.<sup>2</sup> In the disordered tenth century, the minister Feng Dao 馮道 served five dynasties and ten rulers, and was categorised as the most treacherous Confucian of them all.<sup>3</sup> And in the seventeenth century, as the Ming 明 dynasty collapsed and China was conquered by the Manchu Qing 清, questions of loyalty or acceptance [33] confused good men and remained to bedevil their successors.<sup>4</sup> In each case, and in a multitude of others, later historians have offered moral judgements from the perspective of their own experience and concerns.

For any man of Confucian honour, there has always been tension between personal or family duty and loyalty to the state. Increasingly during Later Han, however, as the imperial government appeared dominated by eunuchs and factions at court, many gentlemen refused to become involved and gained honour from their insistence upon private life.<sup>5</sup> Even among those who were willing to hold office, there appeared a sense of personal

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<sup>2</sup> See his biography by Holzman, *Poetry and Politics*.

<sup>3</sup> Wang Gungwu, "Feng Tao," 41-63.

<sup>4</sup> Spence and Wills, *From Ming to Ch'ing*, particularly the essays by McMorran, Beattie and Struve.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Vervoorn, *Men of the Cliffs and Caves*. DeC, *Huan and Ling*, 14-18, describes a number of gentlemen who refused appointment.

responsibility to the individual one chose to serve under. Many men of good conduct abandoned the imperial service because they regarded their superiors as corrupt and unworthy, while the power and influence of high officials was enhanced by the support they could call upon from clients, students and former subordinates, sometimes numbered in the hundreds and thousands. By the latter part of the second century AD, the network of personal relationships, patronage and alliance between individuals and family groups, was generally more immediate and important than the general, almost anonymous, loyalty which every official was supposed to feel and express towards the imperial state and the people it ruled.<sup>6</sup> [34]

Despite real tensions and sometimes fatal crises of politics at court, these matters of personal conscience appear almost as a luxury, encouraged by the sense of security which four hundred years of dynastic rule provided. The bonds of the state were loosened, however, by such individualistic morality, and at the end of the century, as the traditional structures of imperial government collapsed in ruins and were ground to pieces by civil war, far harsher questions were posed: how much did a man owe his patron and leader in war, how much to the broader common weal; and how could the demarcation be decided? As conflict spread across the empire, few could escape into private life, while for those at the centre of affairs the nature of public allegiance, and the form of state they should serve, were matters of cruel concern.

The morality of politics in peace-time had not prepared men well for the brutalities of a disintegrated empire and the harsh struggle to restore some semblance of order. And the brittle, ramshackle regimes of Cao Cao and his rival warlords made demands upon their subjects and servants which left small room for moral contradiction or uncertainty.

### *The Xun clan of Yingchuan*

Xun Yu was born in 163 to a noted family of Yingyin 穎陰 county in Yingchuan 穎川 commandery, by Xuchang 許昌 in present-day Henan.<sup>7</sup> East of the imperial capital at Luoyang 洛陽, Yingchuan was one of the most populous and prosperous territories of the Han empire, but the Xun [35] had come to prominence only in the time of Xun Yu's grandfather Xun Shu 荀淑, a local magnate with pretensions to scholarship and contacts in the central government. Xun Shu himself held no high office, but by the time Xun Yu

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, deC, "Politics and Philosophy," 52-55.

<sup>7</sup> On the Xun family, see Ch'en Ch'i-yün, *Hsün Yüeh: life and reflections*. On Xun Yu's cousin Xun Yue, see the same scholar's *Hsün Yüeh and the Mind of Late Han China*.

was born the family had acquired local respect and some position on the national stage.

A few years later, the situation changed. In 159 Emperor Huan 桓 of Han had overthrown his domineering brother-in-law the General-in-Chief Liang Ji 梁冀, and his personal government was strongly influenced by the court eunuchs who had aided him in the coup. There was increasing resistance amongst traditional gentlemen to these mutilated favourites, with accusations and impeachment on each side. In 167 there was a purge and proscription of the anti-eunuch "Pure" party, but Emperor Huan died at the end of that year and the youthful Emperor Ling 靈 began his reign under the control of Dou Wu 竇武, father of the regent Empress-Dowager and a sympathiser of the traditionalists. In the autumn of 168, however, the eunuchs arranged their own coup, Dou Wu was overthrown, and his leading associates were executed or proscribed from office.<sup>8</sup>

Some members of the Xun clan had held a leading role against the eunuchs; one was executed, and the family as a whole was excluded from the court and the capital. The eunuch regime, however, was resented in the provinces, and its opponents were admired for their courage and principle. Several of Xun Yu's kinsmen established a reputation for private scholarship, and his uncle Xun Shuang 爽, in exile and hiding, was celebrated for his moral commentaries on the Confucian classics. In 184, as the religious rebellion of the Yellow Turbans 黃巾 raised popular armies against the government, the quarrels between the factions took second place to the emergency: proscription and persecution were abandoned, and the gentry joined the imperial armies to defend the dynasty. [36]

Five years later, however, after the death of Emperor Ling in 189, the central government fell into ruins. He Jin 何進, brother of the new regent Empress-Dowager, planned to kill the eunuchs but was himself assassinated. His troops and associates then massacred their enemies, and in the disorder which followed the frontier general Dong Zhuo 董卓 seized power in the capital. Replacing Liu Bian 劉辯, son of the Lady He, with his half-brother Liu Xie 協, later known as Emperor Xian 獻, Dong Zhuo attempted to establish a government of reform. He was equipped for the task, however, neither by temperament nor legitimate authority. By 190 there was open rebellion in the east, and the empire was divided in civil war.

The Xun had been in no hurry to return to public life, and members of the family took differing paths. Xun Shuang served against the Yellow Turbans in 184, but initially rejected invitations to civil office. He later

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<sup>8</sup> The history of this period is translated and discussed by deC, *Huan and Ling*.

accepted a summons from Dong Zhuo, became an Excellency, highest rank in the bureaucracy, and followed the court west to Chang'an 長安 where he died in 190 at the age of 62. He was accompanied by his nephew Yue 悅, who joined the Palace Library and was commissioned to compile the Chronicle of [Former] Han (漢紀 *Han ji*). Xun You 攸, a distant cousin who had joined He Jin in 189, also came to the capital; he plotted against Dong Zhuo and narrowly escaped execution.

