



San guo yan yi in translation and its parallels with western literature

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Abstract

This paper identifies a number of parallels drawn by translators and critics between the classic Chinese narrative *San guo yan yi* and related western literary works and traditions, with particular focus on three aspects: genre, character and plot. The paper discusses a number of full and partial English translations of the text, including two full-text translations by C. H. Brewitt-Taylor and two excerpted translations by Hawks Pott and Carl Arendt, as well as several other translators who attempted to bring the book to a western readership. Using comparisons with western literature made by these translators, the paper addresses the following questions: What happens when a text of this sort is translated into a language like English? Where does it fit in the western genre system? What similarities, according to the translators, can be identified between *San guo yan yi* and related western literary works? This paper argues that the translators' commentaries suggest that they were not familiar with the specific modes of characterization and narration of classic Chinese novels, and therefore failed to identify the stylistic features of *San guo yan yi* as those belonging to the genre of *zhanghuiti*. From the perspective of comparative literature, the book can be categorized as an example of a relatively new form—the *ensemble historical narrative*—that combines both Chinese and western literary traditions. The discussions in this paper not only allow us to extend the scope of genre theory, but also contribute to a better understanding of Chinese literature overall.

Keywords *San guo yan yi* · Parallels · Western literature · Genre

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Introduction: the genre of *San guo yan yi* in the Chinese context

The classic Chinese literary work *San guo yan yi* (三国演义), compiled in either the 13th or the 14th centuries by Luo Guanzhong (罗贯中), is a historical narrative based on *Records of the three kingdoms* (*San guo zhi*, 三国志), written by the historian and writer Chen Shou (陈寿, 233–297). The book outlines the turbulent events of the period from 168 to 280 CE, when China's Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) was riven, through decades of bloody strife, into three separate states nearly constantly at war with each other. The book comprises 120 chapters totaling more than 750,000 words; its narrative describes the waxing and waning of the states and depicts some 500 characters, some of whom are household names in China, including the resourceful Zhuge Liang, the crafty Cao Cao, the proud Guan Yu, the forthright Zhang Fei and the generous Liu Bei.¹

What is the genre of *San guo yan yi* in the Chinese literary tradition? A consensus has been reached in mainland Chinese academia that *San guo yan yi* is an example of *zhanghuiti* (章回体), a genre in traditional Chinese literature that first appeared in the 14th century. *San guo yan yi* is recognized as the first literary work in this genre. According to Chinese scholars, a work belonging to the *zhanghuiti* genre can be defined as one in which “the narrative is in the form of several chapters with individual titles; the stories are popular, written in various literary styles; the plot is complex and well structured; [and] the language is easy to understand and close to colloquial speech. [以分回标目、分章叙事、情节繁复、内容通俗、语言晓畅、文备众体、模拟说话艺术形式为主要特征。]” (Chen et al. 1998, p. 15). In terms of form and structure, *zhanghuiti* works consist of several chapters called *hui* (回), with each *hui* having a title consisting of two parts in couplet form. Each chapter starts with the phrase “话说” (*huashuo*, “it is said that...”) and ends with a concluding sentence such as “欲知后事如何, 且听下文分解” (“if you want to know what follows, please read on”). Every chapter narrates a relatively self-contained story, but also relates to each of the others.

All these features can be identified in *San guo yan yi*. Historically, *zhanghuiti* developed from the “vernacular story” or “prompt book” (*huaben*, 话本), a genre popular in the Song and Yuan dynasties that recounted historical events and wars in everyday language. This lineage draws the Chinese text closer to western literature, which has a long tradition of vernacular storytelling. Storytelling tradition had a considerable impact on the vernacular story *San guo zhi yan yi ping hua* (三国志演义评话, hereafter *PH*). It can be described as a storyteller's prompt book version of the novel in colloquial language and presents the events of the century in serial fashion. *PH* epitomizes the features of the prompt book genre, which typically conforms to the structure of *ruhua* (入话, introduction), *zhenghua* (正话, main section),

¹ It is worth noting the different transliterations of names used by both the author of this paper and the various translators discussed here. Translators like Brewitt-Taylor and Arendt, for example, talk about “Ts'aots'ao,” which actually refers to the character Cao Cao (曹操). The differences are due to the change in transliteration systems that occurred in the 1950s in China. It also applies to character names like ‘Guanyu’ (Kuanyu), ‘Liu Bei’ (Liu Pei), and ‘Kongming’ (Kungming).

and conclusion. The introduction begins with a poem and a short story with a related theme; the story then moves on to the main section, which combines prose (for plot developments) and verse (for description of scenes and characters). Each story closes with a poem echoing the main theme. The narrative is crudely handled in comparison, but *PH* clearly establishes the outline of the plot later followed by *San guo yan yi*. It is apparent that the author of *San guo yan yi* was familiar with this earlier novella, although we cannot be sure that the book was based on it. Each chapter of *San guo yan yi* closes with a couplet or short poem presenting a cliffhanger of sorts, marked by sentences such as “who is that character?”, with the thread picked up in the following chapter.

The chapter titles in *San guo yan yi* are also characteristic of *zhanghuiti*. Each title is in parallel and verse, always consisting of seven characters per line. Not only do these titles summarize the contents of each chapter, but they also display an elegance of form. As Su (1997, p. 89) put it, “every author of a *zhanghui* novel is obliged to pay close attention to the chapter titles, since these titles are related to the quality of the whole book and the relationship with the reader. [凡著小说者, 于作回目时, 不宜草率。回目之工拙, 于全书之价值, 与读者之感情, 最有关系。]” For example, the 116th chapter is titled “钟会分兵汉中道, 武侯显圣定军山 (Luo 1996, p. 709) [my literal translation: Zhonghui divides his army at Hanzhong Road/Lord Wu shows apparition at Mount Dingjun].”

San guo yan yi is also narrated from an omniscient point of view, borrowing the style of *PH* and vernacular storytelling traditions. In its narration, *San guo yan yi* expands on and enriches the stories told in *PH*, diminishes their folk-tale flavor, and enhances the sense of realism. The plot covers a long time span and depicts complicated relations between numerous characters. In 1679, the critic Zonggang Mao and his father wrote an interlinear commentary on *San guo yan yi*. Mao’s notes have been an integral part of many subsequent editions of the text, and are still widely known today. The commentary is of great value in helping the reader keep their bearings in a complex narrative; it also offers interesting interpretations of the author’s literary methods. Apart from the commentary, Mao also modified the original text in terms of headings, length, and certain plot lines.

