

A Historical Survey of *Sanguo Yanyi*  
in English Translation

《三国演义》英译史研究

Guo Yu  
郭昱 著

清华大学出版社

## in English Translation

Guo Yu  
郭昱 著

清华大学出版社  
北 京

## 内 容 简 介

本书对19世纪以来的《三国演义》的英译历程做了全面深入的描述性研究,把这部经典名著近两百年的英译史划分为三个时期,描述了各个时期翻译活动的主要特征,揭示了该小说在英语世界翻译和传播的历史趋势。本书重视史料和语料相结合:一方面,在围绕译本产生和传播的社会文化背景层面着墨甚多,并非用当今读者的眼光和标准去衡量上百年前的译本,而是注重对翻译活动的历史性考察;另一方面,不止于抽象的理论探讨,而是援引确凿的译例对译本特征进行微观层面的具体分析。本书可以作为同领域后来研究者的可靠分析依据。

版权所有,侵权必究。侵权举报电话:010-62782989 13701121933

### 图书在版编目(CIP)数据

《三国演义》英译史研究 / 郭显著. -- 北京:清华大学出版社, 2017

ISBN 978-7-302-46018-3

I. ①三… II. ①郭… III. ①《三国演义》—英语—文学翻译—语言学史—研究 IV. ①H315.9

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2016)第316331号

责任编辑:钱屹芝

封面设计:平原

责任校对:王凤芝

责任印制:王静怡

出版发行:清华大学出版社

网 址: <http://www.tup.com.cn>, <http://www.wqbook.com>

地 址: 北京清华大学学研大厦A座 邮 编: 100084

社总机: 010-62770175

邮 购: 010-62786544

投稿与读者服务: 010-62776969, [c-service@tup.tsinghua.edu.cn](mailto:c-service@tup.tsinghua.edu.cn)

质量反馈: 010-62772015, [zhiliang@tup.tsinghua.edu.cn](mailto:zhiliang@tup.tsinghua.edu.cn)

印 装 者: 三河市铭诚印务有限公司

经 销: 全国新华书店

开 本: 155mm×230mm

印 张: 13.75

字 数: 203千字

版 次: 2017年12月第1版

印 次: 2017年12月第1次印刷

印 数: 1~1000

定 价: 78.00元

产品编号: 070282-01

## Foreword

With translation, it is generally assumed in Western countries that the target culture is the social context in which translations are produced and where translators live and work. Translators are supposed to be overseen by patrons from the target culture to serve readers whose native language is the target language. However, this general assumption differs from many translation activities in two historical periods in China. Toward the end of the Qing dynasty, when China was forced to open its doors to the foreign powers, Westerners in large numbers came to work and live in China. They translated lots of Chinese works and served as an important conduit in bringing China to the West. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, particularly after the reform and opening-up policy was adopted, the dissemination of Chinese culture and literature around the world has always been an important issue for the Chinese government. Translations from Chinese into other languages have been produced continuously.

These two periods in Chinese history provide translation studies scholars with interesting translation phenomena well worth exploring. Guo Yu's study of the translation history of *Sanguo yanyi* combines these two periods and has produced reliable findings.

Acquiring first-hand historical documents can lay a solid foundation

for historical studies. Guo Yu's study is based on her careful reading of the various translations and reviews she collected while studying in the United States. Her archeological exploration has helped correct the mistakes concerning the information about translations recorded in previous scholars' works, and is the most thorough research on the English translation history of the novel up until now.

Historical narratives describe people who actually lived. Likewise, the central object of translation history should be the human translator. Giving consideration to the unique identity of the translators toward the end of the Qing dynasty, Guo Yu termed the early efforts to translate the novel "expatriates' endeavors." I believe this concept has its practical implications and can shed light on contemporary endeavors to translate and disseminate Chinese works. As is indicated in this book, even in modern era when Moss Roberts launched his project to produce a complete translation of the novel, he was an expatriate in China. The existence of expatriate translations goes somewhat against the general assumption about translation activities, yet such translations have proven to be very effective in the history of cultural communication between China and the West. As for the translation of Chinese works into other languages in contemporary times, we can create opportunities to attract interested sinologists around the world to work in China for a period of time to begin their translation projects, while providing them with all the necessary support during the whole process of translating and publication. We can also look for those Chinese abroad whose command of the target language is as proficient as, if not more than, that of the Chinese.

