The process of translation, adaptation, and question of feminism in Luo Guanzhong's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*

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ABSTRACT

As one of the Four Great Classic Novels of Chinese literature, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* found its way to the constellation of World Literature via translation and being adapted into the movie Red Cliff (2008) and famous video games series Dynasty Warriors (1997-now). This process further made the story of the Three Kingdom is widely known as many cinemagoers and gamers can associate themselves with the story in the form that they adore. Both processes, however, have disadvantages as they erase the Chinese cultural elements that are demonstrated in the novel. This novel is also heavily riddled with patriarchal paradigm that makes scholars consider *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* "masculine novel" by portraying women in a very weak position in Chinese society. This paper would try to dissect the issues of translation and women portrayal in detail by analyzing the translated work of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* to see what cultural aspect that is disappear as a result of translation and dissecting the dismissive and derogative portrayal of several women characters in the novel.

Keywords: *feminism, Luo Guanzhong, Romance of the Three Kingdoms, world literature*

INTRODUCTION

Romance of the Three Kingdoms (Sānguó yǎnyì) is a famous historical novel written in 14th century by Luo Guanzhong set in the era of Three Kingdom in Chinese history roughly 169-280. Romance of the Three Kingdoms is acclaimed as one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature; it has a total of 800,000 words and nearly a thousand dramatic characters (mostly historical) in 120 chapters (Roberts, 1991, p. 940). Despite the historical setting and the character which is based on the real personage in that era, the story of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is not entirely historical. As the title suggests, the story is the romanticized version of the history which also encompasses some events that did not really happen, with which this embellishment serves as the "Romantic" device of the plot as it makes the story has more romantic tune instead of realistic one. In researching the historical part of the novel, the author made use of available historical records, including the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* compiled by Chen Shou, which covered events from the Yellow Turban Rebellion in 184 to the unification of the Three Kingdoms under the Jin dynasty in 280.

This source material is later supplanted with material from Tang dynasty poetic works, Yuan dynasty operas and his own personal interpretation of elements such as virtue and legitimacy (1991, pp. 946-953).

Therefore, it is safe to assume that the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is a combination of a historical fact and fiction which is intended to create unique atmosphere to the readers.

Extrapolating on how this Chinese classical work can be incorporated into canonical world literature, this paper explores the translation of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* into English. The novel's fame rose internationally when it was translated into English, firstly done in 1907 by John G. Steele although this translation is still considered very rough and not a faithful one. Later on Charles Henry Brewitt-Taylor, a long time official of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, published a complete and faithful translation of the novel in two volumes in 1925 (Classe, 2000, pp. 1221-1222).

The *Encyclopedia of literary translation into English* noted that Brewitt-Taytor translation was good, but lacked any supplementary materials such as maps or character lists that would aid Western readers. Responding to the translation critique, a 1959 reprint was published that included maps and an introduction by Roy Andrew Miller to assist readers unfamiliar with Chinese tradition and custom. In the forewords to the 1959 reprint of the Brewitt-Taylor translation, Roy Andrew Miller also claims that the theme that the novel enriches and expands Chinese literary works, later on World Literature.

Miller states that the novel's chief theme is "the nature of human ambition", which is echoed by Moody. Moody explores the relationship between politics and morality, specifically the conflict between the idealism of Confucian political thought and the harsh realism of Legalism, as a related theme (Moody Jr., 1975, pp. 178-179). After the translation and the supplementary material was meticulously done, the Western reader without any problem at all can enjoy the novel. From English, the novel has been translated into many languages including Indonesian comic reproduction. The process of translation and comic reproduction mark the transformation of the *Romance of the Three Kingdom* from Chinese classic into World Literature as it is circulated and read by people worldwide.

The novel's introduction to the World Literature further enhanced the popularity of this work. Inevitably, adaptation was then followed in order to make the works reach wider audience. Among all adaptation to the novel, the famous one is the cinematic version, *Red Cliff* (2008) that takes one chapter in the novel "Battle of the Red Cliff" and the critically acclaimed video games series made by Koei which reach its 9 series in 2018: *Dynasty Warriors* (1997-now).

