

THREE KINGDOMS

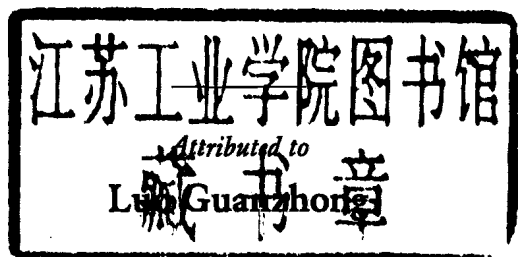
A HISTORICAL NOVEL

Attributed to
LUO GUANZHONG



THREE KINGDOMS

A Historical Novel



*Translated from the Chinese with
Afterword and Notes by*

Moss Roberts

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS /
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
Beijing / Berkeley Los Angeles Oxford

三国演义

(上)

罗贯中 著

罗慕士 译

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外文出版社出版

(中国北京百万庄路 24 号)

邮政编码 100037

北京外文印刷厂印刷

中国国际图书贸易总公司发行

(中国北京车公庄西路 35 号)

北京邮政信箱第 399 号 邮政编码 100044

1994 年(28 开)第一版

(英)

ISBN 7-119-01664-4 /I·320 (外)

04185

10-E-2657DA

Calligraphy by Yang Xianyi

First Edition 1994

ISBN 7-119-01664-4

© Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1994

Published by Foreign Languages Press
24 Baiwanzhuang Road, Beijing 100037, China
and by University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California
University of California Press, Ltd., Oxford, England

Printed by Beijing Foreign Languages Printing House
19 Chegongzhuang Xilu, Beijing 100044, China

Distributed by China International Book Trading Corporation
35 Chegongzhuang Xilu, Beijing 100044, China
P.O. Box 399, Beijing, China

Printed in the People's Republic of China

Not for sale in North America

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Moss Roberts

A number of people have made this project possible and helped bring it to completion—first of all my teachers, whose devotion to the subject matters of sinology has inspired me and guided my studies. Among the most influential were the late P.A. Boodberg, who instructed me in ancient Chinese and the connections between language and history, and W.T. de Bary, whose instruction in Chinese thought has stood me in good stead as a translator. As a student, I also benefited from the devoted labor of many language lecturers at Columbia University and the University of California at Berkeley, who shared their learning without stint.

This project first took shape as an abridged *Three Kingdoms*, which Pantheon Books published in 1976 for use in college classes. The abridged version has its limitations and its mistakes, however, and I harbored the hope that some day the opportunity to translate the entire text would present itself. That opportunity came in 1982 when the late Luo Liang, deputy editor-in-chief at the Foreign Languages Press, proposed that I translate the whole novel for the Press. He and Israel Epstein arranged for me to spend the year 1983-84 at the FLP as a foreign expert. I arrived in Beijing and began work in September of 1983. At the FLP I enjoyed the friendship and benefited from the advice of a number of colleagues. I wish to thank the staff of the English section, in particular the senior staff, for the help and encouragement that made that first year of work so pleasantly memorable. I was also fortunate to have been awarded a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship for the translation.

In the middle stages of the project Xu Mingqiang, vice director at FLP, and his colleague Huang Youyi, deputy editor-in-chief, facilitated my work in many ways. I am particularly grateful that they arranged to have the late C. C. Yin (Ren Jiazhen) serve as the

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FLP's reader. Mr. Yin read the whole manuscript with painstaking care and his recommendations improved the translation considerably. I thank him for sharing his learning and experience with me. At the same time I benefited from the erudition of my life-long teacher, friend, and colleague C.N.Tay, now retired from New York University. Professor Tay served as my reader, and many of his suggestions have been incorporated into the translation.