Guo Yu's monograph, grown out of her doctoral dissertation completed at Tsinghua University, displays a fine balance between a broad historical

narrative and meticulous textual analysis. I think it is a good contribution to the field of translation studies.

Luo Xuanmin

December 10, 2016

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere thankfulness for the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Sichuan University. The book could not have been accomplished without generous financial, material and emotional support from many individuals and institutions. My first and foremost gratitude goes to my teacher Professor Luo Xuanmin. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to have studied within the orbit of his outstanding influence and example. I wish to extend my best wishes to Professor Chen Yongqian, Professor Wang Jinchuan, Professor Li Chenghe, Professor Wang Xian, Professor Huang Xiang, Professor Yu Shou and Professor Zhang Chenshi for their kind advice and warm friendship.

I would like to express my sincere thankfulness to Professor William J. H. Watson, University of California, Los Angeles, for his precious criticism and help in my academic pursuits. His kind advice and warm friendship have been help and love while I was in Los Angeles and will forever be my precious treasure. I will always love and friendship that I have received from all those years.

I would like to express my sincere thankfulness to the China Scholarship Council for a scholarship, which

## Acknowledgements

This book owes its genesis to a PhD dissertation for the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Tsinghua University. The book would not have been accomplished without generous intellectual, financial and emotional support from many individuals and institutions. My first and foremost gratitude goes to my advisor, Professor Luo Xuanmin. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to have studied within the orbit of his enormously stimulating influence and example. I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to Professor Chen Yongguo, Professor Feng Zongxin, Professor Lü Zhongshe, Professor Wang Kefei, Professor Wang Ning, Professor Yu Shiyi and Professor Zhang Chunbai for their invaluable comments on my dissertation.

I would like to express my most sincere thankfulness to Professor Michael Heim, my adviser at University of California, Los Angeles, for his persistent concern and help in my academic pursuits. Priscilla Heim and Michael Kerr gave me much help and love while I was in Los Angeles and I have never stopped feeling their love and friendship that has accompanied me all these years.

I acknowledge the China Scholarship Council for a scholarship, which



enabled me to carry out research at the Department of Comparative Literature at UCLA for a year. I am also gratefully indebted to the School of Foreign Languages, Renmin University of China, for its generous and constant support. My research in authoring this book has been kindly supported by the Renmin University of China's special fund for sponsoring efforts in developing a world-class RUC and the highly advanced disciplines therein.

Last but not least, I owe more than a word of appreciation to my family, whose enduring love and incredible support have helped me to make it this far on my academic journey.

I would like to express my most sincere thankfulness to Professor Michael Hearn, my adviser at University of California, Los Angeles, for his persistent concern and help in my academic pursuits. Priscilla Hearn and Michael Hearn gave me much help and love while I was in Los Angeles and I have never stopped feeling their love and friendship that has accompanied me all these years.

I acknowledge the China Scholarship Council for a scholarship, which



## Preface

In 1820, *The Asiatic Journal* published the very first translated excerpt of *Sanguo yanyi*; a work entitled “The Death of the Celebrated Minister Tung-cho,” translated by P. P. Thoms. *A Historical Survey of Sanguo yanyi in English Translation* is the first attempt to make an overall descriptive study of the English translation history of *Sanguo yanyi*.

The translation history is divided into three periods: the early period (1820–1924), the middle period (1925–1975) and the late period (1976– ). The description of each period encompasses all types of paratexts attached to the versions (the preface, afterword, acknowledgements, annotations and titles, etc.) and a variety of documents introducing the novel to the English-speaking world (book reviews, translation reviews, encyclopedias, anthologies and bibliographies, etc.).

In the early period it was mainly expatriates in China who engaged in translation activities. As interested amateurs, they produced versions of texts adapted, summarized or excerpted from the original to help the local expatriate communities and those in their home countries gain a first-hand knowledge of China. Versions appeared in the form

of leisure-time reading material, language learning material and research. As the texts were comparatively short, English journals published by expatriates in China served as their major outlet.

In the middle period translation activities show a greater diversity in terms of translator, purpose and target readership. The scope of translation expanded significantly, individual books becoming the dominant publication format. This period witnessed the appearance of the first complete translation of *Sanguo yanyi*.

