

The Dissemination, Acceptance and Evolution of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Japan

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As one of the Four Great Masterpieces of China, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* has become a landmark of ancient Chinese literature with vivid and profound character images, ups and downs of politics and war descriptions, and appealing historical plots. After being introduced to Japan in the second half of the 17th century, it was spread in Japanese society and was accepted for literary value, social needs and other reasons, then a series of evolutions were produced by combining with local culture, eventually becoming a national culture in Japan. This paper selects the most popular text of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* with 24 chapters and 120 verses in the Wanli period of the Ming Dynasty, and the Japanese translation of *The Popular Romance of the Three Kingdoms* published by Hunan Wenshan in 1689 as the objects, guided by Ralph Linton's "Manifestation, Selection, Integration" cultural communication research method, to analyze the dissemination, acceptance and evolution of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in 17-20 centuries' Japan, which started from the field of literature, then combined with various cultural forms and spread to the civic class, and finally entered politics area and produced a series of evolutions under the influence of Japanese values to become the representative culture of Japan. This paper suggests that in today's world of frequent cultural exchanges, China should, based on strengthening cultural self-confidence, actively and appropriately select and accept foreign cultures with the attitude of prioritizing our own culture and utilizing foreign culture for our own purposes. The research outcome can provide experience for the current Chinese culture to go to the world with high quality.

Keywords: *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, dissemination, acceptance, evolution

Introduction

The Romance of the Three Kingdoms, one of the Four Great Masterpieces of China, is a landmark of ancient Chinese literature for its dramatic historical plots, vivid characterizations, and evocative depictions of war. In the second half of the 17th century, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was introduced to neighboring Japan, and then began to spread and be accepted in the new cultural background, resulting in a series of evolutions, and eventually became the national culture of Japan (Fan, 2011). Therefore, in nowadays increasingly close international cultural exchanges, Chinese culture needs to go global with higher quality, so it is necessary to take the dissemination, acceptance and evolution of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Japan as the object of

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study, and analyze profoundly how Chinese culture can achieve significant influence in different cultural background around the world, so as to effectively build the Chinese people's cultural self-confidence and cultural identity, and improve China's cultural soft power in the international arena (McLaren, 2008).

The objective of this paper is to study the dissemination, acceptance and evolution of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Japan through the text of the most popular *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* written during the Wanli period of the Ming Dynasty (1573-1620) and the first Japanese translation of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* published in 1689 by the monk Yicho and Tsukudo at Tenryuji Temple in Kyoto, who signed his name as "Hunan Wenshan" to investigate the process of its dissemination, acceptance and evolution of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Japan.

In the current academic research on the dissemination, acceptance and evolution of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Japan, the number of theses and research results is moderate, the scholars' research perspectives are more diversified, and a large number of these take the wider "Three Kingdoms culture" as the research object, which encompasses a broader scope of the research, but the degree of refinement is lacking; in addition, a large number of theses related to this topic are linked to local cultural development or tourism development, which is more inclined to practical value.

As there have been many games, anime and other cultural and entertainment products based on the Three Kingdoms in Japan in recent years, perhaps this has led to oceans of academic studies that choose Three Kingdoms-related movies and television productions or derivative adaptations of literary works as the objects of research to study the current situation of the Three Kingdoms culture in Japan. To a certain extent, such papers have introduced the popularity of the Three Kingdoms culture in Japan today and revealed the successful foreign dissemination effects of China's excellent traditional culture, but such literature is extremely lacking in deeper research on the dissemination, acceptance, and evolution of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* itself in Japan (Ma, 1987).

Second, among the academic studies linking *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* with Japan, there are adequate papers that analyze the images of individual representative characters to study some of the evolutions of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Japan. The main characters studied are Zhuge Liang, Guan Yu, etc. Such papers analyze the reasons for the transformation of the characters' images and summarize that some of the characters in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* are portrayed in accordance with Japanese values or social education as well as the political demands of different eras, which provides a certain degree of academic reference for this paper's study of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* being widely accepted by the Japanese people and Japanese culture (Lin, 2021).

Third, in the current academic research, the study of the dissemination process of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Japan is more often regarded as an additional part of their main content of the article, and most of the research papers only briefly skim over or give a simple timeline. Therefore, this part of the research results provides less reference value.

Finally, regarding the evolution of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Japan, the number of papers is moderate, but the quality of the papers is high, the content is abundant, the research is thorough, and the evolution of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* under the cultural background of Japan is analyzed in detail, which provides important academic knowledge support and inspiration for this thesis.

