



# Gongsun Zan: Famous Warlord of the Late Eastern Han Dynasty

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**Abstract.** Gongsun Zan (?–199) was a warlord active in the late Eastern Han Dynasty (184–220). Although he finally failed in a series of wars in northern China, he was a historical figure who greatly influenced that era. At the same time, he was one of the most excellent cavalry commanders of the late Eastern Han Dynasty. This study analyses this historical figure from the angles of military and politics, trying to find some enlightenment from his early success and final failure.

**Keywords:** Gongsun Zan · the late Eastern Han Dynasty · warlord · the Youzhou area · cavalry · horse archers

## 1 Introduction

In 2019, a computer game named Total War: Three Kingdoms led to many historical figures of the late Eastern Han Dynasty starting to become well-known around the world. Before this, owing to the lack of cultural exchange between China and other countries, when talking about the late Eastern Han and the Three Kingdoms Period (220–280), most people only remember Guan Yu (?–220), Zhao Yun (?–229), and Cao Cao (155–220). After the appearance of this game, increasing numbers of historical figures of that era began to be recognised. Gongsun Zan was one of them. Gongsun Zan was a warlord of the Eastern Han Empire's northeast region (including today's Hebei and Liaoning Provinces of China and the northwest region of North Korea), an area with complex situations. The governors of that area faced many problems such as national conflict, border clashes, and illegal immigration. These problems remain hot topics today.

Gongsun's experience can be viewed as a source of inspiration. In the process of dealing with problems, he was both successful and unsuccessful. As a warlord, Gongsun had two identities at the same time: politician and commander. Against the background of his two identities, this study analyses his career path in detail, combining the era background and his own character. His good ideas are extracted from examples of his success. It is also necessary to critically review the history of failure.

Since Gongsun was a failure in terms of warlordism, there are relatively few historical records about him. This was the greatest challenge in the process of this research. Fortunately, *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (290) and *Book of Later Han* (445), two official history books of ancient China, contain his biographies. The current research centred on these two books.

## 2 Historical Background

### 2.1 Talent Selection System of the Late Eastern Han Dynasty

#### 2.1.1 Importance of Family Background and Good Fortune

In the Eastern Han Dynasty, the talent selection system was referred to as the election system. Local government officials were required to recommend the talents to central government after examining them. Then, these talents would be elevated to different positions within the government. However, in the late Eastern Han Dynasty, this kind of talent selection system had become the game of dignitaries [1]. For those young men born into common families, they needed to be lucky enough if they wanted to make a great achievement. Finally, in the Sui Dynasty (518–618), the election system was replaced by imperial examination [1].

Gongsun Zan was born into an official family. However, at the very beginning, he was just a minor official in the prefectural government [2, 3]. Because his mother was inferior in status, he had no chance to enjoy the convenience of the election system [3]. However, Gongsun was a lucky man. After marrying the daughter of the prefecture's top leader, he was recommended to study under Lu Zhi (139–192), a famous scholar and general [2]. One of Gongsun Zan's classmates in Lu Zhi's class was Liu Bei (161–223), the founder of the Han Kingdom (221–263) in the Three Kingdoms era (220–280) [2]. According to *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, in this period, he learned the ancient classics [2, 3]. His military capability mainly came from inborn talent.

The identity of Lu Zhi's students was important for Gongsun's official career. After graduation, due to his chivalrous spirit, he became well-known in high society. He was promoted by the government of the Eastern Han Empire and deployed to the Liaodong Shuguo area (located in today's Liaoning Province). Here, Gongsun started his military career.

#### 2.1.2 Bad Result Led by the Election System

Owing to the talent selection system, the air of officialdom and army was quite bad. A children's folk rhyme described the phenomenon as 'the generals from official families were as timorous as chickens' [4]. At the same time, because one's background was the most important standard, professional knowledge and ability were usually ignored. Many officials were assigned to unsuitable positions, which greatly increased the turmoil of the Eastern Han Empire.

Gongsun was also the victim of this talent selection system. He started his military career without experiencing military education. At the same time, his talent was not sufficient for him to command a large army. This era carried a foreshadowing of his tragedy.

### 2.2 Chaos in the Late Eastern Han Dynasty

#### 2.2.1 Border Conflict with Nomads

As previously mentioned, Gongsun Zan began his military career in the Liaodong Shuguo area. It was a place used to resettle the nomadic people who surrendered to the Han

Dynasty [5]. It was also an area where the Eastern Han army often fought against two nomadic tribes, the Sumbe and Wuhuan.