The late period has seen a noteworthy academic turn. Moss Roberts, Professor of Chinese at New York University, has retranslated the novel to meet the requirements of teaching and research in the English-speaking countries. His translation, published in its entirety and in an abridged edition, has been patronized by Chinese as well as American presses and academic institutions. It is accompanied by academic paratexts.

Thus the work's translation history shows a transformation of translators from amateurs to professionals, an expansion of readerships and shifts of cultural orientation from domestication to foreignization, from simplification to amplification. This book points out that the language ability and interculturality of the translator and his readership are the decisive factors over the cultural orientation of the translation.

This book contains historical and textual analyses of the translation activities of the past nearly 200 years. It devotes much attention to the social and cultural environments that have generated the various versions and promoted their dissemination, and avoids

using contemporary standards to evaluate those produced in earlier periods. It also cites numerous instances of the textual characteristics of different versions, extending the discussion beyond abstract theorization. The overall analysis will therefore prove a reliable source for future studies on the English translation and dissemination of the novel.

Acknowledgements V

Preface VII

Chapter One Introduction I

1.1 Background and brief history 1

1.2 Status of the study of translation history 9

1.3 Structure of the book 13

Chapter Two The Translation and Review of *SGYY*  
in English 15

2.1 Li Hui's introduction to the Chinese novel *SGYY* 15

2.2 Sinologists' comments on the popularity of *SGYY* 16

2.3 The translation history of *SGYY* into English 20

2.3.1 *SGYY* in Chinese 20

2.3.2 *SGYY* in English: a brief introduction 21

2.3.3 *SGYY* in English: a preliminary 37

2.4 The review career of *SGYY* in the English language 39

2.4.1 General review 39

2.4.2 Detailed review: *SGYY* in the English language 48

Chapter Three The Translating Period (1820-1924)  
Expatriates' Endeavors 51

3.1 Other identities of translators 56

3.2 The varieties of languages in China during the nineteenth and  
early twentieth centuries 56

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>Preface</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>Chapter One Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Purpose of the book	5
1.2 Scope of the study of translation history	9
1.3 Structure of the book	13
<b>Chapter Two The Translation and Review of SGYY in English</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1 A brief introduction to the Chinese novel SGYY	15
2.2 Sinologists' comments on the popularity of SGYY	18
2.3 The translation history of SGYY into English	20
2.3.1 Data collection	20
2.3.2 A brief introduction to the English translations	21
2.3.3 Periodization of the history	37
2.4 The review history of SGYY in the English language	39
2.4.1 Data collection	40
2.4.2 A brief introduction to the English reviews	40
<b>Chapter Three The Early Period (1820–1924): Expatriates' Endeavors</b>	<b>51</b>
3.1 Other identities of translators	56
3.1.1 Identities of foreigners in China during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries	56

## XII A Historical Survey of *Sanguo Yanyi* in English Translation

- 3.1.2 Identities and perspectives of translators 57
- 3.2 Translation purpose and translation object 63
  - 3.2.1 Influence of Chinese culture on the choice of the translator 65
  - 3.2.2 Sinologists' views on the novel as a literary form 66
  - 3.2.3 Translation as leisure-time reading material 69
  - 3.2.4 Translation as language learning material 72
  - 3.2.5 Translation as research 75
- 3.3 Translation strategies 77
  - 3.3.1 Translation strategies 77
  - 3.3.2 Reasons for the translation strategies adopted 80
- 3.4 The journal as a unique outlet for translations and reviews 84
- 3.5 Conclusion 89

## Chapter Four The Middle Period (1925–1975): An Age of Diversity 91

- 4.1 Three translations of the same episode 94
  - 4.1.1 Z. Q. Parker's translation 94
  - 4.1.2 Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang's translation 95
  - 4.1.3 Cheung Yik-man's translation 98
- 4.2 Charles Henry Brewitt-Taylor and his *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* 100
  - 4.2.1 Charles Henry Brewitt-Taylor 100
  - 4.2.2 The reason why Brewitt-Taylor undertook the translation 101
  - 4.2.3 Target reader 107
  - 4.2.4 Translation strategies 111
  - 4.2.5 Publisher's role in the formation of the translation 119
  - 4.2.6 Mistranslations 122
  - 4.2.7 Reception of the translation by Brewitt-Taylor's contemporaries 131
  - 4.2.8 Influence of Brewitt-Taylor's translation 133

