

Study on the Relationship between Guan Yu and Sun Quan (The Kingdom of Wu)

Xinzhao Tang

School of History and Culture, Sichuan University, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China

Keywords: Guan Yu; Sun Quan and the kingdom of Wu; Jingzhou

Abstract: The alliance formation of Sun Quan and Liu Bei makes China's political structure gradually enter the "three kingdoms" era in the late Eastern Han Dynasty. After the battle of Red Cliff, the alliance gradually breaks down. Many scholars pass the buck to Guan Yu. They think that the reason why the alliance of Sun Quan and Liu Bei broke down at last is because Guan Yu was too headstrong and he didn't pay much attention to better the relationship with Sun Quan. This paper discusses the breakdown of the alliance of Sun Quan and Liu Bei from Guan Yu's point of view.

1. Introduction

The formation of the alliance of Sun Quan and Liu Bei is the result of the change of the political pattern since the late Eastern Han Dynasty. The powerful warlords destroyed the weak warlords, and the weak warlords had to form an alliance to fight against the powerful warlords for their survival. As Cao Cao and his army were marching toward the south, Sun Quan and Liu Bei formed an alliance and defeated Cao Cao in the battle of Red Cliff. After that, with the threat of Cao Cao gradually decreasing, the contradiction between the two forces began to become increasingly sharp. Generally speaking, most of the scholars blame Guan Yu for the breakdown of the alliance of Sun and Liu. Undoubtedly, the academic research has its rationality. However, this paper believes that for the breakdown of the alliance, it is necessary to focus on the complex situation at that time and analyze the specific problems on a case-by-case basis. Guan Yu shouldn't take all the responsibilities. Therefore, this paper intends to discuss the alliance of Sun and Liu from Guan Yu's point of view, in order to seek advice from the academic circle.

2. The Unstable Factor of the Alliance of Sun and Liu

In the thirteenth year of Jian'an, with the defeat of Cao Cao and his return to the north, the military threat to Sun Quan and Liu Bei began to decrease. However, both Sun Quan and Liu Bei realized that Cao Cao might return. Therefore, in the early postwar period, the alliance between the Sun and Liu was consolidated. Sun Quan acquiesced in Liu Bei's possession of Wuling, Changsha, Guiyang and Lingling counties in Jingzhou, and agreed to Liu Bei's claim to the Nan county of Jingzhou. Thus, Sun Quan was able to successfully resist Cao Cao's re-attack in Jiangdong area and consolidate the domination of his interest group there.

However, in the nineteenth year of Jian'an, Liu Bei won Yizhou and became the ruler of Yizhou. Moreover, as Cao Cao's military threat to Sun Quan decreased, Sun Quan and his group began to direct against Liu Bei. The focus of its contradiction is the claim of the part of Jingzhou occupied by Liu Bei. The attribution of the part of Jingzhou has become an unstable factor for the alliance and led the relationship to break down in the end.

3. Guan Yu's Handling of the Relationship with Sun Quan group

Guan Yu is an important general in Liubei's group. In his early years, he followed Liu Bei and made great contributions to Liu Bei's fights up and down the countries. During the battle of Red Cliff, the main force of Liu Bei's army was led by Guan Yu. After the battle, Guan Yu guarded

Jingzhou with Zhuge Liang, Zhang Fei and Zhao Yun. In the nineteenth year of Jian 'an, the conflict of Liu Bei and Liu Zhang, the Lord of Yizhou, intensified, they started a war. Zhuge Liang, Zhang Fei and Zhao Yun then left Jingzhou for Liu Bei immediately. Liu Bei appointed Guan Yu to stay in Jingzhou and guard it.

According to the records in the literature, Guan Yu did not do anything out of line to Sun Quan group when he was guarding Jingzhou. In *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms·Records of Wu Dynasty·Biography of Lu Su*, it says: “When Guan Yu and Lu Su got close to each other, suspicion often arose and their battlefields often overlapped. Lu Su often appeased him as a friend.”

Although literature records show that Lu Su made efforts to maintain the alliance, it would be difficult without Guan Yu's cooperation. In other words, Guan Yu did not embarrass Lu Su. Through the joint efforts of both sides, the alliance could still maintain. Therefore, we cannot attribute all the credit to Lu Su. Guan Yu also did his best.