What happens when a book of this sort is translated into a language like English? Where does it fit in the western genre system? What similarities can be identified between the text and related western literary works, according to its various translators? This paper focuses on the ways in which a number of English translators of *San guo yan yi* have drawn parallels with western texts, or, more precisely, texts with similar themes or genre traditions in western literature.

Translating a classic

The translation of a literary text into another language and culture inevitably entails comparison to similar texts in the target language. The reason is not difficult to understand: The intended readers may not have adequate knowledge of the source text and culture, and parallels may be necessary to bring the text closer to them, encouraging them to interpret the text in a more familiar or more acceptable way.

This is evident in the various English translations of *San guo yan yi* produced over the previous two centuries. In describing and evaluating the parallels drawn by these translators, a parallel study approach is most appropriate, since the Chinese and western works discussed here are not genetically related to or influenced by each other.

San guo yan yi was introduced overseas at a comparatively early date with its translation into Japanese in 1689. In English, translations of excerpts appeared in various periodicals as early as 1820. These excerpted versions were selected by the translators to fit their own narration, and were sometimes presented in the same form as the original, and sometimes adapted into different genres entirely, including poetry, drama, fairy tale, and textbook. Several of the early partial translations were published in academic journals, others inserted in research-oriented monologues, and still others in collections of fairy tales or plays. There are also two full-length translations, one by C. H. Brewitt-Taylor, first printed in 1925, and the other by Moss Roberts in 1991. More than one translations are involved in the case study; one coming after its predecessor, the second translation is, by definition, a retranslation. This paper examines various sections from the two full-text translations and several early excerpted translations, including those by Hawks Pott and Carl Arendt, as well as several other translators who attempted to bring the book to a western readership. The next two sections present a contextual overview of each of these translators and their translations, which is followed by further discussion of the texts in “Parallels drawn by the English-language translators” section.

Translations in this case study

The first text in this case study is a general review of *San guo yan yi* written by Brewitt-Taylor. Before his full translation in 1925, the translator published a general overview and three excerpted translations of the narrative in the journal *The China review: Or, notes and queries on the Far East* from 1889 to 1892. In his review, Brewitt-Taylor talks about the historical background of the Han Dynasty and the book *San guo zhi* by Chen Shou, and then moves on to Luo Guanzhong’s text itself with a discussion of the difficulties of translating the phrase “Yen-I” (*yan yi*) in the original title and of categorizing the book in terms of genre. The author then elaborates on four aspects of the book in detail: the plot of the narrative; its characters; its battles, along with the methods of warfare and strategy it depicts; and the author’s narrative style. This paper explores the western parallels drawn by Brewitt-Taylor in this review.

The second text is an article by Carl Arendt titled “Parallels in Greek and Chinese literature” published in 1886, in which he not only compares *San guo yan yi* to the *Iliad*, but also offers a profound analysis of both Chinese and Greek literature. As part of his comparison between the two cultures, Arendt translates excerpts from Chapters 41, 42, and 108 of *San guo yan yi*. He elucidates a number of parallels between Greek literature and Chinese literature, explaining the latter by outlining the features of a Chinese muse. He then turns to the Three Kingdoms period of Chinese history and to the Han Dynasty, describing it as “an episode in the deadly

contest between Ts'ao's'ao and Liupei, in which I wish here to engage the interest of the reader" (Arendt 1886, p. 41). This is followed by "a somewhat detailed abstract of the novelist's version of Chang Yite's heroic defense of the passage over the river, from the 41st and 42nd chapters" (*ibid.*, p. 43). Arendt concludes his article by telling the reader "a story from the 108th chapter of the same romance, to which I have so frequently referred in the course of these pages" (*ibid.*, p. 55). Arendt juxtaposes a literal translation of a passage from the 36th book of Chen Shou's *San guo zhi* with the equivalent scene—the dissonant pealing of the cracked bell of Zhang Fei—presented in a more dramatic narrative style in *San guo yan yi*. He goes on to compare this scene with a similar sequence from the *Iliad* to make it clearer and more accessible to the reader.

The third text is a translation by Rev. Francis Lister Hawks Pott titled "Selections from *the three kingdoms*," published in *The East of Asia magazine* in 1902. This excerpted translation consists of three passages from *San guo yan yi*. Each of the three passages has a different focus: The first illustrates Chinese strategy; the second the unselfishness of women; and the third the fears born out of superstition. These passages are respectively taken from the story of Kongming's borrowing of arrows from Cao's army, Lady Mi's self-sacrifice to rescue her son A-dou, and Yu Ji's conjuring before Sun Ce's death. The translator concludes with two paragraphs outlining the benefits of reading and translating the narrative. Unlike the majority of translations, which merely discuss the merits of the original, Pott's text draws parallels with two western authors and their works—*History of the four Georges* by Thackeray and Sir Walter Scott's historical novels—to support his view that *San guo yan yi* allows the reader to "[know] better the period of history covered by the novel than we could possibly do by merely reading the dry-as-dust histories of China" (Pott 1902, p. 128). These parallels situate the text in a more familiar and acceptable space for the western reader to appreciate its merits. According to Pott, the other benefit of reading *San guo yan yi* is that it "enable[s] us to form a better estimate of the character of the Chinese people" (*ibid.*). He holds that western culture has a stereotype of the Chinese as "intensely practical and matter-of-fact," but what *San guo yan yi* shows the reader is that they are also "capable of entertaining high and noble ideals" (*ibid.*). The translator argues that the text could help the west develop a more favorable impression of the Chinese people.

The final text examined here is the 1991 full-text translation by Moss Roberts titled *Three kingdoms: A historical novel*. In the afterword to his translation, Roberts provides detailed background information on *San guo yan yi*, covering the history of its composition, its characters and plot, and the values inscribed in the book. Roberts also draws parallels with western literary works, including parts of the *Iliad*, a number of Shakespeare's historical plays (notably the *Henry VI* trilogy), Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, and several novels by Sir Walter Scott (Roberts 1991, p. 939).

Introducing the translators

Most translators of *San guo yan yi* spent at least a short period living and working in China, often for governmental institutions such as the Customs Service,

the consulates, or the universities, which played an important role in developing connections between Chinese and western literatures and cultures. There is no evidence to suggest that these institutions had any direct role in the translation of *San guo yan yi*, but it might be said that they exerted tenuous and indirect influence on the translators or retranslators at every stage of their translations, from their choice of the source text, to the specific strategies applied in rendering the text into English, to the reception of the text by their intended readership. These political and academic institutions were sites at which translators could find improved facilities and collaborate with scholars with similar interests; they also offer us a lens through which to explore the translators' perceptions of Chinese literature like *San guo yan yi* from the western perspective.

