

【三國演義】



CHINESE CLASSICS

# Three Kingdoms

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VOLUME I



I

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS BEIJING

# THREE KINGDOMS

Volume I

LUO GUANZHONG

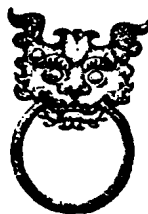


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Volume II

LUO GUANZHONG

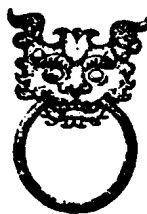


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Volume III

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Volume IV

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# THREE KINGDOMS



## INTRODUCTION

*Three Kingdoms* was the first full-length novel with clear chapter divisions to appear in ancient China. It is a classic historical romance. No other work of this genre, in past times or present, has had such a deep and wide-ranging impact on Chinese society. The Chinese title of the novel, *Sanguo Yanyi*, indicates that its theme is "righteousness," which at one time was extolled as the highest standard of virtue in China. The novel's fictionalized account of Guan Yu reading the *Spring and Autumn Annals* has produced the standard image of this hero as almost a deity worthy of worship. The various episodes have been transmitted to every nook and cranny of Chinese society, either directly or indirectly by means of the theater, songs and other channels of popular culture, and are known in every household in the land.

*Three Kingdoms* was created by Luo Guanzhong, based on the historical work *Sanguo Zhi* (*Annals of the Three Kingdoms*) by Chen Shou. In the Supplementary Record of Deceased Personages by Jia Zhongming of the early Ming Dynasty, there is a short note on Luo Guanzhong:

"Luo Guanzhong, native of Taiyuan. Pseudonym 'Wanderer by Lake and Sea.' A man of solitary habits, he is skilled at writing *yuefu* poems and is a pure and honest person. We have been friends despite the difference in our ages. A man with a wealth of experience, Luo is widely traveled. We last met each other more than 60 years ago, and there has been no news of

him since."

From the above data, we can surmise that Luo Guanzhong was born in the Yuan Dynasty and died in the early years of the Ming Dynasty. So he is usually called a man of the Yuan-Ming transition period. The *Supplementary Record of Deceased Personages* identifies his hometown as Taiyuan, which tallies with an inscription in an early edition of *Three Kingdoms* which refers to "Guanzhong, a native of Dongyuan" (Dongyuan being an archaic name for Taiyuan). From the *Supplementary Record of Deceased Personages*, too, we learn that Luo Guanzhong led a wandering and rootless life during the period of turmoil that marked the end of the Yuan Dynasty, that his character was marked by a solitary aloofness and that he had a penchant for popular literature. The *Supplementary Record of Deceased Personages* says that he was the author of three zaju plays (zaju was a poetic drama set to music, popular in the Yuan Dynasty), of which only one, *Song Emperor Taizu's Tempestuous Meeting*, survives. It also names him as the author of three other novels besides *Three Kingdoms*—*Stories from the Annals of the Sui and Tang Dynasties*, *Fragmentary Tales from the Tang and Five Dynasties Periods and the Sorcerer's Revolt and Its Suppression by the Three Suis*.

How did Luo Guanzhong come to create *Three Kingdoms*? Gao Ru of the Ming Dynasty gives the following outline of the book in Volume Six of his *Hundred River Bibliography*:

"It is based on historical facts, but also incorporates fictional elements. The language is elegant and it upholds righteous-

ness. It is easy to read, while avoiding vulgarity and triviality. It is not written in the pedantic style of the historian, but it eschews careless chatter and jocularity. It is a panorama of 100 years."

From the arrangement of the plot and the descriptions of the characters, we can indeed see that Luo Guanzhong embellished historical facts with fictional elements. Also, his artistic method was to combine invention with authenticity and cater to both refined and popular tastes. So Gao Ru's assessment of the novel is an accurate one.

*The Annals of the Three Kingdoms*, written by Chen Shou of the Jin Dynasty, gives a comparatively complete account of the division of the erstwhile Han empire into three parts by Cao Cao, Liu Bei and Sun Quan. Chen Shou's work was greatly enriched some 130 years after his death by Pei Songzhi's annotations, which incorporated a large amount of new materials and expanded the original work by several times. The "historical facts" which Gao Ru says Luo Guanzhong based *Three Kingdoms* on refers to Pei Songzhi's annotated version of the *Annals of the Three Kingdoms*. But the latter work is a history presented as a series of biographies, with the personages as the woof and the time sequence as the warp of the account; in this it differs from the novel style, which places incident and plot at the center of the narrative.