The Wuhuan was a nomadic tribe who lived in the north of the Han Empire's northeastern border. These herdsmen became subjects of the Han Dynasty after General Huo Qubing (140 B.C.–117 B.C.) defeated Xiongnu, the most powerful nomadic tribe of that era [3]. The young men of the Wuhuan usually served as the vassal troops of the Han Dynasty. However, in the late Eastern Han Dynasty, the Wuhuan betrayed the Han Dynasty and started to attack its northeastern border. The Sumbe was another nomadic tribe that lived in the north of the Han Empire's northeastern border. Unlike the Wuhuan, it was in continued conflict with the Eastern Han Dynasty.

After coming to Liaodong Shuguo, Gongsun Zan started to fight against the Wuhuan and Sumbe. Owing to his courage, the nomads usually avoided engaging with him. After fighting against the Wuhuan for a long time, Gongsun finally became the most hawkish general of the late Eastern Han Dynasty. As a Han general, his aim was to exterminate the entire race of the Wuhuan [3].

### 2.2.2 Yellow Turban Rebellion

The Yellow Turban Rebellion was the most famous event in the late Eastern Han Dynasty, occurring in February 184 [6]. This peasants' uprising consisted of an army of more than one million soldiers [6].

At the same time, many young men joined the army of the Eastern Han Empire to fight against the aforementioned uprising. After defeating the peasant army, some became generals and officers. This event led to the warlord period of the late Eastern Han Dynasty. Many 'up-and-comers' such as Cao Cao, Yuan Shao (?–202) and Sun Jian (155–191) turned from common officers to warlords during this war.

In 191, three hundred thousand soldiers of the Qingzhou (located in today's Shandong Province) Yellow Turban army arrived in Bohai prefecture (in today's Shandong Province) [3]. Gongsun defeated them with 20,000 elite soldiers, the largest victory in his military career [3]. However, the Qingzhou Yellow Turban army was finally incorporated by Cao Cao and became the core of his army.

As previously mentioned, Gongsun's aim was to exterminate the entire Wuhuan race. In 207, Cao Cao, the man who incorporated the Qingzhou Yellow Turban army, completed this aim.

## 3 Introduction of Gongsun Zan's Army

### 3.1 The Youzhou Tuji

#### 3.1.1 Concept of Tuji

According to *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, Gongsun Zan was the commander of the Youzhou Tuji [2]. The Liaodong Shuguo area was part of the Youzhou area (including today's Beijing, Liaoning, north region of Hebei of China and the north-west region of North Korea). In fact, the word Tuji frequently appeared in the history books of ancient China. This word is essential to a clear understanding of Chinese war history.

Tuji was a kind of heavy cavalry with the ability to charge and shoot. At the very beginning, it was known as Tunji [7].

This kind of cavalry continued to be active on the battlefields of ancient China until the end of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). Over time, the equipment used by the Tuji kept being renewed. In the Ming Dynasty, these cavalymen even started to use firelocks.

### 3.1.2 Tuji from the Youzhou Area

When reading the history books of the Eastern Han Dynasty, the term the Youzhou Tuji appears frequently. This is because this army was a very important part of the Eastern Han Dynasty's border guard.

To defend the nomads from the north, the northern border guard of the Eastern Han Dynasty had to build some powerful troops of cavalry. The troops from the Youzhou, Bingzhou (including some places in today's Shanxi, Inner Mongolia, Hebei, and Shaanxi) and Liangzhou areas (located in today's Northwest China) were the best. As expected, these three areas were on the northern line of defence.

Compared with the cavalry in other areas, that from Youzhou had another identity. It was a founding meritorious army of the Eastern Han Dynasty and therefore, the governors paid much attention to it [3]. As well as young men of Han nationality, some migrants from the Wuhuan and Sumbe would also serve in this army [7]. The government of the Eastern Han Dynasty arranged for some Han officers to lead these nomads.

In the period of Gongsun Zan, increasing numbers of people from the Wuhuan started to serve in the Youzhou Tuji. Because the motherland of these cavalymen was the vassal state of the Eastern Han Dynasty, they were known as the Tuji of the Wuhuan vassal state [7]. Han cavalymen were known as the border cavalry of the Han [7]. As a result of the rebellion by the Wuhuan, the national conflict greatly influenced the army of the Youzhou Tuji. At the same time, Gongsun's hatred of the Wuhuan accentuated this phenomenon. After a series of events, many cavalymen from the Wuhuan chose to surrender to Yuan Shao, the old enemy of Gongsun.