The research significance and innovation of this paper is that, first of all, through the study on the stages of cultural dissemination, this paper summarizes what characteristics of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* have been produced during different periods. What's more, it focuses on what are the characteristics of the whole dissemination process through the strict division of the timeline. This paper will no longer treat the dissemination part as an additional part of the thesis, but a thorough and perfect analytical study.

Additionally, this paper studies the acceptance of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Japan more profoundly, showing the phenomenon of acceptance and the deep-seated reasons behind it, and no longer limiting itself to a single character or adapted film or television work, but analyzing the acceptance of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* as a work of literature in conjunction with Japan's political, cultural and other backgrounds of the times. Instead, it combines the acceptance of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* with the political and cultural background of Japan to analyze the phenomenon of its acceptance and the deep-rooted reasons, which are more profound and comprehensive and have higher academic value. The above two points are also the theoretical significance of this paper.

Finally comes the practical significance of this paper. Through the successful dissemination of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Japan as an example, this paper summarizes the need to pay attention to the dissemination of Chinese excellent traditional culture in today's international context, and eventually builds up the cultural self-confidence and cultural identity of the Chinese people internally, and improves China's cultural soft power in the international context.

The primary research hypothesis of this paper was initially proposed by Professor Meng Xihua, who focused on the dissemination and acceptance of the *Mulan Legend* within the United States. By employing the three perspectives of "manifestation", "selection", and "integration" (Linton, 1936), this study evaluates the transmission of traditional Chinese culture to a different cultural background to uncover the factors that contribute to the profound embedding of the *Mulan legend*, as an aspect of Chinese culture, within the United States. In the article by Professor Meng, "manifestation" pertains to the cultural traits that emerge during the transmission process, "selection" refers to the essence behind the acceptance and acknowledgment of the culture by the local population, and "integration" is concerned with the evolution of the culture after the integration with the local social and cultural milieu. This paper will follow this idea, analyzing the essence of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*' success in Japan through its dissemination, acceptance and evolution (Meng, 2020).

Dissemination of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*

The process of dissemination of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Japan is characterized by distinctive differences in stages. On a macro level, the whole process of dissemination of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* generally reveals the common characteristics of gradual progress from the surface to the essence. In the process of dissemination, the influence of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* on Japanese literature, culture, society and political life is also from each single point to the overall and gradually deepened. This part analyzes the process and stages of the dissemination of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Japan according to the research method of stage comparative study (He, 2023), based on the distinctive features and differences of each stage of the dissemination process, which is divided into three stages: the period from the Daika Reforms (1600) to the eve of the Edo period, the Edo period (1604-1867), and the Meiji Restoration period (1868-1902).

Taika Era Reforms to the Eve of Edo Period: Basic Preparation

This stage is the beginning of the dissemination of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Japan, which is characterized by partial dissemination, accumulation and preparation, and is the basic foundation stage of the dissemination process. At this stage, the complete text of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* had not yet been introduced into Japan, and the early reception of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* by the Japanese literary area was mainly through the trade and cultural exchanges between China and Japan to obtain some classic chapters and passages, or poems and texts involving the stories of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in the previous generation (Ma, 1987), and to study and translate them, and to make *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* gradually become more and more popular in the Japanese literature by translating and disseminating the stories of history and the classical characters (Fan, 2021). Through the translation and dissemination of historical stories and allusions to the characters, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* gradually became well-known within the Japanese literary community. At this stage, the most typical literary phenomenon is the reference to the history and characters of the Three Kingdoms. The most classic literary work is *Taiping Ji*, which briefly describes the history of the Three Kingdoms from Zhuge Liang's point of view, and the references to the Three Kingdoms can be seen clearly in the work, such as "Wu and Wei fight for the world, the Battle of Red Cliffs," and so on. In addition, there are references to the characters of the Three Kingdoms, such as "The people of the world are afraid of the power of the Wolong, and they all come to pay tribute to the Wolong", and "Today's proverb says: "Dead Zhuge frightens away live Zhongda", and so on (Tanaka, 1999).

Generally speaking, before the appearance of more complete translations, Japanese readers' knowledge of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was not entirely blank, though the Japanese who could read the original version of the work are after all a minority, confining to the scope of the literary area, and have not extended to the burghers class. However, the localized and fragmentary dissemination of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in this stage not only enriches the subject for the creation of Japanese military novels, but also accomplishes the groundwork for the development and dissemination of the Three Kingdoms culture in Japan in the later period. and its importance cannot be overstated.