In the nineteenth year of Jian 'an, with Liu Bei's acquisition of Yizhou, Sun Quan began to ask Liu Bei for the three counties of Jingzhou, namely Changsha, Guiyang and Lingling. Liu Bei did not refuse Sun Quan's request. In *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms·Records of Shu Dynasty·Biography of the First Lord*, Liu Bei only said: “I will give you back Jingzhou after I take over Liangzhou.” For Liu Bei, he was reluctant to hand over Jingzhou and Sun Quan easily, because Jingzhou was also Liu's core strategic area. However, in order to maintain the alliance, Liu Bei adopted the delaying tactic. Instead of rejecting Sun's request, he just delayed it under the pretext of taking over Liangzhou.

But how did Sun Quan react? In *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms·Records of Shu Dynasty·Biography of the First Lord*, it says: “Sun Quan was irritated by Liu Bei's words.” Obviously, Sun Quan had lost his patience and pointed the blame at Liu Bei and his group. Therefore, Sun Quan sent officials to Changsha, Guiyang and Lingling counties in Jingzhou, who were all expelled by Guan Yu. *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms·Records of Wu Dynasty·Biography of the Lord of Wu*, it says: “Sun Quan was very angry. He immediately sent Lu Meng to lead Xianyu Dan, Xu Zhong and Sun Gui, with a total of 20,000 troops, to take over the three counties of Changsha, Lingling and Guiyang. He also sent Lu Su with tens of thousands of soldiers to Ba Qiu to defend Guan Yu. Sun Quan himself was stationed in Lukou, as the commissary of all the armies.” The conflict between Sun Quan group and Guan Yu was not caused by Guan, but by Sun. Sun Quan asked Liu Bei for the three counties, Liu Bei replied with the excuse of Liangzhou. Liu Bei adopted a dilatory tactic, and he did not agree to hand over the three counties in Jingzhou to Sun Quan at this moment. As Liu Bei's subordinate, Guan Yu, who was in charge of Jingzhou, would not agree to give the three counties in Jingzhou to Sun Quan. Therefore, he could not keep out of the affair that Sun Quan set some officials to Guiyang, Changsha and Lingling in Jingzhou. Moreover, from the perspective of Guan Yu's behavior and reaction, it is more like “chasing them out” rather than “killing them”, which itself is not an action to intensify the contradiction. As a general loyal to Liu Bei, what Guan Yu did is no more than his duty. On the contrary, it was Sun Quan who fired the first shot to destroy the alliance. After Guan Yu expelled the officials stationed in the three counties in Jingzhou, Sun angrily led the army to occupy Guiyang, Changsha, and Lingling, which formed the military confrontation with Guan Yu.

Neither Guan Yu nor Liu Bei could tolerate such military provocations by Sun Quan. Thus, it is Liu Bei's turn to be at a stalemate with Sun Quan. In *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms·Records of Shu Dynasty·Biography of the First Lord*, “Liu Bei led fifty thousand soldiers to Gong'an, and ordered Guan Yu to Yiyang.” In *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms·Records of Wu Dynasty·Biography of Lu Su*, it says: “After hearing what Sun Quan did, Liu Bei himself went to Gong'an and sent Guan Yu to fight for the three counties. Lu Su stayed in Yiyang and fought Guan Yu.” As Cao Cao conquered Hanzhong, he forced Zhang Lu to surrender, stationed his troops there and sent troops to invade the northern part of Yizhou, forcing Liu Bei to send envoys to make peace with Sun Quan. Finally, Sun and Liu reached an agreement to divide Jingzhou equally. Jiangxia, Changsha and Guiyang counties were assigned to Sun Quan group, and Nanjun, Lingling and Wuling counties were assigned to Liu Bei group.

At this point, the contradictions of Sun and Liu have been tempered. But it should be seen that the main instigator of the conflict is Sun Quan, not Guan Yu. Generally speaking, during this period, Guan Yu also abided by the protection of the alliance between Sun and Liu, and did not go out of line. After Sun and Liu divided Jingzhou equally by Xiang river, Guan Yu, who was in western Jingzhou, became more and more distrustful of the neighboring Sun Quan group and realized their ambition for the whole Jingzhou area.