Xun Yu's elder brother Shen 諶 had meantime taken service with Yuan Shao 袁紹, and in 191 he persuaded Han Fu 韓馥, Governor of Ji province 冀州 on the great plain north of the Yellow River, to cede power to him. Yuan Shao was a member of a great official family and leader of the alliance against Dong Zhuo, and Xun Shen became one of his advisers.

Xun Yu had stayed in Yingchuan, but at this time, now almost thirty years old, he went to join his brother at Ye 鄴, the capital of Ji province. A short time later troops of Dong Zhuo attacked Yingchuan, several members of the family were killed, and their estates were ruined. From this time, like many other gentry embroiled in the civil [37] war, Xun Yu and his relatives were cast adrift from their former landed base and were obliged to rely upon their own wits and skill.

Though well received by Yuan Shao, Xun Yu soon left his service to go to Cao Cao. Cao Cao's father Cao Song 曹嵩 had been adopted by the eunuch Cao Teng 騰, held high office as an Excellency, and amassed great wealth. Cao Cao himself, after a middling career at the capital, fled Dong Zhuo's regime in 189, sold family property to raise troops in the southeast, and joined the alliance under Yuan Shao. Eight years the elder, Cao Cao had probably not met Xun Yu before, but the two men immediately found a rapport.

In 194, from his base in Yan 兗 province on the plain south of the Yellow River, Cao Cao attacked Xu 徐 province in the east to avenge the murder of his father. While he was away several of his officers mutinied and invited the fighting man Lü Bu 呂布 to take over. Xun Yu, however, had charge of a garrison in Jiyin 濟陰 commandery, and he played a vital role in holding a position from which Cao Cao was able to regain his territory. Two years later, as Emperor Xian escaped from Chang'an and returned to the east, Xun Yu urged Cao Cao to take the exiled ruler under his protection. As the emperor was settled at Xu city 許 in Henan, Xun Yu became Director of the Imperial Secretariat (尚書令 *shangshu ling*) at the court of Han. Xu city is present-day Xuchang, so Xun Yu had returned to the region of his family's old estates.

In 199 and 200 Yuan Shao attacked south across the Yellow River and Cao Cao set his defences at Guandu 官度 on the Vast Canal 鴻溝. Guarding the base at Xu city, Xun Yu maintained the loyalty or neutrality of leaders on the south and west and encouraged Cao Cao in the strategy which led to victory.

For the next several years Xun Yu remained at Xu city, formally head of the imperial secretariat but in practice responsible for the heart of Cao Cao's power. He was consistently a close adviser, and it was under his patronage that Cao Cao recruited many of his most effective ministers. Following the death of Yuan Shao and the destruction of his sons in Ji province, Xun Yu was enfeoffed as a marquis in 206. He rejected additional honours, but Cao Cao linked the families by marrying one of his [38] daughters to Xun Yu's eldest son Yun 惲.

There is no further record of Xun Shen who had served Yuan Shao, but another brother, Xun Yan 衍, held command at Ye city in Cao Cao's service, and in 205 their cousin Xun Yue, who had followed the imperial court to Xu and maintained his position in the Library, submitted *Shen jian* 神監, a work of political philosophy, to the throne. The more distant relative Xun You, who had joined Cao Cao in 196 through Xun Yu's recommendation, held responsibility and confidence comparable to his: while Xun Yu maintained Xu city, Xun You went with Cao Cao on campaign as a tactical adviser and occasional commander.

By counsel, military activity, or scholarly repute, Xun Yu and his kinsmen had moved swiftly, under most troubled conditions, to a national role and had acquired a leading position in the new regime: no small achievement for a family which had emerged from local obscurity just two generations earlier.

### *The Nine Distinctions*

In 212, however, this close personal and family alliance was disturbed and broken, and the source of discord was the question of the Nine Distinctions.

The origins of the Nine Distinctions (九錫 *jiu xi*) were traced to the ancient past. Augmentations of honour, they had been used during Former Han and were codified into the Confucian tradition of Later Han at a conference in the White Tiger Hall at Luoyang held under the auspices of Emperor Zhang 章 in 79 AD; a record of the proceedings is preserved in *Bohu tong* 白虎通.<sup>9</sup> Details varied slightly from one list to the next, but the

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<sup>9</sup> On the Nine Distinctions under Han, see Tjan Tjoe Som, *White Tiger Discussions*, I, 25-29 and 37-39, and II, 504-509, also Dubs, *HFHD* III, 208-210, and deC, *Generals*

recipient [39] was awarded special carriages; clothing, bonnets and shoes of honour; musical instruments and formal dancers; a gateway of imperial vermilion for his residence; the right to use a private inner staircase at the palace; guardsmen of the same style as the ruler's; axes of ceremony and authority; ceremonial bows and arrows; and a special liquor distilled from black millet and flavoured with herbs. Each entitlement was notionally associated with some civil or military achievement, and the special liquor was given to those of personal virtue and good conduct. In theory, they could be awarded separately, and there were others that a ruler might grant to a worthy minister, but tradition, precedent and theory grouped all Nine Distinctions into one splendid array.

With his triumph at Guandu in 200, followed by the death of Yuan Shao two years later, Cao Cao had no effective rival in the north of China. Having seized Ji province from Yuan Shao's quarrelling sons, in 207 he destroyed a confederation of the Wuhuan 烏桓 people in the north-east and established control as far as Manchuria. In 208 he moved south into Jing 荆 province, and though he was defeated at the Red Cliffs 赤壁 on the Yangzi by an alliance of the warlord Sun Quan and the condottiere Liu Bei 劉備, this was not a critical set-back. Another brilliant campaign in 211 destroyed the petty chieftains of the north-west and gained the whole of the valley of the Wei. There remained three provincial leaders, Liu Bei on the middle Yangzi, Sun Quan in the south-east, and Liu Zhang 劉璋 in Yi 益 province, present-day Sichuan; but their [40] positions were disparate and their connections unstable, so Cao Cao had reason to feel confident that his northern power could overwhelm them one by one.