Edo Period: Rapid Popularity in Japanese Cultural Field

At the beginning of the Edo period around 1604, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was officially introduced into Japan, and the first complete Japanese translation, *The Popular Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was also completed in this period (Oba, 1967). Therefore, the Edo period was also a prosperous stage for the dissemination of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Japan, which was concentrated on the vigorous development of the literary world, the spread of its influence to the civic class, and the depth of integration into civic life; and the strong literary influence was gradually extended to the cultural level, giving rise to or flourishing many cultural forms and activities, and integrating with Japan's unique cultural forms. Its strong literary influence gradually extended to the cultural level, giving birth to or flourishing many cultural forms and activities, and at the same time integrating with Japan's unique cultural forms, the unique Japanese culture of the Three Kingdoms took shape (Inoue, 2008).

From the perspective of literature, the landmark event was undoubtedly the publication of the Popular Journal of the Three Kingdoms. This was the first Japanese translation of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* by

the brothers Yoshitsune and Tsukido of Tenryuji in Kyoto, who signed their name Hunan Bunsan and published it between the second and fifth years of Genroku (1689-1692). The translation changed the chapter-and-volume format of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* by combining the original 120 chapters into 50 volumes, which enhanced the continuity of the storyline. At the same time, it deleted the “Let’s listen to the explanation of the next chapter” which was a common phrase at the end of each chapter, and completely changed the work from a speaking story, which was listened to as a way of accepting, to a reading novel which was read as a way of accepting, thus realizing the conversion from a speaking story to a reading book in the true sense. Because “the area where Cao, Liu, and Sun fought during the Three Kingdoms era is several times larger than Japan’s, with many powerful men and fierce warriors, which is beyond the reach of Japan’s military literature; and the power and tactics shown in the book give Japanese people a sense of ‘fantasy’, which makes readers’ hearts tremble, and the way of description is exaggerated, which is also a good way of reading. Methods and more exaggerated strokes, writing to the pen and ink vertical and coherent and meticulous, the war situation of the ‘magnificent fast and majestic’, readers cannot help but for the ‘blood and flesh jump’, clap three sighs” (Bunzan, 1983, pp. 170-171). The preface of *The Popular Romance of the Three Kingdoms* has the sentences “The history so carries the way to the future generations”, “To make the young learners easy to understand”, “Those who read it, if there are persuaded to think that the good, the evil as a warning” (Bunzan, 1983) seems to indicate that the translator’s purpose was to make people learn from history and to punish evil and promote goodness, which is in line with the pragmatic values of Tokugawa Shogunate literature that was implemented in the Edo period to promote goodness and punish evil, and to carry the Way through literature, and therefore was very popular when it was released and was put on the stage of recreation and entertainment that the citizens of that time enjoyed, such as picture books, readers, sprinklers, and jingurigi, and this gave rise to the popularity of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* which overwhelmed the whole country from top to bottom (Tokuda, 2001).

The dissemination of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and the publication of *The Popular Romance of the Three Kingdoms* created a new situation for the translation and introduction of Chinese popular novels in Japan, breaking the dominance of Japanese classical literature and leading to the introduction of oceans of Chinese popular novels and their wide circulation. Influenced by the stories of the Three Kingdoms, many Chinese historical novels were introduced to Japan, and a series of literary works featuring Chinese history were produced; at the same time, the subject matter of popular literature in the Edo period was enriched and revitalized (Ma, 1987). During this period, due to the gradual collapse of the feudal system, popular literature such as Kusako and Sharashimoto became more decadent and homogeneous and lost its vitality. Especially from the first year of the Kyoho era (1716), Tokugawa Yoshimune further reformed the bakufu system, and in the eighth year of the Kyoho era (1723), he banned all publications about love or death, which made this kind of work even more moribund. The introduction of the stories of the Three Kingdoms was like a breath of fresh air, which ushered in the revival of popular literature in Japan. Inspired by Chinese novels such as *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *The Popular Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, some Chinese-speaking literati imitated the novels in terms of content, language, narrative, title, and even the paper, paperback, and binding of the books, and wrote a number of Kusako Shonen novels with Three Kingdoms as their content, such as Yumonaka Rakusuke’s *The Master of the Three Kingdoms for Generals* (1781), the *Master of the Kusakan of the Chiyohigaoka*, the *History of the Parade* (1789-1800), and *Shojo Shonen* (1781), all of which were published on the subject of the *Three Kingdoms*

(1789-1800) and Shohei-an Watanabashi's *Tomodachi* (1800), etc. Though there were defects in their rigidity, these novels catered to the vulgar taste of Japanese readers at this stage and further promoted the fusion of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* with popular literature and really came into the life of the public (Torii Kiyomitsu, 1760).