### 3.1.3 Appearance of Lancers

In the Western Han Dynasty (202 B.C.–8 B.C.), heavy cavalymen usually used halberds as their primary weapon. Owing to its structure, this kind of weapon greatly limited the cavalry's ability to charge. Therefore, in the Eastern Han Dynasty, to improve the charging ability, the cavalymen started to use lances in place of halberds [6]. The Youzhou Tuji quickly caught up with the trend. Simultaneously, the cavalymen of the Youzhou Tuji used bows as their secondary weapon. As a famous cavalry commander, Gongsun Zan was also good at using a lance. Unlike the common lance, Gongsun's lance had two heads [2, 3]. In Chinese history, only the best warriors used this kind of weapon.

## 3.2 White Horse Fellows

The Youzhou Tuji was the government army of the Eastern Han Dynasty. As a warlord, it is necessary to own a private army. The soldiers of Gongsun Zan's private army

were known as White Horse Fellows. This army consisted of many excellent horse archers whose horses were white. They usually acted as Gongsun's bodyguards. At the beginning, there were fewer than one hundred soldiers in this army [3]. After developing for a period of time, this army comprised thousands of soldiers. Owing to Gongsun's distrust of the soldiers from the Wuhuan and Sumbe, the soldiers of this army were Han.

In fact, in the late Eastern Han Dynasty, there were many famous troops, such as Cao Cao's Tiger and Leopard Cavalry and Dong Zhuo's (?–192) Xiliang Cavalry (from the Liangzhou area). However, the White Horse Fellows experienced the greatest popularity because it was the most recognised. We can imagine the scene of thousands of young cavalymen, wearing shining armour, riding white horses, and fighting bravely. It was both an irreproachable star army and an extremely powerful army. It finally became the nightmare of the nomads. The appearance of White Horse Fellows proved that the best horse archers of that era were Han, not nomads.

Why did these horse archers ride white horses? Some people joked that Gongsun was an obsessive commander. In fact, asking all of the elite horse archers to ride white horses was a psychological tactic, which is discussed in the next section.

The White Horse Fellows were the first echelon mounted troops of the Eastern Han Dynasty's border guard, performing well when facing the cavalry of the nomads. However, when facing the army from the central plains of China, which was famous for heavy infantry and crossbowman, their ability fell short of their ambitions. What was worse was the fact that Gongsun was not a good commander in chief. The battle of Jieqiao was the final battle for the White Horse Fellows.

## 4 An Excellent Cavalry Commander and Unqualified Commander in Chief

### 4.1 Gongsun Zan's Cavalry Tactics

#### 4.1.1 Horsemanship and Archery

As previously mentioned, the White Horse Fellows were Gongsun Zan's elite soldiers. At that time, most of the cavalry commanders would choose the cavalry charging tactic. However, there were always exceptions. Some officers who came from frontier areas were enthusiasts of horsemanship and archery. For example, Dongzhuo, a warlord from the Liangzhou area was a skilful horse archer [3]. As an officer of the border guards, Gongsun also paid attention to horsemanship and archery, which was a tactical move.

The nomads were famous for their horse archers; their greatest advantage was agility and manoeuvrability. Relying on heavy cavalry, it would be hard to intercept these horse archers. Therefore, Gongsun built his own troops of light cavalry. At the same time, defeating the enemies in their field could greatly amplify the enemies' fear.

#### 4.1.2 Tactic of Running Fight

Owing to the agility and manoeuvrability of the cavalry, Gongsun's army was good at 'running fight'. Gongsun's army always attacked when its enemy was retreating, which was an excellent tactic to exploit the victory. *The Book of Later Han* recorded some examples of Gongsun's running fight.

In 191, Gongsun's army defeated the Qingzhou Yellow Turban army. While retreating, the soldiers were attacked again when they were crossing a river [3]. Gongsun's army seized a large amount of materials such as armour and war chariots. At the same time, seventy thousand soldiers of the peasant uprising army were captured [3]. Five years later, Gongsun also defeated the Yuan Shao-Wuhuan-Sumbe allied forces with this tactic [3].