In the spring of 212, as he returned from the west to his personal capital at Ye city, the imperial court awarded him special honours: the right to enter court without announcing himself and without hastening step, and the right to wear shoes and carry a sword in the imperial presence. The precedent was related to the favour received by Xiao He 蕭何, minister to the founding Emperor Gao 高 of Former Han, and the scholar Bao Xian 包咸 former tutor to Emperor Ming 明 of Later Han, had been similarly treated. More significantly, however, in 145 the powerful regent Liang Ji and in 189 the usurping general Dong Zhuo had also taken these privileges.<sup>10</sup>

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*of the South*, note at 415-417.

<sup>10</sup> On these honours paid to Cao Cao, see *SGZ* 1:36; deC, *Establish Peace*, 434. On Xiao He, see his biographies at *SJ* 53:2016; Watson, *Records I*, 94, and *HS* 39:2009. On the precedent of Bao Xian, see *HHS* 79/69B:2570, on Liang Ji, *HHS* 34/24:1183, and on Dong Zhuo, *HHS* 72/62:2325; deC, *Establish Peace*, 27-28.

In all such cases, however, and particularly the first two, the exemptions related to the status of a minister at court, and Cao Cao was treated as no more than an especially worthy subject of Han. Ten months later, however, at the beginning of winter, a more substantial move was proposed.

The initiator was Dong Zhao 董昭 a long-time officer of Cao Cao who had served as advisor and planner and was currently a member of his Imperial Chancellor's office. Having gathered his forces for another campaign against Sun Quan, Cao Cao was moving southeast towards the Hual [41] and the enemy position on the lower Yangzi. He would naturally pass by Xu city, and Dong Zhao suggested, first, a rearrangement of noble ranks to establish the title of Duke and, second, the award of the Nine Distinctions.<sup>11</sup>

Since the early years of Han, enfeoffment as King (王 *wang*) had been reserved to members of the imperial clan, and the highest rank available to outsiders was Marquis (侯 *hou*). The feudal rank of Duke (公 *gong*) was maintained for the notional descendants of the ancient dynasties Shang 商 and Zhou 周, but these had no political role, while the style *gong* [rendered "Excellency" in this context] was also used for the three highest ministers of the imperial bureaucracy.

Dong Zhao's proposal was that the imperial government should restore the feudatory position of Duke above that of the marquises, and that Cao Cao should receive the honour to signal his exceptional achievement and authority. His recommendation urged that:

Since ancient times, of all great ministers who have saved the empire, never has there been achievement to compare with yours today; and no man of the past, with such great work as this, has consented so long to serve another.

Besides his evident flattery, Dong Zhao was addressing two problems of protocol and perception. Cao Cao had been awarded four county marquisates, but in theory the holder of such fiefs required imperial permission not to reside at his domain, and the scholar Kong Rong 孔融 had at one time suggested that his continued residence at the capital was lese-majesty. Kong Rong was a trouble-making pedant, but the incident was annoying and embarrassing.<sup>12</sup> [42]

Two years earlier, in winter at the beginning of 211, Cao Cao had addressed the question of his status in an ordinance which formed a personal

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<sup>11</sup> This proposal of Dong Zhao is described in his biography, *SGZ* 14, at 439-40.

<sup>12</sup> This argument of Kong Rong is described in his biography, *HHS* 70/60, at 2272; deC, *Establish Peace*, 374.



*apologia*.<sup>13</sup> He referred to his first humble ambitions, to the circumstances which had obliged him to contend for power, and to the implications of his current situation. His success guaranteed the security of the dynasty, but it also exposed him to suspicion that he might aim for the throne himself.

Supposing I had not been here, who can tell how many men might have claimed the imperial title, and how many would have sought to rule as kings?

There are some people, however, who see how my power has grown and realise that I have no natural trust in the favour of Heaven. They are afraid I am concerned only for myself, and that I have ambitions for the throne. . . . .

On the other hand, if anyone proposes that I should simply give up my army, hand over my power, and retire to my fief ..., then that is quite impossible. Why? Because I am really afraid I should be killed as soon as I leave the protection of my troops. And if I should come to harm, it will not be only my sons and grandsons who suffer – the whole realm will be in danger. In seeking a meaningless reputation I would guarantee myself a certain death; and I am not going to do this.

Cao Cao was in an awkward position: he could not afford to look greedy for the throne, but he could equally not withdraw from public life,[43] and his status as a marquis was unsatisfactory. By Dong Zhao's plan, the system would be changed so that he could hold a greater fief and central power without obviously infringing the prerogatives of the emperor. Whatever the future might hold, Cao Cao would have established himself and his family in a position of hereditary power, independent though notionally subordinate to the emperor like a Shogun in later Japan.

Dong Zhao's proposal was surely presented with Cao Cao's knowledge and approval, and in context the Nine Distinctions were no more than an embellishment of imperial favour to the substantive matter of the dukedom. The precedent, however, was ominous: though Confucian theorists at the White Tiger Hall had endorsed the Distinctions as suitable for a loyal minister, the only person to whom they had been granted under Han was Wang Mang 王莽, just four years before he usurped the throne and proclaimed his own dynasty.<sup>14</sup> So while the enfeoffment and the Distinctions

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<sup>13</sup> This ordinance (令 *ling*), dated to the equivalent of 1 January 211, was preserved in *Wei-Wu gushi* 魏武故事, quoted by SGZ 1:32-34 PC. It is part translated by deC, *Establish Peace*, 411-413, and by Bauer, *Anlitz Chinas*, 131-133, who cites it as an early and distinctive example of autobiography. DeC, *Imperial Warlord*, has a full rendering at 357-362.