One of the earliest translators of the text, Brewitt-Taylor worked at the Chinese Customs Service (CCS), an institution providing advice on and assistance with customs affairs to the government of Imperial China. Seeing the considerable value of the CCS to China in its transition to a modern state (describing it as "a stout staff for China to lean on"), Brewitt-Taylor later joined the Imperial Chinese Maritime Customs Service (ICMCS) and spent the next thirty years in China. Similarly, Carl Arendt and Hawks Pott also worked in China for many years. Hawks was an American Episcopal missionary and educator who served as president of St. John's College, one of China's oldest and most prestigious universities, from 1888 to 1941. Carl Arendt was a German Sinologist of the 19th century, who also worked in China for several years as an interpreter and head of the German Consulate. Arendt played a pioneering role in German Sinology. His two main works are the *Handbook on Northern Chinese colloquial speech* (1891) and the *Introduction to the Northern Chinese colloquial speech* (1894). What distinguished his work from other nineteenth-century books on modern Chinese was his emphasis on the grammatical rules of the language.

Moss Roberts, meanwhile, is a more recent translator of *San guo yan yi*. He first published an abridged version of the book in 1976 titled *Three kingdoms: An epic drama*, followed by a full-text translation in 1991. Roberts's full translation is much more faithful, literal, and academic in style than Brewitt-Taylor's 1925 version. One of its striking features is the abundance of explanatory notes, which Roberts justifies by pointing out that for the Chinese reader, "names of persons, places, titles, and battles are household words, words that have also been incorporated in scores of proverbs," yet "the Western reader, coming to this novel for the first time, is unlikely to find much that is familiar" (Roberts 1991, p. 940). The 1991 full translation was co-published by the University of California Press and the Foreign Language Press in Beijing, the latter providing expert support and advice on the original text. In the acknowledgments section of the translation, Roberts mentions his one-year stay as a foreign expert at the Foreign Language Press, during which he was able to correct several mistakes in his previous abridged version, notably in the subtitle, which he changed from "An epic drama" to "A historical novel," reflecting the change in his understanding of the book's genre and narrative style.

In addition, this paper briefly mentions other early translators of *San guo yan yi*, including C. T. Hsia and L. C. Arlington, who also offered comparisons between the

text and various western works. Since these translators are not the focus of this case study, no further details are provided here.

While it is difficult to discern any direct relation between the biographies of these translators and the parallels they drew in introducing the original text, it might be plausible to say that their interpretations of the text and the ways in which they compared it to western works are indirectly influenced by their personal and working backgrounds. The following sections identify a number of these parallels, and evaluate them with regard to three aspects: genre, character, and plot. There remains considerable debate on the question of whether local traditions ought to be analyzed exclusively on their own terms or by western norms; the comparisons that follow, however, incorporate both Chinese and western literary traditions in an effort to bridge the gap and facilitate a dialogue.

Parallels drawn by the English-language translators

Genre

The introductory section of this paper established that *San guo yan yi* is generally classified as part of the *zhanghuiti* genre in Chinese literary tradition and academia. Does *zhanghuiti* have the same meaning as *novel* in the western literary vocabulary? The similarities and disparities between western and Chinese literary genres have rarely been explored, with the exception of an English-language dissertation by Ropp in 1990 titled *Western and Chinese literary genre theory and criticism: A comparative study*, as well as a small number of journal articles. It is accepted that *zhanghuiti* can be defined as a full-length fictional story in the vernacular language, containing a complex plot and strong characterization. The fictional novel in Chinese literary tradition started from printed copies of historical texts in the vernacular language in the late 14th century; these had developed into the genre we now know by the 16th century, a century or so earlier than the western novel. Though the emphasis of *novel* in both traditions developed from myths and folk tales to acquire a greater focus on individual experiences and observations (Ropp 1990, p. 310), *zhanghuiti* is closer to historical fiction and folk tales.

It is worth examining the ways in which the various translators of *San guo yan yi* have interpreted the genre of the book. Take the 1925 full-length translation by Brewitt-Taylor as an example. This version is titled *Romance of the three kingdoms*. The word “romance” in the title reveals the translator’s interpretation of the genre. It is worth noting, however, that although Brewitt-Taylor renders the *yanyi* of the original title as “romance” here, he did not fully agree with this categorization, as indicated in his discussion of the book’s genre in his review, where he argues that the word “paraphrase” is a more fitting translation of *yanyi*, as, in his view “the romantic portion consists almost entirely of legends that have grown up and wreathed themselves round the figures of two or three of the more important characters” (Brewitt-Taylor 1891, p. 169). *Yanyi*, in classical Chinese poetics, refers to “a popular narrative of historical events and characters [对历史现象、人物故事的通俗化叙述]” (Tan 2013, p. 151) and performs two basic functions: to make stories more broadly

comprehensible and to educate the public through implied value orientation (*ibid.*). In the late Qing dynasty (1840–1912), along with the increase in the use of western literary terms in China, Chinese critics attempted to relate *yanyi* to the historical novel and defined it in a new theoretical context: “a historical novel is based on historical facts and narrated in the form of *yanyi*” (*ibid.*, p. 161).

Brewitt-Taylor also compares *San guo yan yi* with western literary works such as Walter Scott’s historical novels and the *Iliad*; none of these is in the same genre as *San guo yan yi*. According to Brewitt-Taylor, *San guo yan yi* has a historical basis and features “earthy” men as its characters, rather than the demigods of Homer’s work. One of Brewitt-Taylor’s reasons for not categorizing the original book as a novel is its lack of certain important features of the genre, not least “the absence of plot” (Brewitt-Taylor 1891, p. 170). For him, “the *San-Kuo* has more the character of a long historic drama than of a novel or romance,” since “the characters speak as if on the stage,” “the battles look like stage battles,” and “the actors almost smell of paint” (*ibid.*, p. 169). A similar comparison can be found in the translation by Arlington and Acton, who compare the character Mi Heng in *San guo yan yi* with Apemantus in Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens* (Arlington and Acton 1937, p. 51).