While the movie adaptation *Red Cliff* is considered to be a good adaptation, it is the game adaptation *Dynasty Warriors* that steals the light by becoming a very popular game played by many gamers in the world, clearly make the story of the Three Kingdoms soars against the boundary of the national borders. Considered as a groundbreaking effort to create a historical video game, gamers all over the world can enjoy entertainment while studying the history of the Three Kingdom in the same time by playing as the characters in the Three Kingdoms Era. Inevitably, many children all over the world who play the games understand the history of the Three Kingdoms even before they touch the historical book or read the novel. Therefore, *Dynasty Warriors* is considered as a successful adaptation of the novel for not only its entertainment but also educational purposes.

Although the process of adaptation and translation of Romance of the Three Kingdoms is generally positive, with which this novel has reached a global popularity

and it is known by diverse demographics, the processes also evoke potential problems. This paper shall discuss about the problems that occurred particularly relating to the cultural elements which is lost during the translation process. Additionally, this paper also explores Romance of the Three Kingdoms from feminist perspective, concerning with the dismissive and derogative portrayal of several women characters in the novel.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chinese Philosophical View on Women

Before going further to analyse the dismissive and derogative portrayal of several women character in the novel, it is paramount to understand first Chinese philosophical view on Women. Many of Chinese philosophies mainly places men as the ruler while women serves as the subject starting from Three Obediences and Four Virtues and *Yin-Yang* principal. Rosenlee (2006) adds additional information regarding the *yin-yang* principle and discuss new philosophical ideal of *nei-wai* (inside and outside) as follows

> The *nei-wai* distinction signifies more than just the ritual propriety of gender relations; it functions also as a marker of civility. In other words, the *nei* and the *wai* embody not only the process of genderization and ritualization but also the process of civilization within and without (Rosenlee, 2006, p. 70).

Through Rosenlee's explanation, it can be underlined that another theory of gender role is already enforced within the Chinese society in order to separate man and women roles. This strict demarcation causes the lesser one to not having the same right as the former. Rosenlee adds more detail about Chinese Gender role in her writing (2006, p.82) that women resides in the realm of the *nei* or inside and therefore needs to fulfill the domestic role as a good and proper wife that serve the husband well while men belong to the realm of *nei* or outside that resides on the outside in order to study well and become a good leader of the family.

Chinese consider this role as an absolute rule that needs to be followed in order to become a good family. Falling to follow this rule often lead to consequences in the form of supernatural belief and myth that often being told from generation to generation to maintain the tradition. To maintain the balance is the reason that often used so that the women has no choice but to obey the women. Rosenlee also points out that this gender role is connected to the yin-yang principle which states that

> the yin is resolutely female, passive, and nature-oriented as opposed to its negating counterpart, the yang, denoting male, active, and human society. The yin-yang metaphor in the Western eyes is a conceptual equivalent of the Western paradigm of femininity and masculinity (2006, p. 49).

In order for everything to be in order, Chinese believes in *yin* and *yang* and thus incorporating this paradigm into their gender roles. As man is *yang*-active, women need to be his counterpart, which is *yin*-passive. Falling to do so could not be happened, as it will disturb the balance. Having an active daughter is not preferable as later on when she is married, she will create double *yang* with the husband and by doing so make the family unbalance. This is why the women is Chinese society is expected to be docile, passive, and submissive toward her husband while the husband act as the counterpart: active, ruling, and aggressive. Only by doing so that the balance is created between the two counterparts of *yin* and *yang.*

ANALYSIS

The Loss of Courtesy Name as a Result of Translation that Affects the Adaptation

In the process of translating *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* from Chinese into English, it is inevitable that there are some untranslatable cultural lexicons. One of the important cultural lexicon that can be found in the original text of the *Romance of the Three Kingdom* which is lost in the English translation is the culture of courtesy name. A courtesy name (Chinese: 字, zi), also known as a style name, is a name bestowed upon one at adulthood in addition to one's given name (Fu, 2009, p. 142). Similar to the Western tradition, Chinese has family name and given name with the tradition of writing the family name in front of given name as opposed to the Western tradition that writes family name after given name e.g. Liu Bei (Liu is the family name, while Bei is the given name. When a man turned twenty years old, as a sign of adulthood a *zi* (courtesy name) would replace the man's given name as a symbol of adulthood and respect.