<sup>14</sup> HS 99A, 4074-75; Dubs, *HFHD* III, 208-210.

could be presented as no more than a means to confirm Cao Cao's formal position as the greatest subject of Han, they could also be harbingers of a future grasp for power and the overthrow of the dynasty.

*Fall from grace*

Dong Zhao's proposal was first raised with Cao Cao's military commanders and fellow-marquises, who agreed to the enhancement of their master's status. Xun Yu, however, approached by letter, raised objections:

Since the time that Lord Cao raised troops to save the dynasty and give peace to the state, he has kept faith with loyalty and honest conduct, and has maintained his honour by withdrawing and yielding. A true [44] gentleman shows his love for others by virtuous advice, so I must speak now. We should not act like this.<sup>15</sup>

Xun Yu's biographies emphasise that his advice was sought and given privately, but the matter was already known to Cao Cao's officers. It had no doubt been planned that a ceremony would be held as Cao Cao passed through Xu city on his way to the attack against Sun Quan, but the opposition of this respected and senior official of the imperial court brought an immediate halt to the program. Cao Cao was naturally embarrassed, and when the histories say that he was upset (心不能平), they surely express his feelings very mildly.

His formal response was prompt. In a memorial to the emperor Cao Cao asked that Xun Yu accompany the army to Qiao 譙 "to encourage the troops." Qiao county in Pei 沛 was Cao Cao's homeland, and was his base for operations against the lower Yangzi. When Xun Yu arrived Cao Cao had him transferred to become Palace Attendant (侍中 *shizhong*), Imperial Household Grandee (光祿大夫 *guanglu dafu*) bearing the Staff of Authority (持節 *chijie*), and Advisor to the Army of the Imperial Chancellor (參丞相軍事 *can chengxiang junshi*). The new appointments were announced in most complimentary terms, and the first three were indeed fine positions under Han: a Palace Attendant held the highest honorific status, Imperial Household Grandees were senior advisers, and the Staff of Authority conferred plenipotentary powers. None, however, had the same direct influence as head of the imperial secretariat, and the real twist was in the tail, for his new post as Advisor to the Army removed Xun Yu from the imperial court and placed him directly under Cao Cao's control. [45]

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<sup>15</sup> Dong Zhao's letter to Xun Yu is in *SGZ* 14:440 PC quoting *Xiandi chunqiu* 獻帝春秋 by Yuan Ye 袁曄 of the third century. Xun Yu's reply is quoted by *HHS* 70/60:2290 and summarised in *SGZ* 10:317.

So Xun Yu travelled south-east with Cao Cao's headquarters. In the winter, however, he was taken ill at Shouchun, now Shouxian in Anhui, and was left behind. The army over-ran Sun Quan's defences north of the Yangzi, but could make no gains across the river, and in the spring of 213 Cao Cao turned back to the north. By this time Xun Yu was dead. He was fifty years old by Chinese reckoning.

A variety of stories gathered about Xun Yu's death, depending upon the political sympathies of those who told them. Supporters of Cao Cao said that he died of natural causes, perhaps aggravated by anxiety about his conflict of loyalties. In later years Cao Cao praised him and his cousin Xun You together:

Whenever Xun Wenruo put forward a worthy project, he would follow through until it was adopted and completed. The two directors Xun grew ever more reliable in their judgement of men. As long as I live I shall never forget them.<sup>16</sup>

Other accounts, designed to emphasise the rift, tell how Cao Cao, angry and resentful, refused to let Xun Yu speak with him privately and later, when he was ill, sent a dish of food; but when the lid was taken off the bowl proved to be empty. Realising that he had lost Cao Cao's trust, Xun Yu took poison and died.<sup>17</sup> A further version, brought by a deserter to Sun Quan and widely circulated, claimed that Cao Cao had ordered Xun Yu to kill the Empress Fu 伏; rather than do so, Xun Yu [46] killed himself.<sup>18</sup> Certainly, Emperor Xian mourned Xun Yu and held ceremonies in his honour, though it is hard to tell if this was a general sign of public courtesy to a long-serving officer of the court or represented a personal and political alliance.<sup>19</sup>

For there was another, most serious, matter in which Xun Yu may have been involved. In 199 Emperor Xian's cousin Dong Cheng 董承 had sought to gather a conspiracy against Cao Cao, possibly with the complicity of the emperor himself. The plot was discovered and Dong Cheng and his fellows were killed, but Cao Cao then also demanded the life of Dong Cheng's

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<sup>16</sup> SGZ 10:325 PC quoting the *Fuzi* 傅子 book of Fu Xuan 傅玄 (217-278), and SGZ 10:318 PC quoting *Xun Yu biezhuàn* 荀彧別傳; deC, *Establish Peace*, 478-479.

Wenruo 文若 was the style of Xun Yu. The encomium was given after the death of Xun You in 214: Xun Yu had been Director of the Secretariat for Han, and Xun You later held the same position in Cao Cao's state government of Wei.

<sup>17</sup> SGZ 10:317 PC quoting *Weishi chunqiu* 魏氏春秋 by Sun Sheng 孫盛 of the fourth century, and HHS 70/60:2290.

<sup>18</sup> *Xiandi chunqiu*, quoted in SGZ 10:319 PC; the account of the deserter's story is omitted from the parallel quotation in commentary to HHS 70/60:2291.