Another early translator, Carl Arendt, argues that *San guo yan yi* is closer to the epic genre in western terms:

The Chinese have no epic poems in our sense of the word, but the work of fiction based on Chen Shou’s historical narrative from which I have just translated a few lines, and called ‘the Amplified History (or, Romance) of the Three Kingdoms’, though written in prose, may for all intents and purposes be considered as the nearest *approach* to an epic poem in the whole range of Chinese literature. (Arendt 1886, p. 43)

Some western scholars describe *San guo yan yi* as a classic Chinese novel or historical novel, as did American Sinologist C. T. Hsia, who also translated the text, in his monograph *The classic Chinese novel*. Indeed, most of the early partial translations of *San guo yan yi* use a similar classification. Moss Roberts also titled his 1991 full-text translation *Three kingdoms: A historical novel*, though he had used *Three kingdoms: An epic drama* as the title of his 1976 abridged version.

In my view, *San guo yan yi* combines three different genres in the western literary tradition: the novel, the drama, and the epic. It is difficult to find a single genre that encompasses the original text. According to James J. Y. Liu, author of *Chinese theories of literature*, the lyric-epic-dramatic generic trio is present in all literary traditions, the only difference being that in the western, or European, tradition, the lyric element took longer to emerge as a distinct genre, while the opposite was true of the Chinese and Japanese traditions, in which drama and narration developed for the most part from poetry. It would, however, be beneficial to introduce Chinese literary traditions in a less westernized context, because “when the adaptation of a theory of universal claim does not work smoothly, that can be both useful and thought-provoking” (Hajdu 2018, p. 171). Genres in western literature are classically divided into the three forms of ancient Greek literature: poetry, drama, and prose. The novel or novella is consigned to the rather loose category of fiction, with romance, as a style of heroic prose and verse narrative, a closely related long-form narrative genre. The

characteristics of a novel, including the long-form narrative and prose text, seem to apply to *San guo yan yi*, though its language and characterization are more dramatic. The book bears little similarity to most western literary works in the romance genre, such as the legend of King Arthur, which revolves around the spirit of chivalry, nor to historical romances such as those by Walter Scott, according to Scott's own definition of romance as "a fictitious narrative in prose or verse; the interest of which turns upon marvelous and uncommon incidents" (Scott 1824, p. 436). Furthermore, as the *Encyclopædia Britannica* notes in its definition of *romance*, the *marvelous* is also considered a vital component of the genre: "to most English readers the term romance does carry implications of the wonderful, the miraculous, the exaggerated, and the wholly ideal" (Vinaver and Whitehead 2019, para. 1). Yet, *San guo yan yi* is not inscribed with any element of the marvelous, nor does it have any association with chivalry; instead, it devotes more space to themes such as brotherhood, appropriateness (keep up to one's words; being loyal to friends and morals), military battles, and political plots.

I would therefore like to expand on Brewitt-Taylor's interpretation of *San guo yan yi* as "a historical drama not written for the stage" (Brewitt-Taylor 1891, p. 169). Based on the specificity of the book's characterization, with its lack of unequivocal heroes, and the macro-perspective it adopts in its narration and themes, it might be worth adapting a term from audio-visual studies and describing its characters as an *ensemble cast*, a term referring to the cast of a dramatic production in which multiple principal actors and performers are assigned roughly equal amounts of importance and screen time. Therefore, if it must be categorized according to western literary norms, *San guo yan yi* can with justification be regarded as an *ensemble historical narrative*, a term that incorporates both Chinese and western concepts and shows respect to the peculiarities of the Chinese literary tradition.

Character and characterization

The second of the three issues, *character*, relates to a crucial aspect of narratology. In *San guo yan yi*, hundreds of characters cross the stage. Luo Guanzhong's characterization of many of these figures, such as the loyal general Guan Yu, the treacherous hero Cao Cao and the intelligent minister Kongming, was based on the history of the late Han dynasty (184–220 A.D.), as recorded in Chen Shou's *San guo zhi*, and was also influenced by a number of scholarly works and literary traditions in the intervening centuries. The characters are compared with the heroes of ancient Greek literature by the various English translators of *San guo yan yi*. The comparison with ancient Greek literature in particular prompts the question: are the characters in the narrative mortal or godlike in their characterization?

A similar approach to characterization can be found in Homer's *Iliad*, the Western literary text with which *San guo yan yi* is most frequently compared. Sir John Francis Davis was the first to make this comparison. In his book *The Chinese: A general description of the empire of China and its inhabitants*, Davis argued that

the period of the San-kuo, or "Three States," into which the country was divided towards the close of Han, about A. D. 184, is a favourite subject of

the historical plays and romances of the Chinese [...]. It is, however, as little stuffed with extravagancies as could be expected from an Oriental history, and, except that it is in prose, bears a resemblance in some of its features to the *Iliad*, especially in what Lord Chesterfield calls “the porter-like language” of the heroes. (Davis 1840, p. 165)

Although Davis is one of the earlier English translators of *San guo yan yi*, he did not draw this parallel in his own translation or its paratexts. However, his observation had an impact on other early translations, as noted by George Candlin:

The *San Kuo Tzu* may be characterized in one comparison. It is the *Iliad* of China. This was first pointed out by Sir John Davis. Many of the qualities of old Homer are in it, consummate dramatic art (which alone redeems the Greek epic from insufferable dullness), supreme love of battle, extravagant admiration of bravery and feats of arms, wide and universal sympathy which puts him in touch with all his characters, fondness for detail, and copiousness, which leads him to pour into it the most miscellaneous facts, lists, names; skill in blending the supernatural with the ordinary course of events (for the *San Kuo Tzu* [sic] has its machinery as much as the *Iliad*), consuming patriotism that makes everything interesting which affects his country. (Candlin 1898, p. 24)

The same comparison can also be seen in Arendt’s (1886) article. Arendt not only compares the original text to the *Iliad*, but also offers a profound analysis of both Chinese and Greek literature. As part of his comparison between the two cultures, he translates excerpts from Chapters 41, 42, and 108 of *San guo yan yi*. He elucidates a number of parallels between Greek and Chinese literature, describing the Chinese muse as well as outlining the main features of Chinese literature. He then turns to the period of Chinese history covered in the narrative, that of the Three Kingdoms and the Han dynasty: “It is an episode in the deadly contest between Ts’aots’ao and Liupei, in which I wish here to engage the interest of the reader” (Arendt 1886, p. 41). Arendt then provides “a somewhat detailed abstract of the novelist’s version of Chang Yite’s heroic defense of the passage over the river, from the 41st and 42nd chapters” (*ibid.*, p. 43). He concludes the paper by telling the reader “a story from the 108th chapter of the same romance, to which I have so frequently referred in the course of these pages” (*ibid.*, p. 55). For this excerpt, Arendt translates literally from the 36th book of Chen Shou’s *San guo zhi*, then provides a translation of the equivalent scene—the dissonant tinkling of the cracked bell of Zhang Fei—rendered in a more literary and dramatic style in Luo Guanzhong’s *San guo yan yi*. The passage in question from *San guo yan yi*, concerning the character Zhang Fei, is quoted below:

As soon as the messengers arrived and Ts’ao Ts’ao heard about it he mounted and rode to the bridge to see for himself. Chang Fei’s fierce eye scanning the hinder position of the army opposite him saw the silken umbrella, the axes and banners coming along and concluded that Ts’ao Ts’ao came to see for himself how matters stood. So in a mighty voice he shouted, “I am Chang I-te of Yen; who dares fight with me?”