During 1984 Brian George of the University of California Press visited the FLP and helped to prepare the way for joint FLP-UCP publication. I thank him for his interest in my work and his encouragement over the long years of this project. William McClung and James Clark of the UCP arranged the joint publication with the late Zhao Yihe of the FLP. Shortly thereafter, the UCP, the FLP, and I concluded that the Western reader would be best served by adding a full set of notes and an extended commentary on the text. This format was adopted, and the translation became eligible for support from the National Endowment for the Humanities; In 1985 and 1986 I was fortunate to hold a fifteen-month fellowship from the NEH that relieved me of half my teaching duties.

The translation owes much to the wisdom of John S. Service, whom the UCP engaged to serve as its reader when the manuscript was completed. His stylistic grace has refined many a phrase, and his pertinent and penetrating queries on both the text and the introduction were of great value to me. Having so demanding and knowledgeable a reader turned the arduous last years of the project into an energizing experience. I also wish to thank Deborah Rudolph for contributing her considerable sinological and proof-reading skills. In the later stages of the project William McClung and Betsey Scheiner of the UCP were generous with their encouragement and good counsel, lightening my task and my spirits.

Another scholar I wish to thank is Robert Hegel, who read the first half of the manuscript for the UCP. I made use of a significant number of his suggestions. Chauncey S. Goodrich kindly read the introduction in draft and suggested useful changes; these too have been incorporated. I would like to thank as well my friend James Peck; although he did not work directly on the manuscript, his thoughtful comments have widened the view on many issues. Mr.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Peck was the editor for the abridged version published by Pantheon, and his continued interest in the project has been encouraging.

The abovementioned, by giving so generously of their time and talent, have improved this project greatly. Errors and doubtful points surely remain, and for these I take full responsibility. A word of recognition is also due to C. H. Brewitt-Taylor, whose 1925 translation of *Three Kingdoms* I read long before gathering enough Chinese to confront the original.

To the students in my Chinese language and literature classes, my thanks for twenty years of challenge and excitement in what has been (at least for me) a learning experience; and to my colleagues in the East Asian Studies Program of Washington Square College, New York University, my appreciation for the years of sustaining companionship and critical interchange.

To my mother, Helen, who takes a loving interest in my work, my gratitude for years of support and encouragement. The translation is dedicated to my wife, Florence, who serves the poorer citizens of New York City as a Legal Services attorney in family law.

FOREWORD

John S. Service

In 1942, during China's war against Japan, I happened to be a solitary American traveling with a party of Chinese from Chengdu to Lanzhou and beyond. They were officials and engineers of the National Resources Commission, with a sprinkling of journalists. All were college graduates; many had advanced degrees from foreign study. We rode together intimately in a small bus, and our first main objective was Hanzhong in southern Shaanxi.

Almost from the start I noticed that my companions were having vigorous discussions that seemed to involve the old names of various towns that our road passed through. Changing place-names are one of the problems of Chinese history, and I paid little attention. About the third day the discussions could no longer be ignored. Our youngest member, the *Dagong bao* correspondent, excitedly announced that the walled town we were approaching was the site of Zhuge Liang's "Empty City Stratagem."¹ The whole area we were passing through, it turned out, had been the scene of many hard-fought campaigns during the wars of the Three Kingdoms.

Years before, as a boy in China, I had heard vaguely of the famous novel. Travel in Sichuan in those days was by sedan chair. About once an hour the bearers would set us down while they regained strength at a tea shop. Sometimes, sitting at a small raised table at the rear, there would be a storyteller. To my queries, my patient father usually replied: "Probably something from *Three Kingdoms*." Also, we occasionally saw a snatch of Chinese opera. Again, it seemed to be "something from *Three Kingdoms*." But the tea shop rests were brief, and missionary families did not spend much time at the Chinese opera. Having read about King Arthur and his knights of the round table, I decided that *Three Kingdoms* must be something of the same: romantic myths of a misty never-never land of long ago. It was startling to find that for these

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men of modern China it was fact and history. Furthermore, these tales of martial valor and deepest loyalty had special relevance for them in that time of foreign aggression—with Chinese resistance being based on the actual area of Liu Bei's old kingdom of Shu.