Since the day he received his courtesy name, a man should be called by this name, calling his real given name is considered disrespectful as only the man himself and the elder could only do that. Therefore, Liu Bei is usually called Xuande (玄德)in the original text by his peers and subordinate and went with the full name *Liu Xuande* .The same goes with other characters: Guan Yu is *Yunchang* (雲長) , Zhang Fei as *Yide* (益德) , Zhuge Liang is *Kongming* (孔明).

Romance of the Three Kingdoms underlines the importance of addressing each other with courtesy name. Although Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zhang Fei is admitting each other as a sworn brother and has very close relationship, they do not call each other by given names but use courtesy name instead: Xuande, Yunchang, and Yide.

Similar cases can be found in the relationship between Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang, his foremost adviser and eventual prime minister. When the former are being asked about his relationship with the latter, Liu Bei famous reply was "I have Kongming [Zhuge Liang's courtesy name] just like a fish has water. I hope you gentlemen will not speak like that ever again" (Chen, 1959, p. 913).

While having a very close relationship, like fish and water which symbolizes how one cannot live without the other, Liu Bei still talk to Zhuge Liang using his courtesy name "Kongming" as a sign of respect. Liu Bei also addressed his entire subordinate by using their courtesy names respectively as a sign of respect while he has power over them as a ruler. For examples, he addresses his Five Tiger General by their courtesy name: Zhou Yun a Zilong (子龍), Ma Chao as Mengqi (孟起), and Huang Zhong as Hansheng (漢升). The other two are his own sworn brothers Guan Yu as Yunchang (雲長) and Zhang Fei as Yide (益德).

Despite the fact that the original text employs courtesy names as a sign of the culture at that time, the English translation of the *Romance of the Three Kingdom* omit this kind of naming system (perhaps) due to the confusion that will occurs with the non-Chinese readers.

Therefore, Brewitt-Taylor and Roberts' translation keeps each character family and given name while omitting the courtesy names completely. Following this policy, Liu Bei is still called Liu Bei and not Xuande, Zhuge Liang is not called as Kongming and so does other characters which follow the way they address each other by their given name. While it is considered as culturally incorrect and disrespectful to address someone by one's given name, the translators decide to

sacrifice the cultural aspect of the story in order to make the story reach the wider audience.

This choice also effect the adaptation of the novel later, especially in media form. One example is the movie Red Cliff (2008) that choose to not use courtesy names despite their employment of Chinese producer, director, actors and actress to reach the wider audience and to avoid confusion with the non-familiar audience when the character Zhuge Liang is addressed as Kongming**.** The video game adaptation *Dynasty Warrior*, as a comparison, also applies this strategy since its creation in 1997 until now. The game faithfully follows the naming convention of the translated version of the novel so that they can reach gamers from all over the world, which they did successfully by selling 18 million copies worldwide by 2011. It can be concluded then, sometimes in order for a works to enter the domain of World Literature some sacrifice needs to be made. In this case, the omission of a Chinese cultural elements in form of Chinese courtesy name.

Romance of the Three Kingdom: Story of Male Domination?

Despite its status as critically reclaimed Chinese work of literature that manages to find its way into the realm of World Literature, *The Romance of the Three Kingdom* is not exempt from criticism. One of the famous criticisms toward this novel comes from feminism. To give an insight before continuing further about this topic, this paper includes some brief commentary of feminism. Feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies, and social movements that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social equality of sexes (Hawkesworth, 2018, pp. 25-27).

In other words, feminist aims to make women and men have the same right and position and, according to Barry (2002, pp. 128-129) the use of feminist criticism in literary work usually deals with uncovering such inequality within the work of literature. This is where *The Romance of the Three Kingdom* appears to be a very interesting object for feminist critics.

The Three Kingdoms is a "masculine" novel par excellence, to the point where female scholars with an interest in the work are treated with great surprise in the Chinese-speaking world ("why aren't you studying the Dream of the Red Chamber?") (McLaren, 2008, p. 384). The point of view comes from the fact that the story of the Three Kingdom mainly revolves around man and man's world. The story emphasizes the various male warriors of the Three Kingdoms and their good characteristic e.g. Zhang Fei, known for his physical prowess, and Zhuge Liang, famed for his intelligence and wisdom (2008, p. 984).