At the sound of this thunderous voice a terrible quaking fear seized upon Ts'ao and he bade them take the umbrella away. Turning to his followers he said, "Kuan Yu said that his brother Chang Fei was the sort of man to go through an army of a hundred legions and take the head of its commander-in-chief; and do it easily. Now here is this terror in front of us and we must be careful." As he finished speaking again the terrible voice was heard, "I am Chang I-te of Yen; who dares fight with me?" Ts'ao, seeing his enemy so fierce and resolute, was too frightened to think of anything but retreat and Chang Fei, seeing a movement going on in the rear, once again shook his spear and roared, "What mean you, cowards? You will not fight nor do you run away."

This roar had scarcely begun when one of Ts'ao's staff reeled and fell from his horse terror-stricken, paralysed with fear. The panic touched Ts'ao Ts'ao, and spread to his whole surroundings and he and his staff galloped for their lives. They were as frightened as a suckling babe at a clap of thunder or a weak woodcutter at the roar of a tiger. Many threw away their spears, dropped their casques and fled, a wave of panic-stricken humanity, a tumbling mass of terrified horses. None thought of aught but flight, and those who ran trampled the bodies of fallen comrades under foot. (Brewitt-Taylor 1925, Vol. 1, pp. 440–441)

Arendt goes on to compare this scene in *San guo yan yi* with another from Greek literature: "The situation in which we find Chang Fei or Chang Yite placed by the Chinese historian, is so strikingly similar to the situation of Achilles and Patroclus in the two passages from the *Iliad*" (Arendt 1886, p. 42). He directly compares Achilles and Zhang Fei: "I may add that, just as 'thrice from the trench his dreadful voice Achilles raised,' so we find Chang Yite thrice challenging the enemy from the bridge." The translator points out the divine qualities of the Greek hero: "We see Achilles raised above the level of humanity, and thus the flight of the hostile army appears but as the necessary consequence of the operation of energies which it would have been hopeless to combat" (*ibid.*, p. 46).

Arendt goes on to contrast the two texts by describing the different reactions of the enemy, who in the *Iliad* is intimidated by the main character's thunderous voice and great courage. "How different is the execution of the corresponding scene in the Chinese romance! Ts'ao's army and his army run away before a martial pair of whiskers and a column of dust!" (Arendt 1886, p. 46). In his view, the characterization of Zhang Fei and others in *San guo yan yi* presents less grandeur: "Notwithstanding its many excellencies, our episode falls therefore in my opinion far short not only of the sublime grandeur of the Greek poet, but also of the simple dignity of Chen Shou's narrative in his History of the Three Kingdoms" (*ibid.*, p. 47).

For Arendt, the characters in *San guo yan yi* are more earthy, possessed of less divinity than those in the *Iliad*. The translator summarizes his comparison between the Chinese Muse and her Greek counterpart as follows:

The Chinese Muse is not, like the Muses of Greece, a heaven-born Goddess; she is not, like them in constant communication with the Gods; she does not even frequently soar into the higher regions of the ideal world; she is eloquent

and entertaining; lively, fanciful, fascinating; she knows how to touch, charm, and surprise her hearers but she does not often try to elevate her votaries and her audience above the dust of earth. (Arendt 1886, p. 48)

Similar ideas can also be found in C. H. Brewitt-Taylor's analysis. In a review of the text titled *The San-Kuo*, written in the 1890s prior to the publication of his full-text translation, Brewitt-Taylor argues that

nor do I think the *San-Kuo* can be fitly compared with the *Iliad* as Sir John Davis says... The heroes of the *San-Kuo* lay no claim to goddess-birth; they are men, simple men, never advised nor directed by any dweller in Olympus, never helped by any Chinese Juno, or rescued by a Chinese Venus. The Chinese heroes never aim at the god-like sublimity of the Greeks, nor are they marvels and models of manly beauty and strength. They seem rather to belong to Hades than to Heaven, to strike terror by their brutal and coarse appearance than respect by god-like rage and refinement. They are of the earth, earthy, and one is inclined to think a Homer could not have sung in the land of *I* and *Li* and *Tao*. (Brewitt-Taylor 1891, p. 171)

In this passage, Brewitt-Taylor uses terms such as “earthy,” “Hades,” and “brutal and coarse appearance” to summarize the characters in *San guo yan yi*, while describing those in the *Iliad* with such phrases as “god-like sublimity,” “Heaven,” and “god-like rage and refinement.” In sum, these translators believe that the characters in *San guo yan yi* are closer to mortal human beings, while those in the *Iliad* demonstrate a godlike personality.

How, then, can we look at the translators' interpretations of the characters in *San guo yan yi*? First, from a typological point of view, the parallel between Zhang Fei and Achilles drawn by Arendt is based on the existence of certain similarities between characters in stories of the same type, and close comparisons between them. However, Arendt lacks a broader grasp of the character's personality and fate, and therefore does not explore in any depth the differences in the methods by which the characters in these two works are constructed. Zhang Fei is known for his savage bravery, and arguably has more in common with another character in the *Iliad*, Ajax the Great, while Achilles is presented not only as a ferocious warrior, but also as an idealized tragic hero, which is better paralleled in the character of Guan Yu in *San guo yan yi*.