However, this tactic was not always useful because it required the commander to have considerable insight. It was necessary to stop the attack in time. Unfortunately, Gongsun did not always know when to stop because he was a radical commander. In 188, an official of the Eastern Han Dynasty named Zhang Chun (?–189) and the leader of the Wuhuan named Qiu Li Ju (?–?), betrayed the Eastern Han Dynasty and began attacking some of its cities [3]. Gongsun's army defeated them easily. Gongsun ordered his soldiers to chase the rebels without hesitation. Gongsun was besieged by the rebels when he arrived in Liaoxi Guanzi (the exact location is unknown) [3]. He finally broke out of an encirclement after more than 200 days; however, half of his soldiers died in the process of retreating.

## 4.2 Gongsun Zan's Psychological Tactics

### 4.2.1 Amplifying the Enemy's Fear

Simply having some basic cavalry tactics was not sufficient for Gongsun Zan to be one of the most excellent cavalry commanders of the era. When fighting against the Wuhuan and Sumbe, he always used psychological tactics.

As previously mentioned, having the elite horse archers ride white horses was Gongsun's psychological tactic. There were two possible reasons behind his actions. First, Gongsun Zan defeated the nomads many times. The nomads noticed that he always rode white horses and were afraid of the officers whose horses were white. After learning this, Gongsun ordered his elite horse archers to ride white horses [2]. Second, because the best nomadic troopers rode white horses, Gongsun ordered his cavalymen to do the same thing. Upon consideration, the first statement was more believable. Given the people from the Wuhuan and Sumbe had long known the customs of the Han Empire were different from theirs, they would probably not believe that the best cavalymen of the Han army would also ride white horses. Therefore, they were only afraid of Gongsun Zan, the general who liked riding white horses. Gongsun tapped into this psychology and built an army consisting of riders on white horses. This tactic was in fact very useful; people from the Wuhuan only dared to shoot Gongsun's portraits, lacking the courage to get close to his defence zone [2].

### 4.2.2 Courage of the Commanders

In ancient times, the generals personally fighting in the battles would greatly inspire the troops [8]. This tactic was widely used during the age of cold steel and made full use of emotion. It could not only inspire the troops but also had the ability to frighten the enemy.

As an excellent warrior and radical commander, Gongsun Zan knew much about this tactic. He once met a few hundred cavalymen of the Sumbe in a military action. At the

time, he had fewer than 100 cavalymen with him. He charged at the enemy, waving his two-headed lance and singlehandedly killed dozens of enemy soldiers [2, 3]. The Sumbe cavalry were forced to retreat and Gongsun lost just half of his soldiers [2, 3]. In the battles with nomadic troopers, he always fought bravely and tirelessly. Finally, the nomads were shocked by his bravery, and did not dare engage with him [3].

## 5 Classical Battle of Gongsun Zan

### 5.1 History Background of the Battle of Jieqiao (191)

In winter 191, after defeating the Qingzhou Yellow Turban army, Gongsun Zan began fighting for control of the entire country. The Jizhou area (including today's middle south region of Hebei Province, west region of Shandong Province, and north region of Henan Province) was his first target; therefore, the war between Gongsun Zan and Yuan Shao (the warlord of the Jizhou area) was unavoidable. In this process, there three large battles, the battle of Jieqiao being the most famous.

The situation of both sides is presented in Table 1.

### 5.2 Battle Formation of Gongsun Zan's Army

Battle formation of Gongsun Zan's army is illustrated in Fig. 1.

In this battle, Gongsun pinned his hopes on the both flanks' cavalymen. When fighting, the cavalymen of the left flank would shoot the left flank of enemy while those of the right flank would shoot the right flank of enemy, creating a crossfire [2].

### 5.3 Battle Formation of Yuan Shao's Army

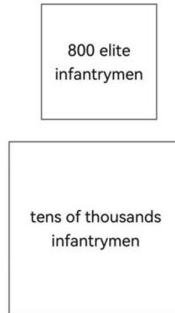
The battle formation of Yuan Shao's army is illustrated in Fig. 2.