<sup>19</sup> HHS 70/60:2290.

daughter, a senior imperial concubine who was pregnant at the time. Emperor Xian pleaded for her, but to no avail, and the lady was executed.<sup>20</sup>

As a result of this, it is said that the Empress Fu became afraid for herself, and urged her father Fu Wan 完 to likewise take action against Cao Cao. Fu Wan, sensibly, did nothing of the sort, and died peacefully in 209. The Lady Fu's initiative was discovered only later, in the winter of 214, and Cao Cao promptly sent the Imperial Counsellor Chi Lü 郗慮 and the new Director of the Secretariat Hua Xin 華歆 to arrest her. Many of her family were killed, including two imperial children, and the Lady died in a palace prison. Soon afterwards, Cao Cao arranged for his daughter Jie 節 to be raised from senior concubine to imperial consort; one may suspect the treachery of the Lady Fu had served his purposes well.<sup>21</sup> [47]

A further version of the story claims that Xun Yu learnt of the Lady Fu's intrigue at an early stage but failed to report it. Much later, when Cao Cao taxed him on the matter, he could offer only weak excuses and Cao Cao had additional reason to suspect his loyalty. The tale is circumstantial, with dialogue between Cao Cao and Xun Yu, but is surely an anachronism, for the Lady Fu was not punished until two years after Xun Yu's death, and Cao Cao had no reason to wait so long once the affair came to his attention.<sup>22</sup>

What does appear is that the puppet court at Xu city was a potential source of trouble, and the emperor himself could be involved in conspiracy against his powerful minister. Although he was Cao Cao's chief agent there, Xun Yu had been an officer of the court for almost twenty years, and was vulnerable to doubts about his loyalty.

Many men found themselves torn between dynastic and personal allegiances at this time of confusion. Besides Kong Rong, who enjoyed maverick sophistry and eventually paid the penalty,<sup>23</sup> two honorable examples are Han Song 韓嵩 and Zhang Hong 張紘.

In 199 Liu Biao 劉表, Governor of Jing province, sent his officer Han Song to Xu city to assess Cao Cao's chances against Yuan Shao. Han Song warned:

A sage can manage any commission at any time, but a lesser man keeps to his duty. Once the name of master and servant has been settled, it must be maintained to the death. Now my name is on your service-list, I

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<sup>20</sup> SGZ 32/Shu 2:875, SGZ 1:18, HHS 10B:453.

<sup>21</sup> HHS 10B:453-55, SGZ 1:44-45; deC, *Establish Peace*, 480-481.

<sup>22</sup> *Xiandi chungqiu*, quoted in commentary to HHS 70/60:2291 and at SGZ 10:318 PC. At 319, however, Pei Songzhi notes the confused timing and rejects the whole story.

<sup>23</sup> HHS 70/60:2278; deC, *Establish Peace*, 374-375.

have handed in my pledge, and you are the only person to command me. You may send me through fire and water and I shall die without complaint. [48]

It is my opinion, however, that Lord Cao will achieve his design for the empire. If you wish to support the Son of Heaven above and Lord Cao below, then send me to Xu city. If, however, you are uncertain, and when I come to the capital the Son of Heaven grants me a post and I am obliged to accept, then I shall become an imperial servant, and my relationship to you will be no more than that of a former officer.

When I have a master I work for him. So if I hold appointment from the Son of Heaven I can no longer give you full loyalty.

Liu Biao paid no attention, and insisted that Han Song go. He was indeed given office at the capital, and when he returned he praised Cao Cao's government and urged Liu Biao to offer allegiance. Liu Biao, furious, was going to kill him for a turn-coat, but Han Song reminded him what he had said earlier, and Liu Biao was obliged to accept the principle. Han Song, however, was sent to prison, and he was released and rewarded only when Cao Cao took over the territory nine years later.<sup>24</sup>

In similar fashion, though less dramatically, the scholar Zhang Hong, a long-time supporter of the southern warlord Sun Ce 孫策 was also sent to Xu city and held office there. He was an advocate for the Sun family on several occasions, and soon after Sun Ce's death in 200 he was sent back to the south. Despite his loyal record, he was kept some years at a distance by Sun Ce's brother and successor Sun Quan, and probably never gained his full confidence.<sup>25</sup>

For Xun Yu at the court in Xu city, the critical decision was whether Cao Cao's ambitions and the fortunes of the dynasty could be reconciled; and if not, then where did primary loyalty lie? Was his opposition to the Nine Distinctions intended to defend the dynasty against further [49] usurpation, or was it no more than a well-meant cautionary note, that Cao Cao could not afford to appear so ambitious? We cannot assess Xun Yu's full intention, and he may not have been clear on the matter himself, but Cao Cao resented his support for the imperial court, and was no longer sure of Xun Yu's loyalty. Given the tensions within the warlord regime, the potential political damage of punishing one of his closest associates, who was also a minister of Han and past patron of many of his officers, was too great for Cao Cao to take direct action. He made his feelings very clear, however, and though Xun Yu's

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<sup>24</sup> SGZ 6, 213 PC quoting *Fuzi*; deC, *Establish Peace*, 259-260.

<sup>25</sup> See de Crespigny, *Generals of the South*, 220-225. The biography of Zhang Hong is in SGZ 53/Wu 8:1243-47.

death was something of an embarrassment and spawned several hostile rumours, it did solve the problem.

Xun Yu may have died of natural causes, but he may have been poisoned, or chose suicide as a means to preserve his family. Certainly the affair had no further effect. A few months later Cao Cao took the Nine Distinctions and became Duke of Wei, and Xun Yu's cousin Xun You became the head of his official secretariat. Xun Yu's eldest son Yun 惲, son-in-law of Cao Cao, received the succession to his fief, and his brothers held office at court. The Xun, indeed, maintained and enhanced their position under both Wei and the successor state of Jin 晉 founded by the Sima 司馬 family, and they acquired their highest noble status at the end of the third century.<sup>26</sup>

*The debates of historians*

Given Xun Yu's importance in Cao Cao's government and the suddenness of his fall, it is not surprising there were different stories and [50] interpretations of the incident, nor that later writers sought to analyse his conduct and motives. At least in early years, however, each commentator was to some extent influenced by his situation and experience: the fall of the four-century Han empire was unprecedented, and the series of short-lived dynasties which followed created their own questions of allegiance.