Second, Brewitt-Taylor seems to be unfamiliar with the specific modes of characterization of classic Chinese novels. For example, in his discussion of the character of Liu Bei in his review, Brewitt-Taylor comments that “with all his love of justice and right, from a European stand-point we should say he was somewhat selfish and careless of his friends.” According to the translator's interpretation, Liu Bei leaves his families and the generals to their fate when defeat comes; when his child is saved and placed in his arms, Liu throws the child to the ground, blaming him for almost causing the loss of a good general, and does not even spare a thought for his wife who sacrificed herself to save the child. Since Liu Bei is introduced as the epitome of honor and respectability, Brewitt-Taylor concludes that this character reflects the value dissonance between China and Europe: “This shows a different standard from

what prevails in the modern West and shows us we are reading an oriental book.” However, this is a misreading of the character of Liu Bei. The character’s virtues of honor and benevolence are merely superficial; it is believed by a number of Chinese literary critics that what the book really aims to present, through the ironic depiction of the character, is Liu’s selfishness and hypocrisy. Take Liu Bei’s last words to his prime minister Kongming as an example, in which, in a demonstration of apparent frankness and nobility, he asks Kongming to take the throne himself if his son proves a fool. Mao and Luo (1989, p. 1095) focused on this request in his analysis, asking, “Is that genuine or not? It is very likely that Liu was fully aware that Kongming was too kind or cautious to usurp, so Liu deliberately uttered those words to further urge Kongming’s sincere devotion to assisting Liu’s son.” In addition, *San guo zhi*, the inspiration for *San guo yan yi*, describes Liu Bei as a “wicked hero” [梟雄] who perpetrates “incessant betrayal” [反覆难养] (Chen 2009, p. 300). As Lu (2004, pp. 111–112) makes clear, “the *Sanguo* is written in such a way that makes Liu Bei too benevolent to be freed from the suspicion that he was faking it.” This implicit characterization, which hides another meaning behind the façade of narration, is an example of a classic Chinese literary technique frequently used in *zhanghui*: *chunqiu bifa* (春秋笔法), an approach that conveys profound meaning through subtle linguistic techniques, and which was heavily influenced by the writing style of Chinese court historians. Brewitt-Taylor’s understanding of *San guo yan yi* is not deep enough to penetrate these narrative devices, and his appreciation of the characters is confined to their stereotypical aspects. For example, his analysis of Cao Cao is almost one-dimensional, as indicated by his reliance on phrases like “permanent villain” and “the hero of wickedness” to describe him (Brewitt-Taylor 1891, p. 174), as well as by his insistence that there are only two places in the entire book that present the character in a favorable light.

Aside from his superficial reading of the characters, Brewitt-Taylor also claims that many characters in *San guo yan yi* have a very peculiar appearance, which may be the result of centuries of rumors and exaggeration, despite the historical basis of the narrative. In contrast, characters like King Arthur, Sir Galahad, Sir Bois, and Sir Bevis, whose fictional depictions are also “scarcely recognizable,” are of more debatable origin, and indeed “have very nearly been denied [historical] existence” (Brewitt-Taylor 1891, p. 173). Brewitt-Taylor also does not understand why the appearances of so many characters are compared to those of animals, such as the general Zhang Fei’s being described as having a leopard’s head, round eyes, sharp jaws, and a tiger’s whiskers. In fact, however, this is simply another example of *zhanghui*’s “line drawing” characterization, which indirectly conveys a character’s personality by comparing their appearance to that of animals that have symbolic meanings (for instance, a wolf to represent savagery, a leopard for physical beauty and ferociousness, a tiger for fierceness and leadership, or a chimpanzee for wisdom).

The term “line drawing” (白描) used to describe this kind of characterization is borrowed from a style of Chinese painting that depicts the subject using only thin lines, without blocks of color or shading. In Chinese literature, the term refers to a technique of character construction. Mao (2004, pp. 163–173), a contemporary writer, commented that line drawing, commonly employed in traditional Chinese

novels, is particularly effective at revealing a character's inner self through the description of plain actions. *Zhanghuiti* texts do not directly describe a character's internal conflict and development, but instead place great emphasis on the dramatic conflict arising from the meeting of characters with different personalities under specific spatial and temporal circumstances. For example, the debut of a character is very carefully considered in *zhanghuiti* texts, as the way in which a character first appears is usually an important hint to both their personality and their fate. Examples of this can be found in *Water margin* and *A dream of the red mansions*, as well as *San guo yan yi*.

Plot and narration

The third issue concerns *plot*, either fictional or factual, which is an important aspect of a novel. *San guo yan yi* is a narrative version of *San guo zhi*. As Qing scholar Zhang (1985, p. 396) remarks, *San guo yan yi* is “seven parts fact and three parts fiction” [七分史实, 三分虚构]. In the preface to his masterly critique of the text, Jin Shengtian (金圣叹) also mentions that he finds it to be in accordance with real history, and provides an accurate overview of the course of the civil war at the end of the Han dynasty (184–220 A.D.). The characters are all formally introduced using various forms of their names, and their places of birth are also listed. Though it adds to the length of the book, this lends the narrative an air of verisimilitude. On the other hand, almost any incident related to a character is followed by a poem that alludes to other works and enhances the literary qualities of the text, elevating it beyond the historical facts. The following poem is an example, quoted from the scene involving Zhang Fei discussed above:

后人 有诗 赞曰：长坂桥头杀气生，横枪立马眼圆睁。一声好似轰雷震，独退曹家百万兵。

Chang Fei was wrathful; and who dared
To accept his challenge? Fierce he glared;
His thunderous voice rolled out, and then
In terror fled Ts'ao's armed men. (Brewitt-Taylor 1925, Vol. 1, p. 441)

The close adherence to historical facts in *San guo yan yi* reminded some early translators of another western literary creation: the legend of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. This was also composed of a combination of folklore and literary inventions, based on the mythical King Arthur's defense of Britain against Saxon invaders in the late 5th and early 6th centuries. In his foreword to Moss Roberts's 1991 translation, John Service compares *San guo yan yi* to the Arthurian legend: “I decided that *Three Kingdoms* must be something of the same: romantic myths of a misty never-never land of long ago” (Roberts 1991, p. xiii). Brewitt-Taylor, however, does not agree with this comparison, arguing that, unlike the stories of King Arthur, *San guo yan yi* does not belong in the romance genre. For Brewitt-Taylor, the romance genre is “of the same class as those relating to King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table; those that the mythfinders tell us belong no more to Arthur than to Joshua” (Brewitt-Taylor 1891, p.