**Table 1.** General situation of the Battle of Jieqiao (Table credit: Original)

Army	Army of the Youzhou area	Army of the Jizhou area
Commanders	Gongsun Zan and Yan Gang (163–191)	Yuan Shao and Qu Yi (?-?)
The quantity of the soldiers	Ten thousand cavalymen (including White Horse Fellows), more than thirty thousand infantrymen	Eight hundred elite infantrymen led by Qu Yi (the vanguard), Tens of thousands of infantrymen led by Yuan Shao (the main force)
Result	White Horse Fellows were wiped out. Yan Gang was killed. Gongsun Zan retreated to Youzhou area.	Victory



**Fig. 1.** Battle formation of Gongsun Zan's army (Photo credit: Original)



**Fig. 2.** Battle formation of Yuan Shao's army (Photo credit: Original)

The elite infantrymen were armed with large shields. At the same time, their commander Qu Yi also prepared 1000 crossbows for them. Qu Yi had experience of fighting against the Qiang tribesmen (the nomads living in Northwest China) [2]. He clearly knew how to defeat the horse archers of Gongsun's army. As previously mentioned, Gongsun liked using the nomads' own tactics to defeat the nomads. Therefore, his army's mode of operations was similar to that of the nomads (the horse archers were the main force). However, when facing large shields, his horse archers were rendered useless. Moreover, in the Eastern Han Dynasty, the crossbowmen of the Jizhou area (the Jizhou Qiangnu army) were as famous as the cavalymen of the Youzhou area.

Using the formation comprised of infantrymen with ranged weapons and large shields or carts with large shields to defeat cavalry was a traditional tactic of ancient China. In the Western Han Dynasty, this tactic became famous after general Wei Qing adopted it to defeat the cavalry of Xiongnu [9]. This tactic continued to be popular until the Northern and Southern Dynasties. In the Ming Dynasty, it was revived by an outstanding strategist named Yu Dayou (1503–1579) [10].

#### 5.4 Process of the Battle

As a matter of fact, the battle of Jieqiao may not be considered to be particularly eventful. This is because Yuan's army won victory easily. The battle started ten kilometres south of Jieqiao Bridge (located in today's Xingtai, Hebei Province). After seeing Qu's 800 soldiers, Gongsun started to underestimate the enemy. He directly ordered his cavalymen



to start charging. When the cavalrymen got close to Qu's formation, the crossbowmen raised dust and started to shoot with their crossbows. Yan Gang, Gongsun Zan's right-hand man, was killed in this process. As a result of losing their commander, Gongsun's cavalrymen had to retreat. Qu Yi and his soldiers quickly rushed to Jieqiao Bridge, defeating the rear-guard of Gongsun Zan [2]. After that, they rushed into Gongsun's base camp.

The only dramatic scene of this battle happened when Yuan Shao was pursuing and attacking the fleeing enemy. He was suddenly besieged by 2000 of Gongsun's horse archers [2]. At the same time, there were fewer than 100 crossbowmen and fewer than 200 heavy infantrymen (armed with large halberds) beside him [2]. Yuan's soldiers bravely fought back. Fortunately, Gongsun's cavalrymen did not know that Yuan was in that formation. Therefore, they quickly retreated after shooting for a short time.

After the battle, Gongsun went back to the Youzhou area and the White Horse Fellows finally disappeared into history. Yuan Shao started to gain initiative.

## 5.5 Analysis of the Battle

The main reason for Gongsun's failure was that he didn't have the thought of collecting information. The Jizhou Qiangnu army was a famous and powerful army but Gongsun did not pay attention to it. The battle formation with shields was a common tactic in his era; however, he just ignored it. He always defeated nomadic troopers and the peasant army, which made him an overconfident commander, believing that his White Horse Fellows were invincible. However, nomadic troopers and soldiers of the peasant army were not from a regular army. Their commanders were just good at using the huge-crowd strategy. Therefore, Gongsun was easily able to defeat them with a small number of elite cavalrymen. Furthermore, Gongsun lacked the experience of fighting against the regular army of the Central Plains; this was his greatest disadvantage.

On the other hand, Yuan Shao and Qu Yi paid significant attention to the White Horse Fellows and the Youzhou Tuji. They spent much time researching them and found the best way to defeat them. More importantly, Qu had the experience of fighting against horse archers. This eventually became the key point of victory.

In summary, the main reason for Gongsun's failure was the fact he ignored the information. He really was an unqualified commander in chief.

## 6 An Unsuccessful Politician

### 6.1 No Vision to Discover Talents

As an old saying goes, war is nothing more than the continuation of politics through another means [11]. A successful warlord must be a cunning politician. However, Gongsun Zan was a forthright politician and his political behaviour was decided by his emotions, probably due to his soldier's background.