Chen Shou 陳壽 (233-297), compiler of *Sanguo zhi*, describes Xun Yu as dying at Shouchun of illness and anxiety, and in a brief comment at the end of the chapter he refers to him as a man who had the talent and skills suitable to aid a king, but who failed to fulfill his ambitions. As a former official of the defeated state of Shu 蜀 now writing at the court of Jin, Chen Shou was unwilling to discuss the full implications of Xun Yu's crisis of conscience.<sup>27</sup>

Yuan Hong 袁宏 (328-376), compiler of *Hou Han ji* 後漢紀, was more secure. A respected scholar and writer, he was an associate of the powerful Xie 謝 clan of Eastern Jin, and held substantial rank at court and in regional government. His account in *Hou Han ji* of how Xun Yu died of anxiety is

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<sup>26</sup> Members of the Xun clan held rank and office throughout the third century, they were connected by marriage to the imperial Sima family of Jin, and Xun Yu's sixth son Yi 顥 (or Kai) became an Excellency. See *SGZ* 10:319-20, with *PC*, and the biographies in *JS* 39.

<sup>27</sup> The biographies of Chen Shou from *Huayang guo zhi* 11:189 and *JS* 82:2137-38 are reprinted at the end of the Beijing edition of *SGZ* at 1475-76 and 1477-78. See also deC, *Generals of the South*, 534-543.

Chen Shou's comments on Xun Yu appear in his Criticism (評 *ping*) at *SGZ* 10:332.

followed by a substantial essay on his intentions and achievements. Yuan Hong's thesis is that the authority and prestige of Han were not yet exhausted, and Cao Cao was simply using them in his struggle for power. By helping Cao Cao, therefore, even though he restored good order to the empire, Xun Yu failed in his duty of loyalty to the dynasty. On this interpretation, Xun Yu was caught by the contradictions of his career. His conduct had been unworthy of a true [51] Confucian, and when he was faced with the full implications of his support for the usurper, his death came from a sense of moral guilt.<sup>28</sup>

Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (372-451), compiler of the commentary to *Sanguo zhi*, was a leading official and scholar of the Liu Song 宋 dynasty. An officer of Liu Yu 劉裕, general of the Jin dynasty who seized power in 420, he held high appointments at court and in the provinces under the new regime, and in 429 his commentary to Chen Shou's work was accepted by the throne as a standard history. Though the work had been formally commissioned in the previous year, it was evidently in progress for some time before that.<sup>29</sup> Pei Songzhi's experience as assistant to a usurping general was analogous to that of Xun Yu, but he had no such concerns of conscience, and in commentary to Chen Shou's remarks he deliberately confronts the earlier opinion.

For Pei Songzhi, there is no question that Xun Yu was aware of Cao Cao's ambition, but the Han empire was in such turmoil that a unifying warlord was essential. So Xun Yu supported Cao Cao in his struggle to restore order. Then, when Cao Cao appeared a threat to the house of Han itself, Xun Yu made his protest. His sacrifice gained the dynasty an extension of time, and demonstrated his true allegiance. Xun Yu had thus fulfilled his public duty by establishing a regime which would aid the people, and he demonstrated a sense of personal honour worthy of praise by all who came after him.<sup>30</sup> [52]

Fan Ye 范曄 (398-446), author of *Hou Han shu* and a younger contemporary to Pei Songzhi, also defends Xun Yu. Noting that previous historians categorised him as worthy but of inferior quality, Fan Ye points to his excellence as an adviser in time of trouble, but claims he had no intention of overthrowing Han. The fall of the dynasty, however, was inevitable and Fan Ye, in contradiction to Yuan Hong, argues that Xun Yu was well aware of the

<sup>28</sup> The death of Xun Yu is discussed in *Hou Han ji* 30:360-61.

<sup>29</sup> The biography of Pei Songzhi is in *Song shu* 64:1698-1701. The biography and Pei Songzhi's memorial of presentation appear at the end of the Beijing edition of *SGZ* at 1479-81 and 1471-72. See also deC, *Generals of the South*, 535-541.

<sup>30</sup> Pei Songzhi places his remarks on Xun Yu in his commentary to Chen Shou's Criticism (評 *ping*) in *SGZ* 10:332 PC.

consequences of his support for Cao Cao. As to the effect of his work, Fan Ye compares Xun Yu to Duanmu Ci 端木賜, the disciple Zigong 子貢 of Confucius, whose diplomacy to save the state of Lu 魯 brought turmoil to two rival states and power to the semi-barbarous king of Yue 越: he did not wish such misfortune, nor did he lack humane feeling, but the situation made the results of his work inevitable.<sup>31</sup>

While all agree on his ability and good intentions, therefore, the early commentators Chen Shou and Yuan Hong suggest that Xun Yu failed to see the consequences of his actions and suffered when faced with them. Pei Songzhi, on the other hand, admires him as a man of foresight who accepted death for the sake of his personal integrity, and Fan Ye ranks him with the disciples of Confucius. Four centuries later, however, Du Mu 杜牧 (807-852) returned to the attack with a new charge: Xun Yu was a traitor not to Han but to Cao Cao.

A scholar and writer of the later Tang, Du Mu was noted for his strict morality in terms of the revived Confucianism of the time. His collected works include poetry, essays, inscriptions and official [53] documents, and among them is a short "Note after reading the Biography of Xun Wenruo."<sup>32</sup>

The core of the essay is Du Mu's argument that Cao Cao was the only man to restore good government after the collapse of Han, and that this is the matter of overwhelming importance. Cao Cao may be criticised for the killing of the Empress Fu, for the execution of Kong Rong and for other cruelties, and such faults disqualify him from comparison with sage rulers of the past. Full judgement, however, depends upon circumstance, and Cao Cao's real achievement was to save the common people of China from the miseries of disorder.

Du Mu, moreover, cites two occasions that Xun Yu compared Cao Cao to legitimate emperors of Han. In 195, during the struggle against Lü Bu for Yan province, he argued that the territory was as important to Cao Cao as the land within the passes had been for the founding Emperor Gao of Former Han or the region about Luoyang for the restoring Emperor Guangwu 光武 of Later Han.<sup>33</sup> And when Cao Cao faced Yuan Shao at Guandu in 200 and Xun Yu urged him to hold his line, he described the situation as critical as the

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<sup>31</sup> There are biographies of Fan Ye in *Song shu* 69: 1819-34 and in *Nan shi* 33:848-56. See also Bielenstein, *RHD* I, 14-15. Fan Ye's Comments (論 *lun*) on Xun Yu are at *HHS* 70/60:2291-92.