4. The Breakdown of the Alliance and the Loss of Western Jingzhou

After Sun and Liu equally divided Jingzhou, the tension between the two sides eased. Liu Bei was able to lead his troops back to Chengdu and led the army to fight Cao Cao for Hanzhong. In the spring of the twenty fourth year of Jian'an, Huangzhong, one of Liu Bei's subordinate, killed Cao Cao's general Xia Houyuan. In the military confrontation with Cao Cao, Liu Bei risked in the will to win and finally forced Cao Cao to retreat from Hanzhong in the summer of that year. Liu Bei occupied Hanzhong, and appointed himself the lord of Hanzhong, and empowered Guan Yu as the general command, and Jian Jie Yue. (It means he can take actions without the order of the lord.)

However, Sun Quan group at this time was not satisfied with the possession of three counties of eastern Jingzhou. In fact, they were salivating over the three counties of western Jingzhou that Guan Yu guarded. After Lu Su died, Lu Meng, who took over Lu Su's position, offered Sun Quan some suggestions. In *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms·Records of Wu Dynasty·Biography of Lu Meng*, it says: "Lu meng replies: 'Now Cao Cao is far away in Hebei, and has just destroyed the power of the Yuan family. Cao Cao is busy monitoring and gathering soldiers in Youzhou and Jizhou, and has no energy to focus on the east... If we get Xuzhou, Cao Cao is sure to fight for it. Although we have seventy or eighty thousand people guarding the city, it is still worrying. Therefore, rather than taking Xuzhou, it is better to take Jingzhou and subdue Guan Yu so that we can completely occupy the Yangtze river, and expand the territory of Wu.'" To this, Sun Quan showed his agreement. The ambition of Sun Wu group for the western Jingzhou has already been unstoppable. However, Sun Quan group did not act immediately, but was waiting for the opportunity. They pretend to show their friendliness to Guan Yu, thereby to confuse him. In *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms·Records of Wu Dynasty·Biography of Lu Meng*, it says: "After Lu Meng replaced Lu Su's official position, he tried even harder to show his sincerity when he arrived at Lukou, and made friends with Guan Yu."

As for whether Guan Yu was really confused by Sun Quan group. in fact, he was not. As mentioned above, after dividing Jingzhou equally, Guan Yu realized the ambition of Sun Quan group for the whole Jingzhou region. Thus, he did not trust them at all. But as the alliance was still in a maintaining, everyone was outwardly friendly. At that time, Guan Yu focused on Cao Cao group in the north. The reason is that at that time, there were signs showing that they were ready to attack Jingzhou. In *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms·Records of Wei Dynasty·Biography of Emperor Wu*, it says: "In the winter of the twenty-third year of Jian'an, Hou Yin, a general who was guarding the city of Wan, plotted a rebellion with other officers and held the prefecture chief of Nanyang as a hostage. They coerced officials and people by force. At first, Cao Ren was stationed in Fancheng to crusade against Guan Yu. That month, he was sent to encirclement and suppress the rebels. At the same time, Guan Yu also saw that due to the harsh rule of Cao Cao's regime in the north, the class contradictions within the regime were intensified. The heavy taxation made the people of Nanyang miserable. They launched an uprising against the Wei regime and tried to unite with Guan Yu. In *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms·Records of Wei Dynasty·Biography of Emperor Wu*, it cited *The Biography of Cao Man* annotated by Pei Songzhi and said: "At that time, the civil corvee in Nanyang were very heavy. Hou Yin imprisoned Dongli Gun, the governor, persuaded officials and people to conspire with him and cooperated with Guan Yu. Zong Ziqin, an officer of Nanyang tried to persuade Hou Yin. He said: 'you comply with the aspirations of people and do great things. People respect and worship you. But you will do more harm than good by imprisoning Dongli Gun. Why not let him go? I will try my best with you. When Cao Cao's army arrives, Guan Yu's forces will also arrive.' Hou Yin listened to his words and released the prefecture

chief. Zong fled from the city overnight, and then surrounded the remnant and Hou Yin. When Cao Ren came, they destroyed the traitors together.” However, Cao Ren's behavior will certainly intensify class contradictions.

Therefore, Guan Yu took the opportunity to attack Xiangfan in the twenty-fourth year of Jian 'an and took the initiative in the early days of the war.