Eventually, of course, I read *Three Kingdoms*. It was like donning a special pair of glasses. Our family's life while I was growing up in Sichuan had been dominated by the cataclysmic ebb and flow of local warlord politics (having the misfortune to be both rich and populous, Sichuan perhaps surpassed all other provinces as a “warlord tianxia”). Now the dramatic posturings and righteous manifestoes, the unending intrigues and sudden changes of alliances, the forays and retreats and occasional battles, even the actual tactics used—all had a familiar ring. The whole cast of players, it seemed, had absorbed the stories and lessons of *Three Kingdoms* and could not forget them.

It was not only the warlords who found guidance and inspiration in *Three Kingdoms*. After the success of the communists' Long March, the Guomindang spent the years from 1934 to 1937 in largely fruitless efforts to obliterate all traces of the remnants left behind. It is recorded that the military leader of the old Eyuwan base area “was an avid reader, though not apparently of Marxist books. His favorite works included . . . *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. [This] he carried with him always, while fighting or marching, and he consulted it as a military manual between battles.”²

The Guomindang, too, was not immune. When Chiang Kai-shek commissioned Dai Li in 1932 to set up a military secret service, he is reported to have instructed Dai to look for an organizational ethos in the Chinese traditional novels. Thus Dai's organization adopted operational techniques from the KGB, the Gestapo, and eventually the FBI, but it was built as a sworn brotherhood devoted to benevolence and righteousness and held together by bonds of mutual loyalty and obligation—with a clear model in *Three Kingdoms*.³

One could go on. But perhaps I have sufficiently made the point that *Three Kingdoms* continues to have vitality in Chinese attitudes and behavior. That fact alone makes it important to us outsiders who seek to know and understand China.

FOREWORD

There is another important reason, more general and nonutilitarian, why *Three Kingdoms* well merits a reading. For at least four hundred years it has continued to be a favorite of the world's largest public. The literate of China read and reread it; those who can not read learn it (perhaps even more intensely) from storytellers and opera and word of mouth. It is, simply, a terrific story. Every element is there: drama and suspense, valor and cowardice, loyalty and betrayal, power and subtlety, chivalry and statecraft, the obligations of ruler and subject, conflicts in the basic ties of brotherhood and lineage. By any criterion, I suggest, it is an important piece of world literature.

We are fortunate, therefore, to have this new complete and, for the first time, annotated translation by Moss Roberts. Professor Roberts has admirably preserved the vigor and flavor of the Chinese text. His erudition and patience have produced a clarity of language and yet enable us to enjoy the subtleties and wordplays of the original. His translations of the poems, important in the story, are often inspired.

Though urging the reader on, I cannot promise that it will be an easy read. The story, admittedly, is long and complex. We are doubly fortunate, then, that Professor Roberts has complemented his excellent translation with background information and the translated notes and commentary by the editor of the traditional Chinese version of the novel. With the help of his research and the guidance of the Chinese commentary, the way is greatly eased. Few, I hope, will falter and thus fail fully to enjoy this absorbing, rewarding, and majestic novel.

NOTES

1. See chapter 95.
2. My thanks to Gregor Benton of the University of Leeds, whose forthcoming history of the Three Year War will be published by the University of California Press.
3. Wen-hsin Yeh, "Dai Li and the Liu Geqing Affair: Heroism in the Chinese Secret Service During the War of Resistance," *Journal of Asian Studies* 48, (1989): 545-47.

劉
備



Liu Bei (Xuande), leader of the three oath brothers and founder of the kingdom of Shu (the Riverlands), posthumously First Ruler of the Shu-Han dynasty (r. A.D. 221-22)

張
飛



Zhang Fei (Yide), the third oath brother

貂
蟬



Diaochan, singing girl who undoes Dong Zhuo for
Wang Yun



呂
布

Lǚ Bù, companion to Dong Zhuo, suitor to Diaochan

曹
操



Cao Cao, commander of Han forces and regent to Emperor Xian, founder of the fief of Wei, posthumously Emperor Wu of the Wei dynasty