After becoming a marquis, Gongsun started to change from a common officer to a warlord. In this process, he built his own political group. Most of the members were from the army. There were only nine of them left their names in history (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Members of Gongsun Zan's political group (Table credit: Original)

Name	Year of birth and death	Identity	Historic achievement
Yan Gang	163–191	General of Gongsun's army	/
Shan Jing	?–?	General of Gongsun's army	/
Tian Kai	?–199	General of Gongsun's army	/
Guan Jing	?–199	Gongsun's staff officer	/
Liu Bei	161–223	Assistant to Tian Kai	Founder of the Han Kingdom in the Three Kingdoms era
Guan Yu	?–220	Assistant to Liu Bei	The most famous general of Liu Bei's group
Zhang Fei	?–221	Assistant to Liu Bei	A famous general of the Han Kingdom
Zhao Yun	?–229	Liu Bei' cavalry commander	Famous general of the Han Kingdom
Tian Yu	171–252	Assistant to Liu Bei (early stage), Officer of Gongsun's army (later stage)	Famous general of the Wei Kingdom (220–266) in the Three Kingdoms era

Yan Gang, Tian Kai, Shan Jing, and Guan Jing were the core members of this group. We can easily find that the men who was paid attention by Gongsun were not so outstanding. For example, Guan Jing was simply an oppressive official [2]. Owing to his 'apple polishing', that is, ingratiating himself, Gongsun appreciated him [2].

Gongsun even missed five top talents. Compared with his classmate Liu Bei, his disadvantage was much clearer. Liu Bei was good at discovering talents, recognising those of Zhao Yun and Tian Yu [2]. Discovering talents is the most important skill of a politician. Finally, these five people made much greater achievements than Gongsun.

At the same time, owing to the hatred of the upper class, Gongsun would not appoint the talents from this class to any important position [2]. This behaviour not only led him to lose many talents but also intensified the contradictions between him and the local upper class of the Youzhou area. This mistake finally led to his death.

## 6.2 Incorrect Political Line of Gongsun Zan

As previously mentioned, the relationship between Gongsun and the upper class was very bad, probably due to his unhappy childhood. At the beginning of his career, he experienced a really hard time because of his family background. It directly led to his hatred of the upper class. In 188, during the war between Gongsun Zan and the Wuhuan,

a politician of the royal family named Liu Yu (?–193) was appointed the top leader of the Youzhou area. Because Liu Yu was a dove, he decided to let the Wuhuan surrender through political means. As a hawkish general, Gongsun could not bear this and started the war between him and Liu Yu. He finally killed Liu after a series of battles [3].

However, Liu Yu was a representative figure of the upper class of the Youzhou area. Killing him was clearly an unwise choice. The upper class had to side with Yuan Shao, the old enemy of Gongsun Zan. In that era, Yuan was viewed as the protector of the upper class. Because his family was a famous official family in that era. Many politicians were the students of his elders. He also received many resources such as talents and funds from these upper class families. Moreover, many people of the Wuhuan and Sumbe saw Liu as their messiah [3]. These people, who hated Gongsun, finally leagued together to fight against him. At the same time, killing a person from the royal family was equal to revolt. It was a good excuse for other warlords to attack Gongsun.

Despite hating the line of the upper class, Gongsun still had the chance to choose the mass line. However, he and his army treated the civilians badly. Knowing that Liu Yu treated the civilians well, Gongsun always asked his soldiers to plunder as a demonstration [3]. As a result, the civilians of the Youzhou area also viewed Gongsun as their enemy and some even resisted Gongsun's rule through violence.

The only people Gongsun trusted were his soldiers. He placed too much emphasis on force. After killing Liu Yu, he controlled the entire Youzhou area. However, after a series of failed military actions, he had to retreat to Yijing (in today's Baoding, Hebei Province), his base area. He then built many forts and believed that no one could break through his defensive line [3]. Finally, he chose to commit suicide after the failure of the battle of Yijing (197–199) [2, 3]. However, his personal charisma inspired some people. In the battle, Tian Kai and Guan Jing continued fighting for him until the end.

## 7 Conclusion

Gongsun Zan was a representative warlord in the late Eastern Han Dynasty. Although sometimes overlooked, he is of great importance when researching the society of that era because he was the epitome of that era's common officers, without eminent family background or extraordinary talent. In the process of struggling for his better tomorrow, many external factors warped his fettered; this is a story of an aspiring young man becoming a tyrant. However, as a soldier, his spirit of defending his own country and race was highly commendable. His tragedy was a tragedy of the times. His experience is still a good reference for today's politicians and strategists.

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