<sup>32</sup> *Ti Xun Wenruo zhuan hou* 題荀文若傳後 in *Fanchuan wenji* 樊川文集 6:12b-13b. There are biographies of Du Mu in *Jiu Tang shu* 147:3986-87 and *Xin Tang shu* 166:5903-.

<sup>33</sup> *SGZ* 10:308-10; deC, *Establish Peace*, 155.



long-drawn fighting between Emperor Gao and his rival Xiang Yu 項羽 about Rongyang 滎陽 on the junction of the Vast Canal and the Yellow River.<sup>34</sup> Here is evidence that Xun Yu regarded Cao Cao as a man marked for empire, but then, observes Du Mu,

when the affair was ended and the achievement complete, he sought to take the credit for the Han dynasty. This is like telling [54] a thief to bore through a wall and empty another man's cupboards, but then refusing to help him carry away the spoil. Can such a man claim that he too is not a robber?

It was in fact the remnant dynasty which depended upon Cao Cao, not Cao Cao who needed the name of Han. Cao Cao could have destroyed his rivals without borrowing the prestige of the fallen empire, but Emperor Xian could never regain authority on his own.

So Xun Yu owed true loyalty to Cao Cao, not only because he had personally supported and encouraged him in imperial terms, but also as the chief hope for China and its people. It was unworthy and inappropriate for him to dither about the rights of Han, and his death was a natural consequence of such mistaken conduct.

The debate amongst historians and commentators has thus shifted from one perspective to another. Was the dynasty of Han irrevocably ruined? Was Cao Cao the only chieftain who could bring order to the empire? Did Xun Yu owe loyalty to Cao Cao, to Emperor Xian, or to the Chinese people as a whole? And how should an man of honour behave in such a situation?

### *The teaching of Sima Guang*

Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086), minister of the Northern Song 宋 dynasty, presented his plan for a chronicle history, with sample chapters, to Emperor Yingzong 英宗 in 1066, and an edict endorsed the proposal. In the following year Sima Guang gave a seminar to the new Emperor Shenzong 神宗 who, full of admiration, composed a preface for the work and changed the title from plain *Tongzhi* 通志 "Comprehensive Record" to the splendid *Zizhi tongjian* "Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government."<sup>35</sup> [55]

At the same time, Sima Guang was firmly opposed to the liberal policies of the emperor and his chief minister Wang Anshi 王安石. Despite the imperial patronage and sponsorship, therefore, Sima Guang was kept from

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<sup>34</sup> SGZ 10:314; deC, *Establish Peace*, 284.

<sup>35</sup> The biography of Sima Guang is in *Song shi* 336:10757-70. *Zizhi tongjian* is discussed by Gunter Lewin in *Sung Bibliography*, 69-70 [with a historiographical bibliography]; its significance for the history of the end of Later Han and the Three Kingdoms period is considered by Fang, *Chronicle I*, xvii-xix, and by deC, *Huan and Ling I*, xi-xvii.

any practical position, and *Zizhi tongjian* was the work of a political exile. Soon after the completed history was presented to the throne in 1084, however, Emperor Shenzong died, and Sima Guang became chief minister in the regency government for the young Emperor Zhezong 哲宗; he spent the last eighteen months of his life demolishing the reforms of the previous regime.

His swansong of power, however, had less long-term effect than the message which Sima Guang left for his imperial masters and to posterity. For *Zizhi tongjian*, in true Confucian tradition, presents not only a history but also a set of moral teachings.

One hundred years later the Southern Song philosopher Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) prepared an abridgement to the chronicle. [*Zizhi*] *Tongjian gangmu* 綱目 "Summary and Detail of the *Comprehensive Mirror*" presents historical judgements, parallel to the notional system of "praise and blame" ascribed to Confucius in his compilation of the *Chunqiu* 春秋 annals of the state of Lu.<sup>36</sup> Zhu Xi adds no new material to the original work, but uses it rather as a vehicle for presenting his own opinions, and he frequently disagrees with Sima Guang. *Tongjian gangmu* is accessible and has been widely influential, but the style is often heavy-handed [56] and Sima Guang's approach is more indirect and sophisticated.

Though closely based upon accounts provided by established texts, the account of the fall of Han in *Zizhi tongjian* carries strong messages: first, how the favouritism and folly of emperors Huan and Ling destroyed the authority of the dynasty; then how the whirlwind they sowed was reaped in civil turmoil after the seizure of power by Dong Zhuo; and finally how Cao Cao and his rivals struggled to restore a measure of good order in the Chinese world. This is history on a grand scale, and the lessons to be drawn from the chronicle are worth any ruler's attention.

At a second level, moreover, Sima Guang was concerned with personal morality: how should a worthy man behave in critical times? Those who read his work not only learn the events of the past, they are given models of conduct under stress, to accept, reject, or test against their own. No-one who studies *Zizhi tongjian* in detail can fail to be influenced by the historian's strong sense of morality.

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<sup>36</sup> The biography of Zhu Xi is in *Song shi* 429:12751-70; see also Wing-tsit Chan in *Sung Biographies* I, 282-290. *Tongjian gangmu* is discussed [with bibliography] by John W Haeger in *Sung Bibliography*, 75-76. See also Franke, "Das Tse tschi t'ung kien und das T'ung kien kang mu, and Haenisch, "Gedanken zum T'ung-kien kang-muh.

Occasionally, however, the chronicler steps outside his self-imposed restrictions to address the reader directly. In short essays prefixed by the phrase "Your servant [Sima] Guang remarks" (臣光曰) he presents his own interpretation of the events he has described. He does not do this often, but the effect of his comments is all the more powerful for their rarity.