4.3	Conclusion	137
-----	------------	-----

## Chapter Five The Late Period (1976– ): The Academic Turn 139

5.1	Translation purpose and target audience	141
5.2	Production under ideal circumstances	142
5.3	The academic turn and the translator's subjectivity	143
5.3.1	The translator as a scholar	144
5.3.2	The translator's subjectivity and translation strategies	148
5.4	Patronage	158
5.5	Reception of Roberts's translations	159
5.5.1	The 1976 edition	159
5.5.2	The 1991 edition	161
5.5.3	The 1999 edition	164
5.6	Mistranslations in Moss Roberts's versions	164
5.7	Conclusion	166

## Chapter Six Conclusion 169

6.1	Historical tendencies of the English translation of SGYY	171
6.1.1	Transformation of the subject of translation activities	171
6.1.2	Transformation of the translation purpose and readership	172
6.1.3	Transformation of the translator's cultural orientation	173
6.2	Retranslation and its causality	175

## Bibliography 179

## Appendices 193

Appendix A: A Catalogue of English Translations of SGYY (in chronological order)	193
---	-----

Appendix B: A Catalogue of English Reviews of SGYY (in chronological order) 196

Appendix C: An Interview with Professor Moss Roberts 198

List of Tables 201



## Chapter One

### Introduction

In 1820 the most popular Chinese novel *Sanguo yanyi* (shortened as SGYY hereafter, *Elaborations on the Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms* 《三国志演义》<sup>①</sup>) was introduced for the first time to the English-speaking world. A British printer named P. P. Thoms published his translation under the title “The Death of the Celebrated Minister Tung-cho” in *The Asiatic Journal* in December. It was an excerpt translated from the eighth and ninth chapters of the novel. The translation was continued in the same journal in February 1821. This twenty-three-page translation also covered a rendering of Jin Shengtan’s (金圣叹) preface to the original work in the form of a footnote. Thoms (1820: 525) annotated:

The narrative in the text is extracted and translated into English from the San-kwo-che, a Chinese history of the most celebrated of their civil wars. This history is much esteemed by the Chinese, not only for its literary merit, but because it contains (as they imagine) a copious and accurate narrative of the wars and calamities of the period to which it relates.

---

① Despite the immense popularity of this work in China, there is no single standard title for extant editions of SGYY (for further information please refer to 2.1). It is simply known as *Sanguo yanyi* (《三国志演义》) to modern Chinese people, while in the West it is most familiar under the name *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, the influential translation by C. H. Brewitt-Taylor. As the nature of this book is to discuss translation issues, the author simply adopts SGYY to refer to the original work so as to avoid partiality for any extant translations.

The translation and the brief introduction marked the beginning of the dissemination of SGYY in the English-speaking world. For almost two hundred years thereafter, different kinds of translations of the novel—in verse or in prose, abridged or complete, adapted or unadapted—have come into being. At the same time, reviews and studies of the novel in various forms—book reviews, prefaces or postscripts to translations, monographs, literary histories, literary anthologies, dictionaries, encyclopedias, biographies, textbooks, and so on—have accompanied and propelled the translation's development in history. In many cases, especially in the early years when Chinese studies was still in its primeval stage, it is fairly difficult to draw a boundary line between the translation and review of the novel. The two processes are often interlaced, with one imbedded in the other. Even in the late twentieth century, translators and scholars of the novel always benefit from each other's work, and sometimes a person can have both identities.

The journey of a literary work from one language and culture into those of another is composed of the processes of translation, review and study, and reception. In the process of translation, it is shaped with a foreign language and culture; in the process of review and study, it is examined against the poetics of that foreign culture; in the process of reception, it is accepted or rejected, commented on or imitated upon. The three processes are mutually complementary and work together to promote the dissemination of the literary work. The latter two processes often intertwine. In fact, review and study can be viewed as a subclass of reception, because they always present scholarly reception of a literary work.

The present study takes the translation history of the novel SGYY in the English language as its research object, using review and study as supporting material to explain various translation issues. According to André Lefevere (1992: 4), rewriting can be “the translation, editing, and anthologization of texts, the compilation of literary histories and reference works, and the production of the kind of criticism...mostly in the guise of biographies and book reviews.” The present study agrees with Lefevere