*The General History for the Aid of Government*, compiled by Sima Guang of the Northern Song Dynasty, is a historical record covering the period from the 23rd year of King Weilie of the Zhou Dynasty (403 B.C.) to the sixth year of the Xiande reign period of Emperor Shizong of the Later Zhou Dynasty (959 A.D.). This is a span of 1,300

years, and contains accounts of the last years of the Han Dynasty and the entire *Three Kingdoms* period. The main events are presented in chronological order, so that the reader can follow clearly their emergence, development and outcome, and providing convenient material for the creation of a novel. However, the complete work is lengthy and unwieldy, and as a consequence condensed versions appeared, the most influential of which was the *General History for the Aid of Government With a Network of Headings*, by the Southern Song philosopher Zhu Xi. This book did not just give a more abbreviated account of the history of the *Three Kingdoms* than Sima Guang's work; it brought a completely different concept to bear on the period. Whereas Sima Guang's work followed convention by supporting the claim of Cao Cao's Wei Kingdom to be the legitimate successor to the Han Dynasty, Zhu Xi assigned that honor to the Shu-Han Kingdom ruled by Liu Bei. This shift of emphasis was quite naturally connected with the contemporary rivalry between the Southern Song and the Jin Dynasty in the north, and at the same time was in tune with a long-held tendency among ordinary people to favor Liu Bei and regard Cao Cao as a villain. In addition, it laid the ideological groundwork upon which *Three Kingdoms* was built.

Gao Ru said that Luo Guanzhong added elements of fiction to authentic history. In ancient times, the word fiction had a very broad meaning, including even folk legends, but it was held in contrast to recorded "authentic history" because of the unsubstantiated elements it contained. A wide variety of legends based on the history of the *Three Kingdoms* sprang up very early among the common people.

Some of them are contained in volumes such as *Records of Shu* by Wang Yin of the Eastern Jin Dynasty and the *New Anecdotes of Social Talk* by Liu Yiqing of the State of Song during the Southern Dynasties period. In addition, the Records of Music section of the *History of the Jin Dynasty* contains details of stories from the *Three Kingdoms* which were designed to be sung and which contain the embryo of the plot of *Three Kingdoms*. Records of public lectures given in temples during the Tang Dynasty contain titles of *Three Kingdoms* stories. In the storytellers' prompt books of the Song and Yuan dynasties, one of the titles is *The Threefold Division*. Su Shi, a leading literary figure of the Northern Song Dynasty presents evidence of how widely stories of the *Three Kingdoms* were known in Volume 6 of his *Dongpo Anthology*:

"Urchins in muddy lanes abandon their miserable hovels, and take their pennies to join the throng around the storyteller. When he tells the old tales of the *Three Kingdoms*, they frown and tears start from their eyes at the defeat of Liu Xuande, but they laugh uproariously at the defeat of Cao Cao."

This is backed up in Volume 5 of *Reminiscences of the Eastern Capital* by Meng Yuanlao of the Southern Song Dynasty. He mentions that in Bianjing (present-day Kaifeng), the capital of the Northern Song Dynasty, there was a public entertainer named Huo Sijiu who used to tell the stories about the *Three Kingdoms*. According to Volume 25 of Tao Zongyi's *Resting from the Plow in South Village*, five *zaju* plays dealing with *Three Kingdoms* subjects were popular in both north and south China when

those areas were ruled respectively by the Jin and Southern Song dynasties. They were *The Bloody Battle of the Red Cliffs*, *The Stabbing of Dong Zhuo*, *The Meeting at Xiangyang*, *The Great Liu Bei and Cursing Lü Bu*. Even more *zaju* plays dealing with *Three Kingdoms* themes were produced during the Yuan Dynasty—over 40 titles are listed in documents from the period, of which only 21 survive. Two are attributed to the master playwright of the Yuan, Guan Hanqing: *Lord Guan Displays His Swordsmanship* and *The Dream of Lord Guan and Zhang Fei Journeying to Western Shu*. Other notable works were *Liu Xuande Goes Alone to the Xiangyang Meeting*, by Gao Wenxiu, *The Topsy and Homesick Wang Can Mounts the Tower and Battles against Lü Bu at Tiger-Trap Pass*, by Zheng Guangzu, and *The Topsy Liu Xuande Leaves the Yellow Crane Tower*, by Zhu Gai.

A work which had a very close influence on *Three Kingdoms*, *The Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novella*, appeared in the Zhizhi reign period (1321-1323) of the Yuan Dynasty. The novella, or “pinghua,” was written in colloquial language and was an early form of the novel. In fact, it bears the hallmark of all succeeding colloquial literature. Although the narrative is rudely handled, this novella clearly sets out the outline of the plot of the later *Three Kingdoms*. Although we cannot say for certain that the latter novel was based on the novella, it is very likely that Luo Guanzhong was familiar with all the storytellers’ prompt book versions of the *Three Kingdoms* stories. Nevertheless, the novella marks the high tide of development of the *Three Kingdoms* stories as they were known in the Yuan Dynasty, and this was the platform from which Luo

Guanzhong launched his masterpiece.