In the case of Xun Yu and Cao Cao, Sima Guang felt obliged to enter the debate in this way, specifically to defend Xun Yu against the claim that he lacked Confucian virtue. His argument is based upon a comparison with the legendary minister Guan Zhong 管仲 or Guanzi 管子, who served Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 during the seventh century BC [57] and brought him to hegemony over his rival feudatories under the weakened kingdom of Zhou 周.<sup>37</sup>

Confucius described love for humanity (仁 *ren*) as the matter of utmost importance. From ... the highest of his followers, to the ... worthy grandees of the feudal lords, none qualified for that description. Only Guan Zhong did he praise for humanity, and surely this was because Guan Zhong, assistant to Duke Huan of Qi, gave such great relief to living people.

The conduct of Duke Huan of Qi was like that of a dog or a pig, yet Guan Zhong was not ashamed to act as his Chancellor. It is obvious that he saw Duke Huan as the only way to bring aid to the people.

In the great disorders at the end of Han, the people were in utmost misery, and only a man of exceptional ability could bring them help. Had Xun Yu left Emperor Wu of Wei 魏武帝 [Cao Cao],<sup>38</sup> whom should he have served?

In the time of Duke Huan of Qi, though the house of Zhou was weak, the position was still not so bad as the situation of Han at the beginning of the Jian'an 建安 period [in 196]. At that time the whole world was in turmoil and overturned, and the Han had not a foot of ground nor a single man under its command.

Xun Yu assisted Wu of Wei to bring about a restoration. He promoted worthy men and gave work to the able, he trained soldiers and he drilled troops, he seized opportunities and he developed plans, he fought and was successful in every direction, [58] and so he was able to

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<sup>37</sup> The full text of the essay appears in *ZZTJ* 66:2115-16; deC, *Establish Peace*, 440-442.

<sup>38</sup> In 220, after his son Cao Pi deposed Emperor Xian of Han and placed himself upon the imperial throne, he gave Cao Cao posthumous title as Emperor Wu of the new dynasty of Wei: *e.g.* *SGZ* 1:1.

turn weak into strong and change disorder into good government. Of the ten parts of the empire the Wei had eight.

In what respect does the achievement of Xun Yu fall short of that of Guan Zhong? Guan Zhong did not die for Gongzi Jiu 公子糾,<sup>39</sup> but Xun Yu died for the house of Han. His sense of humanity was superior to that of Guan Zhong.

So Sima Guang gives first emphasis to the responsibility of a minister towards the people as a whole, regardless of the qualities of the ruler, and he cites Confucius' praise of Guan Zhong for his practical public achievement, regardless of his personal obligations.

He then addresses the criticisms of Du Mu, firstly that Xun Yu had compared Cao Cao to the founding emperors of Han, but then turned away and sought to make him, despite his achievements, merely a servant of the Han.

To the first accusation, Sima Guang simply rejects the records of the history:

I recall Confucius' saying: "Literature over reality, that is a scribe."<sup>40</sup> Whenever an historian records a man's words, he always [59] adds a literary touch. So the comparison of Wu of Wei with Gaozu 高祖 [Emperor Gao]<sup>41</sup> and with Guangwu..., that is no more than embellishment by some historian. How can we know Xun Yu really spoke that way? This is criticising him for a fault which is not his.

In other words, though Xun Yu's words to Cao Cao on two occasions are recorded in three separate texts, and the second piece of advice was given in

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<sup>39</sup> Gongzi Jiu was a brother of Duke Huan of Qi, but Duke Huan killed him. The *Analects* of Confucius record, however, that when one of his disciples criticised Guan Zhong for serving a fratricide, the Master replied:

Guan Zhong acted as chief minister to Duke Huan, made him leader of all the princes, united the whole kingdom and set it in order. Even to the present day, people yet benefit from his achievements ... Would you require of him the petty loyalty of ordinary men and women, who would commit suicide in a stream or ditch with no-one knowing anything about them?

<sup>40</sup> See *Lun yu* 論語 XIV.18/17; Legge, *Chinese Classics* I, 282-283, Lau, *Analects*, 137. 文勝質則史: *Lun yu* VI.16/18; Legge, *Chinese Classics* I, 190: "Where the accomplishments are in excess of the solid qualities, we have the manners of a clerk." Legge explains the "clerk" (史 *shi*) as "sharp and well-informed, but insincere." Lau, *Analects*, 51, renders the description as "pedantry."

Sima Guang, however, interprets the character 文 *wen* as referring not to the man's conduct but to the historian's exaggeration: "embellishment" as below.

<sup>41</sup> Emperor Gao of Han is frequently referred to as Gaozu, a conflation of his posthumous dynastic title Gao and his temple name Taizu 太祖 Grand Founder/Ancessor."

a letter which may well have entered the archives of Wei, Sima Guang is prepared to deny the evidence.

To the second charge, that Xun Yu turned from Cao Cao to Han, Sima Guang returns to the essential argument of Pei Songzhi:

Moreover, if Wu of Wei had become emperor, then Xun Yu would have received much of the credit for bringing it about, and could expect the same rewards as Xiao He received from Emperor Gao. Xun Yu, however, took no advantage from his situation. On the contrary, he was prepared to give his own life in order that Han might receive the benefit. Surely this is exceptional conduct?

One may have the feeling that Sima Guang is over-emphasising his point, and that in defending or denying Xun Yu's comparison of Cao Cao with the founders of Han, he makes the same error he ascribes to others. Certainly we cannot be sure that Xun Yu spoke as he is recorded, but the evidence in the opposite direction, presenting Xun Yu as a martyr to the ideal cause of the dynasty, is equally suspect.

Ultimately, we may recognise Xun Yu as the clever counsellor to a great warlord. We cannot judge his full intentions; nor, as with any human being, can we be sure he acted always with consistent motives. His relations with his imperial masters, however, and the stories which were told about the manner of his death, presented a problem for later historians and commentators, and their debates expressed the tensions of a philosophical dilemma on the terms of Confucian loyalty.

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