The dissemination of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and the publication of *The Popular Romance of the Three Kingdoms* directly gave birth to the representative form of Japanese literature, the "Du Ben". Famous literary critic Yamamoto Kenkichi said, "In the Genroku era, on the one hand, Nishizuru established the genre of short realistic novels; on the other hand, Hunan Fumiya established the genre of long romantic novels by writing the Popular Three Kingdoms" (Yamamoto, 1965). The long novel genre here refers to the form of Du Ben. In this period, due to the influence of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, the authors from the perspective of creation, in the overall conception, plot arrangement, characterization, and even "combining Chinese and Japanese cultural feature, balancing the elegance and vulgarity" as the style, are given full consideration, changing the bias of the early war literature heavy on narration and light on description, emphasizing the novel's color of romanticism. Moreover, in the creation of the book, the loyalty and righteousness of the characters of the Three Kingdoms are also used as a metaphor for the loyalty and righteousness of the Japanese samurai. Chapters such as "Offering a Secret Plan and Huang Gai to be Tortured", "Guan Yunchang Hanging the Seal and Sealing the Gold", and "Guan Yunchang Walking on a Single Horseback for a Thousand Miles" widely appeared in *The Romance of Three Kingdoms*.

In addition to showing a profound and wide-ranging influence in the literary world, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* has entered the civic class and, in combination with Japan's unique folklore and cultural activities, has spawned or enriched many cultural forms and events.

The circulation of the Three Kingdoms culture among the Japanese citizen class had a strong influence on Japanese folk illustrated literature. In the Edo period, most of the illustrated literature was based on drawings with short texts. During this period, plenty of picture books were created based on the stories of the Three Kingdoms, such as the *Painted Interpretation of the Three Kingdoms* created by Torii Kiyomitsu in 1760, the *Painted Book of the Three Tripartite States* created by Mutsukutei Elder in 1803, and the *Painted Book of the Three Kingdoms* created by Katsushika Daidou from 1836 to 1841 (Daidou, 2003), etc. These books not only intentionally enhanced the original Three Kingdoms characters' facial demeanor in an exaggerated form of expression, but also The original version of the Three Kingdoms characters in the Chinese dress transformed into a Japanese folk pattern with the characteristics of the dress modeling so that it is more in line with the general aesthetic in Japan; the late Edo period, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is gradually separated from the original text form to the Japanese stage theater Kabuki and Joruri and other forms of display, and in which began to focus on highlighting the Japanese theater art of the image of the female image of the molding and portrayal of Guan Yu, Zhuge Liang, and so on. The characters such as Guan Yu and Zhuge Liang are also portrayed prominently through the new storyline, which has been widely acclaimed (Nakabayashi, 2009).

During this period, the influence of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in the literary world became extensive and profound, bringing new vitality to Japanese popular literature and giving birth to new literary forms; it penetrated the folk life, combining with a variety of unique Japanese cultural activities, such as the creation of Japanese novels and operas, etc. Based on retaining some of the plots of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*,

cultural fusion was carried out in the form of rewriting the plots or borrowing the characters, laying the literary foundation for the formation of the later Japanese Three Kingdoms culture.

Meiji Restoration: Politically Tainted

The period of the Meiji Restoration was also an important time for the deep dissemination of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Japan. During this period, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* continued to have a profound impact on Japanese literature. As the storyline and characters had been deeply rooted in people's hearts, Japanese writers no longer rewrote the themes of the Three Kingdoms stories but shifted to pay attention to the Three Kingdoms period background and Three Kingdoms aesthetics, etc., and combined them with Japanese materialistic and sorrowful sentiments based on Chinese Three Kingdoms aesthetics to form a unique Japanese novel of sorrowful works. This led to the emergence of a number of works of "mourning literature" (Luan, 2015). For example, Doi Bansui, focusing on characterization, wrote in his long narrative poem "Starfall Autumn Wind Wuzhangyuan": "I also feel the coldness of the autumn color here. The silver armor is firmly clad, but the guards' faces are full of sadness. I burst out tears for the Prime Minister who is critically ill!" (Takumimatsuura & Kato, 2005).