While this novel also portrays female characters, usually they is only backgrounded as a side character and/or the companion of the male main characters. The novel has almost no well-developed female character; the few female characters who appear are subjected to heavy gender stereotyping (Tian, 2015, p. 230). Even if there is an important role for them, it is usually related with their as a "tool" for plot progression and/or the means for the male warrior to get their way with their purpose.

One of the famous example is when Wang Yun coaxes his beautiful daughter Diao Chan in order to make Dong Zhuo and Lu Bu, who are step-father and son, fight toward each other. The story can be read in Luo Guanzhong's *Three Kingdoms* translated by Moss Roberts particularly in Chapter 9 entitled: "Lu Bu Kills Dong Zhuo For Wang Yun; Li Jue Attacks The Capital On Jia Xu's Advice". In the story, the tyrant Dong Zhuo is very powerful due

to his stepson Lu Bu. Lu Bu is a powerful warrior who never lose a battle and even can duel with Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zhang Fei simultaneously in a complete stalemate with no one able to win the other.

Wang Yun understands that fighting Lu Bu is tantamount to suicide and therefore devise a plan to make the father and son fighting each other. First, he invites Lu Bu to his house and introducing him to her daughter Diao, promising to get his daughter to marry him. He then done the same to Dong Zhuo to spark the conflict between two of them. His plan succeed because in the end Lu Bu killed his stepfather himself in order to get Diao Chan as his wife. This is one example in the novel of how women is used politically so that the purpose of a man, Wang Yun, can be achieved.

Another example of how the women in the story is only considered helpful to the male comes directly from the protagonist who is considered as a good character, the famous strategist Zhuge Liang himself. Zhuge Liang, who is officially enshrined as Confucian sage or archetype of present day "multicultural hero" and considered a as a model persona of Confucian values, 'a perfect man for all ages' *(qian gu wan ren)* despite the fact that his "Southern Campaign" in southwest China deprived southwestern aborigines of their land, honour, and autonomy (Peng, 2011, p. 142), is also using women as a medium to achieve his purpose.

The examples for this is the event when Zhuge Liang provoke Zhou Yu and Wu Kingdom to go to war against Wei with him (Shu). The story about this can be read in Chapter 44 of the novel entitled. "Zhuge Liang Stirs Zhou Yu To Actions; Sun Quan Decides To Attack Cao Cao". In this story, Liu Bei's Shu kingdom needs Wu kingdom's support in order to battle Cao cao's Wei's kingdom. The Wu strategist Zhou Yu is a smart and cunning man and therefore is not easy to be persuaded. He rejected Zhuge Liang proposal by saying that there is no advantages for Wu to fight Wei and Wu has no problem with Wei.

Knowing Zhao Yu did not want to fight Wei, Zhuge Liang suggest to make a peace agreement with Cao Cao so that he would not bother any of them by giving Cao Cao a treasure that he wants most in his life: two women who considered as the most beautiful in China, two Qiao sisters from Jiangdong. Hearing this, Zhou Yu enraged as one of the Qiao is his wife and the other is his late best friend wife Sun Ce, to whom he has promised to keep her safe. After that, Zhou Yu agrees to go to war with Cao Cao as he now seeing that Cao Cao attacks his dignity and the war has become the problem of Wu kingdom.

This story is another example of how women is being seen as object, treasure in this case, and how women possession has become the part of man's dignity. Owning beautiful women is part of man's pride and dream and thus women also seen as a commodity to be owned. The story is another proof that the *Romance of Three Kingdom*, particularly due to the cultural context that binds the novel, is still see women as an object and commodity to be owned which highlight the rampant misogyny.

CONCLUSION

The process of translation and adaptation is a very important stage to elevate *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* across the world: officially turned itself from Chinese literature into the discussion of World Literature. While the process is undeniably good, it is not a perfect translation as some cultural lexicons, mainly the use of courtesy names is lost in the English translation. Furthermore, it should be noted that even such a great novel could not escape its cultural baggage: its view on women. It has been discussed in this paper that this novel per

ceives women as an object and commodity rather than a person. They only function as a means of the male warrior to achieve their purpose and to fulfill their pride and dignity.

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