However, despite this, Guan Yu did not take the neighboring Sun Quan group lightly and still guarded against it. In *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms·Records of Wu Dynasty·Biography of Lu Meny*, it says: “Guan Yu was attacking Fancheng, but left the soldiers on guard (stationed in Jingzhou). He must be afraid that Lu Meng was plotting behind him.” It can be seen that after dividing Jingzhou, even Lu Meng continued to show good will to Guan Yu, but it did not confuse him. On the contrary, Guan Yu was fully aware of Lu Meng and focused on the defense. During the war with Cao Ren of Xiangfan, he did not forget to guard against Lu Meng. In the meantime, however, Guan Yu made two major mistakes. Firstly, before and after the Xiangfan battle, Sun Quan sent emissary to make peace by marriage. Guan Yu insulted his emissary. Secondly, after the “Seven Armies Flooded”, Guan Yu arbitrarily took away the grain and rice of Sun Quan group in Xiangguan. In *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms*, Chen Shou evaluated Guan Yu as “the most excellent talent in Shu Dynasty.” At the same time, it also points out that Guan Yu is very strong-minded and too proud. From this, it can be seen that the two major mistakes made by Guan Yu should not be simply considered that it was Guan Yu who acted rudely and destroyed the alliance. It should be said that this is the product of the intensification of the contradiction between Sun and Liu. If Sun Quan did not covet Jingzhou, Guan Yu would never have taken such a rough attitude. However, because of his moral integrity and pride, he insulted the emissary and took away Sun's grain and rice. However, there is no denying that even if Guan Yu Didn't do so, Sun Quan would still find an opportunity to sneak attack on western Jingzhou. The development strategy of Sun Wu group will not change. But is Guan Yu intend to destroy the alliance of Sun and Liu by making the two mistakes? The answer is no. It is easy to be told in Lu Xun's congratulatory letter to Guan Yu, we can see that Lu Xun congratulated Guan Yu on his military victory. Ostensibly he was complimenting Guan Yu, but actually he was telling Guan Yu that the alliance between Sun and Liu hadn't been broken. Because Lu Meng pretended to be sick, Lu Xun wasn't that famous, Guan Yu felt that the threat from the Sun Quan group reduced. Moreover, the alliance of Sun and Liu, at that time, was still in a seeming state of maintenance. Thus, Guan Yu fell into the trap and called out the troops that is stationed in western Jingzhou to keep a lookout on Lu Meng to participate in the Xiangfan battle. At the same time, Xiangfan battlefield was in a state of stalemate. Although Guan Yu got great fame for “water flooding seven armies”, and at the same time he received the support of the people in Liang, Jia, Luhun and other places, he still couldn't conquer the city of Fan. Therefore, the troops needed to be mobilized from Jingzhou.

However, this also played into the hands of Sun Quan, Lu Meng and others. As soon as the guard was called out, Lu Meng sent troops to attack the Jingzhou territory guarded by Guan Yu. Defeated by the reinforcements of the Cao Cao regime, Guan Yu had to withdraw his troops from Xiangfan. For Lu Meng's action, Guan Yu adopted the strategy of sending envoys to negotiate with Lu Meng. In *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms·Records of Wu Dynasty·Biography of Lu Meng*, it says: “Guan Yu was still on the way back, he sent people to notice Lu Meng.” From this, it can be seen that Sun Quan group is the one who is destroying the alliance. Finally, Guan Yu was killed by Sun Quan, the alliance of Sun and Liu officially broke.

5. Conclusion

For Guan Yu, who was guarding Jingzhou, it was part of his responsibilities for the breakdown of the alliance of Sun Quan and Liu Bei. But after careful analysis, it will be found that when dealing with the relationship with Sun Quan group, on the whole, Guan Yu did not do anything out of line. Even during the breakdown period, Guan Yu mainly strengthened his guard against Sun Quan group, but rarely went out of line. In fact, it was Sun Quan group that continuously provoked Liu Bei and Guan Yu after Cao Cao's military threat was reduced. Therefore, Sun Quan bears great

responsibility for the breakdown of the alliance.

References

- [1] Shouzhuan Chen, annotated by Songzhi Pei. The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms. Zhonghua Book Company,2006
- [2] Zhijie Ma. The History of the Three Kingdoms. People's Publishing House,1993
- [3] Ziquan He. The History of the Three Kingdoms. People's Publishing House,2011
- [4] Zhengying Qu. The Lost Contents of “The Shock and Fear-inspiration of Huaxia “ – the Content of The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms and Historical Materials annotated by Songzhi Pei Ignored by History as A Mirror, Journal of Hubei University of Arts and Science, 2014, 35(1):9-16