170). In his view, characters such as “King Arthur, Sir Galahad, Sir Bois, and Sir Bevis and a host of others” are “scarcely recognizable and have very nearly been denied existence altogether, being but forms of sun and nature myths” (*ibid.*, p. 173). Indeed, the existence of King Arthur has been the subject of centuries of debate, to say nothing of the veracity of those literary embellishments added to the lore by both generations of authors and the public. On the other hand, the characters in *San guo yan yi* are real historical figures, despite the literary exaggeration of their appearance and their stories. As Brewitt-Taylor argues, “the Chinese heroes came into being and lived their lives three hundred years before these of our own country and there is as good historical evidence that they were real men as that there was an Earl Godwin” (*ibid.*).

In addition, some translators have identified parallels with certain periods of British or European history in *San guo yan yi*, either in particular events or episodes, or in the text as a whole. A representative example comes from Hawks Pott in his lecture on the subject in 1894, in which he compared the historical background to *San guo yan yi* with the War of the Roses in England:

The War of the Roses in England is the only historical parallel that occurs to my mind – it was a war between feudatory chiefs and princes – and resulted in China, as the War of the Roses in England at the accession of the Tudors, in increasing the power of the throne. (Pott 1894, p. 654)

In contrast to most translators, who focus on the narrative’s similarities to the Arthurian myth, Pott compares the book with a genuine historical period. Moreover, he explains that one of the functions of his excerpted translation is to give the reader a better understanding of the historical novels of the reader’s own era, an aim which encouraged his allusions to western literary works. Pott asserts that “just as the historian of the times of the Four Georges needs to read Thackeray, and just as he who would become thoroughly acquainted with the early history of New England should read Hawthorne,” *San guo yan yi* is an indispensable read for students of the Han dynasty (Pott 1894, p. 654). We can see from these comparisons that *San guo yan yi*, in spite of the author’s many literary exaggerations, is important for historical research and adheres relatively closely to historical facts.

In its descriptions of battles, *San guo yan yi* presents similar scenes to those in the *Iliad*: battles “preceded by much talk, opened with abusive harangues conducted with very little fighting and ended in glorious victory for one side and devastation for the other, which however Hydra-like soon put up its head strong as ever” (Brewitt-Taylor 1891, p. 173). Even the duels in the two works are depicted in a similar manner, as Brewitt-Taylor summarized:

First rode out a hero and abused the commander of his opponents calling him a turn-coat, or rebel or an unrighteous man; then the reply came in the

form of a champion and these two fought tremendous and glorious duels after the manner of Paris and Menelaus, Hector and Ajax. (*ibid.*)

Literary invention and exaggeration is often added to the battle or dueling scenes in order to glorify the heroes or enhance the drama, although the incidents themselves are grounded in historical facts, as recorded in *San guo zhi*. The example of Zhang Fei mentioned above is a case in point, with the author describing Cao's army as "as frightened as a suckling babe at a clap of thunder or a weak woodcutter at the roar of a tiger. Many threw away their spears, dropped their casques, and fled, a wave of panic-stricken humanity, a tumbling mass of terrified horses" (Brewitt-Taylor 1925, Vol. 1, p. 441).

Pott also commented on the disparity between the narrative and the real history when comparing *San guo yan yi* with the novels of Walter Scott. In his 1902 translation, Pott noted that "*The Three Kingdoms* is undoubtedly the most popular and most widely read of all the novels in China. By the Chinese boy it is regarded much in the same light as the Waverly novels are by the Western boy" (Pott 1902, p. 123). His selection of three passages from *San guo yan yi* to translate was based in part on his desire to give the reader a better understanding of "how Sir Walter Scott by his imaginative faculty makes certain periods of history living realities" to the western reader (*ibid.*, p. 128). In Pott's estimation, the style of *San guo yan yi*, and the way in which it transforms history into fiction, is quite similar to that of Scott's work.

In terms of plot, the author of *San guo yan yi* adheres closely to the historical record for all his characters, including where their ultimate fates are concerned. Guanzhong ends the narrative with the victory of the Sima family and their founding of a new dynasty, the Western Jin, the main protagonists, including Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang, having died around the middle of the story. Considerable prominence is given to the rival houses of Wu and Wei, despite the fact that Liu Bei is the principal hero of the book:

The final victory lay really with the House of Wei, founded by Ts'ao Ts'ao, and this character, though a mighty and very important one, is clearly subsidiary to Liu Pei as far as the book is concerned. Scarcely any novelist would have been satisfied with the very partial success of Liu Pei in Shuh, which country Wei excelled in power, and Wu in wealth. Nor would he have missed the golden opportunity for ending his story at the point where Liu Pei sat upon the throne of Shuh as Emperor, representative of the Han Dynasty. (Brewitt-Taylor 1891, p. 169)

Brewitt-Taylor's review of the narrative is one-sided and partial. He seems to believe that the differences between principal and minor characters are not clear cut, and that the main character, Liu Bei, does not enjoy a particularly happy ending, opining that "no novelist would have allowed his hero's son to die degraded, or have removed his important subordinate characters in such ways as they disappear." He therefore argues that *San guo yan yi* should not be categorized as a novel in the western sense. However, *San guo yan yi* employs a braided structure consisting of three phases: the first encompassing the period from the Peach Garden of Jie Yi to the Battle of the Red Cliffs; the second detailing the establishment of and conflict between the three

kingdoms; and the third stretching from the death of Zhu Ge Liang to West Jin's reunification of China. The timelines of the three kingdoms are therefore entangled with each other.

One of the hallmarks of *San guo yan yi* is the fact that it does not focus only on one or two protagonists and structure the narrative around their victory, as a work of pure fiction might be composed; rather, it presents a panorama of characters from a macro-historical perspective in order to emphasize the repetitive character of history, and the ways in which kingdoms divide and reunite at the mercy of history or circumstance. This theme is brought to the fore in the very first sentence of the text: "Empires wax and wane; states cleave asunder and coalesce. [话说天下大势, 分久必合合久必分]." This idea too brings the book closer to the realm of historical facts, and distances it from the fictionality inherent in western notions of the novel.

Brewitt-Taylor (1891, p. 170) argues that *San guo yan yi* cannot be termed a novel due to "the absence of plot"; the whole narrative is, in his view, "too clearly historical, to allow the necessary freedom to the plot of a story." As mentioned above, however, the term *yanyi* in the Chinese literary tradition refers to the narration of historical facts in a popular and entertaining way. This type of text always takes historical events as its subject, and often adapts both the content and the language to suit its readership. *San guo yan yi* is a typical example, being seven parts fact and three parts fiction. This explains Brewitt-Taylor's belief that the book is too historically grounded to allow much freedom to the plot. As the *yanyi* tradition developed, however, authors were able to take greater liberties with established history, as seen in works like *The golden lotus* and *A dream of the red mansion*. It can hardly be claimed that *San guo yan yi* lacks plot, therefore, given the history and development of *yanyi* in Chinese literature.