*Three Kingdoms* has been described as a "compilation of subject matter built up over generations." While it is true that the novel's themes are an accretion of the experience of generations, it is misleading to think of the work as a "joint endeavor." If we compare the *Three Kingdoms* stories as they were handed down in folk legend and in novels and plays with *Three Kingdoms*, it is clear that Luo Guanzhong was no mere editor or compiler. From the Yuan *zaju* plays and *The Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novella* to *Three Kingdoms* there is a qualitative leap, and this qualitative leap was brought into being by the creativity and artistry of Luo Guanzhong. Apart from selecting and processing historical and folk tale material, Luo, more importantly, drew on his own life experience to delineate the characters in the novel, and put his own feelings, thoughts and aspirations into the artistic conception. The prolonged warfare and the emergence of a rich crop of martial heroes in the waning years of the Yuan Dynasty was reminiscent of the situation that marked the end of the Han Dynasty and the succeeding *Three Kingdoms* period: The Yuan Dynasty still clung to the northern part of the country; Zhu Yuanzhang controlled the eastern part, on the lower reaches of the Yangtze River; and the Sichuan region was held by Ming Yuzhen. In fact, at that time Zhu Yuanzhang himself compared his dominion to that of Wu and Ming Yuzhen's to that of Shu. The Yuan Dynasty thus corresponded to Cao Cao's northern Wei Kingdom. Although the situation was not quite as dramatic as it had been in the earlier period, the similarities no doubt were the inspiration for Luo Guanzhong's treatment of his narrative.

As Gao Ru pointed out, *Three Kingdoms* is written in easily accessible classical language, which at the same time combines lofty turns of phrase with down-to-earth diction. The early editions of the novel include 24 volumes with a total of 240 episodes. Each chapter has a seven-character heading, such as "The Oath-Taking in the Peach Garden." Some of the editions which appeared in the Wanli reign period of the Ming Dynasty are in formats of 6, 12 or 20 volumes, and those which were published in the Tianqi and Chongzhen reign periods were not divided up into volumes at all, but were issued in 120 chapters, instead of 240 episodes, and the chapter headings consisted of two lines each of seven characters. The annotated edition of Mao Zonggang of the Kangxi reign period of the Qing Dynasty divides the novel into 60 volumes and 120 chapters. The chapter headings consist of two antithetical lines each of seven or eight characters. This format eventually became the standard one.

The narrative of *Three Kingdoms* covers a period of 100 years, from the rebellion of the Yellow Turbans to the replacement of the division of the country into the *Three Kingdoms* by the Jin Dynasty. Luo Guanzhong's support for Liu Bei and his bias against Cao Cao is abundantly clear in the novel's pages. Not only does he place Liu Bei and his company in the center of the plot, he makes the fates of Liu Bei, Guan Yu, Zhang Fei and Zhuge Liang the focus of the reader's attention from the oath taken in the Peach Garden to the death of Zhuge Liang at Wuzhangyuan. The members of this group too are central in the placement and description of the characters in the book.

Liu Bei is presented as a benevolent and upright man.



In his quest to recover the Central Plains as the leader of the common people against the feudal lords, he has neither the powerful clan connections of Yuan Shao nor the network of political power that Cao Cao has; he only has the assistance of the men he swore brotherhood with in the Peach Garden and the flag of benevolence and righteousness to rely on. His political program is the restoration of the Han Dynasty, and at all times he appears as a loyal supporter of the house of Han. In this he forms a complete contrast to Cao Cao, who harbors a sinister ambition to use the emperor as a puppet. The novel amply describes how Liu Bei attempts to put into practice his lofty ideals of benevolence and righteousness in the course of his dire political struggles. For instance, following his reverse in the battle of Xiangyang, Liu Bei leads his army in retreat from the pursuing cavalry of Cao Cao. His flight is slowed by large numbers of dependants scurrying along with the army, but rather than abandon them Liu Bei is prepared to risk the annihilation of his forces. Such an expression of benevolent rule and love for the people forms a sharp contrast with the extremely selfish attitude of Cao Cao, expressed as "Better that I should wrong the world than that the world should wrong me." When Guan Yu is killed at the battle of Maicheng, Liu Bei swears a solemn oath that he will avenge his death, even though he knows that by taking up arms against the Kingdom of Wu he will be contravening the strategy of allying with Wu against Cao Cao. This shows that he puts his ties of friendship with his sworn brother above considerations of political expediency: "If I do not avenge my brother, even if I gain the whole empire I can not be considered noble." Even in the disas-