Another reason for the absence of plot in the western sense, according to Brewitt-Taylor, is that in most cases, characters only appear at critical junctures in the plot, and very little space is given over to the inner development of the characters. He even comments that this amounts to a greater use of *deus ex machina* than in Greek drama. According to critics of Chinese classic novels, however, the description of events is of great importance in narrative composition, including the beginning and ending of an event, the appearance and demise of a character, and the development of the plot. All these elements are interwoven, visibly or invisibly, in a logical structure that provides clues in order to make the plot complete and plausible. *San guo yan yi*, as a lengthy book with 120 chapters and thousands of characters, is an example of excellent narrative composition. As Mao and Luo (1989, p. 524) comments, "the challenge of the narration in this novel does not lie in the gathered events but in the scattered ones". In *zhanghuiti* novels, particularly those relating historical events, the most important aspect of narration is to weave together a large network of events with reasonable foreshadowing, or, as Mao phrases it, "to keep your eye on one part while writing another part" (*ibid.*).

In terms of foreshadowing in Chinese *zhanghuiti* novels, there is a term in classical Chinese poetics: *caoshao huixian* (草蛇灰线). The term literally means "like a snake in the grass and a rope in the ashes," and refers to something that is partially hidden and can only be seen at certain points, as Mao and Luo (1989, p. 524) makes clear: "like a snake in the grass, that one can only see its head in one place and its

tail in another.” The commentary on *San guo yan yi* by Mao and his father uses this term to explain the use of foreshadowing in Guanzhong’s narration. As they state, “the book of *San Guo* excels in hiding hints for when certain events happen far earlier in the timeline. Good gardeners sow their seeds early and simply wait for the proper time to let them grow, and good chess players plan more than ten moves ahead. The way the plot of a story should be is no different.” (*ibid.*, p. 175).

We can now return to the paragraph from Chapter 44 quoted by Arendt above, in which Zhang Fei’s terrifying roar frightens away Cao Cao’s mighty army and even causes Xia Houjie to fall off his horse to his death. This paragraph, taken out of context, seems too exaggerated to be serious. Because of this, Arendt comments that the narrative seems too overblown to maintain any sense of grandeur, and even strays into the absurd. However, a hint about Zhang Fei’s power was planted far earlier in Chapter 25, in which Guan Yu easily kills on Cao Cao’s behalf the renowned enemy generals Yan Liang and Wen Chou. Cao Cao is amazed at Guan Yu’s prowess, but Guan Yu stresses that “I am nothing compared to my brother Zhang Fei, to whom cutting the head off an enemy general with ten thousand men is as easy as picking a pocket.” Cao Cao is so shocked that he orders his subordinates to write this on the inside of their robes so that they would never take it lightly should they one day have to face Zhang Fei. The event depicted in Chapter 44 is just an echo of the incident in Chapter 25. This can be regarded as an excellent example of foreshadowing in a *zhanghuiti* novel.

Conclusion

The parallels drawn by each of these translators epitomize their interpretations of the Chinese original, and in turn have a certain influence on their translation process. For example, Roberts’s initial understanding of the original book as belonging to a genre close to an epic or a drama, such as the *Iliad*, is reflected in his use of the subtitle “An Epic Drama” in his 1976 translation, as well as in his structuring of the text to resemble a drama script, with character dialogue in *oratio recta* (on separate lines, each beginning with the character’s name followed by a colon and direct speech without quotation marks). His 1991 version, however, saw changes to both the subtitle (to “A Historical Novel”) and the format, likely due to an evolution in his understanding of the original book.

Through the analysis above, we have gained a clear overview of the parallels made and identified by the various translators of *San guo yan yi*. On the one hand, two positive effects of such comparisons can be discerned. The first one is to bring the original text closer to the target reader through the allusion to familiar texts in the target culture. Through a process of intertextuality, the reader then develops a better understanding of the original text and culture. As Moss Roberts wrote in the afterword to his full translation,

if comparison to Western literary works is attempted, it may be said that *Three Kingdoms* bears some resemblance to parts of the *Iliad*, to certain of Shake-

spere's historical plays (perhaps the *Henry VI* trilogy), and to Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* or certain novels by Sir Walter Scott. (Roberts 1991, p. 939)

These parallels may convey a message to the target reader that *San guo yan yi* is not overly difficult or inaccessible; the associations with western literary works established in the text may encourage them to read with a sense of familiarity, and may aid comprehension.

On the other hand, we might also interpret the function of such parallels negatively, since they veil the original text with the translator's interpretation, which to some extent obscures the original sense of the text for the target reader. That is to say, a stereotype created by the translator is shaped in the reader's mind, rather than a more accurate impression of the original text. It is not unusual for most readers to associate *San guo yan yi* with works such as the *Iliad*, the *Waverley* novels, or Shakespeare's plays after they are made aware of the comparisons. In addition, it is difficult to judge whether these parallels are appropriate unless the readers have some level of literary competence; Brewitt-Taylor, for instance, disagreed with the parallels drawn by Davis and other previous translators and instead elaborated his own understanding of the text.

Furthermore, we can trace the values inscribed in the parallels by the translator. Many translators do not explore the historical context of *San guo yan yi* or its related western literary works in any detail. John Service, for instance, considers *San guo yan yi* comparable to the legend of King Arthur—citing their shared “romantic myths of a misty never-never land of long ago”—while the former is in fact far more faithful to the historical record. Others compare *San guo yan yi*'s characterization with that in the *Iliad* because of the similar focus on individualism and heroism in the two works, while still others, such as Brewitt-Taylor in his 1891 review, place greater emphasis on the uniqueness of *San guo yan yi* in terms of genre and characterization.

Last but not least, considering the above analysis of genre, character, and plot, along with the comparisons with related western literary works made by the English translators of *San guo yan yi*, we can propose a relatively new category for the book—the *ensemble historical narrative*—combining both Chinese and western literary traditions. As Hajdu (2018, p. 177) argues, “When the adaptation of a theory works only partially, with sometimes essential modifications, this may give an impulse to further elaborate the theory ... it highlights the peculiarities or even uniqueness of a different culture.” In this sense, the generic categorization of *San guo yan yi* by means of a comparative study not only allows us to extend the scope of genre theory, but also contributes to a better understanding of Chinese literature and literary traditions.

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