The most prominent feature of this period is that Japanese writers often used the history of the Three Kingdoms as a metaphor for the changes in society in Japan, and *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* eventually entered the political and social arena after it had gained a strong influence in the literary and culture, and the related compositions and writings were characterized by their purposefulness and social realism. In terms of poetry, Doi Bansui wrote a long narrative poem called "Star Falls in Autumn Winds in Wuzhangyuan" in 1896 against the background of the story of the Three Kingdoms, which used the background of the Three Kingdoms and the life of Zhuge Liang as a metaphor for the social turmoil and political changes in the era of the Meiji Restoration in Japan; in terms of novels, Naito Konan's book *Zhuge Wuhou* published in 1897 not only satirized the political evolution in the era of Meiji Restoration with the story of the Three Kingdoms but also used characters from the Three Kingdoms as a metaphor, but also used the images of the wise in the Three Kingdoms to convey Naito Konan's longing for talents in Japan. At the same time, the new Japanese government during the Meiji Restoration, out of the need to educate the people and promote values, launched a series of cultural works with obvious political-educational colors by combining the stories or characters in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* with its own values, most of which were based on political propaganda and had a low literary value.

During this period, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* had become popular, and Japanese writers shifted their focus from storyline to contemplation of the context of the times and consideration of aesthetic values, and "literature of lamentation" was born. The most iconic feature was the extensive integration of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* into political and social activities. The novel was used either as a metaphor for social problems or as a means of expressing their own feelings about the current state of society. Meanwhile, the government also attached a political coloration to *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* to deliver political propaganda and education. Since then, the dissemination of the Three Kingdoms has penetrated the three major fields of literature, culture, and politics, and has contributed to the further development and refinement of Japanese civic culture.

Acceptance of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*

This chapter examines the reasons for the widespread acceptance of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Japanese literary, cultural, and socio-political spheres. By exploring these reasons, we can gain insight into why this foreign novel has become an integral part of Japanese national culture. This will provide a lesson for contemporary China in encouraging excellent culture to go to the whole world. This chapter analyzes and explores the Three Kingdoms from three perspectives: the literary and cultural characteristics of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* itself, Japan's consistent acceptance of and learning from Chinese culture, and the fulfillment of the political needs of the ruler and Japanese people during this period.

Unique Advantages Contained in the Text

The success of a literary work, such as a novel, depends on its inherent qualities, including the ease of understanding of the language used, the appeal of the storyline and characters, and other literary features. *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* stands out for its exceptional literary characteristics.

The Romance of the Three Kingdoms is a classic work that features a unique style of language that can be appreciated by both the common and the scholars. It is not overly complex, yet not too simplistic. The language used is a balance of literary and colloquial styles. *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was the first of the Four Great Masterpieces to be published. Compared to the other three, it may lack literary elegance, but its straightforward and colloquial language facilitates foreign translation. Using *Dream of Red Mansions* as an example, it is more complex than the relatively straightforward *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. It contains numerous textual codes, puns, harmonies, and split or combined words. The novel's charm lies in its micro-linguistic and evocative nature, which is a characteristic of the Chinese language. However, in foreign translations, this can become a disadvantage. For example, the name Jia Yucun has a double meaning that is difficult to translate accurately while maintaining the original's high standard of faith, attainment, and elegance. If the translation does not capture the mystery of the language in 'Dream of the Red Mansions', its charm will be diminished. The first translation of 'A Dream of Red Mansions' was completed in 1842, after *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* had already been popularized in Japan for over a century.

Secondly, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* shapes its characters in a manner that aligns with the aesthetic psychology of Japanese readers. The novel features approximately 1,200 named characters, all of whom are real historical figures. The characters in the text are based on Chen Shou's Records of the Three Kingdoms, which may result in bored and rigid characterization. However, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* creatively enhances certain aspects of the characters' personalities while still following historical facts. This makes the spiritual light carried by each character more prominent and dazzling. Compared to complex characters, typical characters are more likely to become synonymous with certain traits and qualities, making them easier to adapt to derivative products and more memorable for readers (Kasei, 1998). For example, Liu Bei's 'benevolence', Kong Ming's 'loyalty', Guan Yu's 'righteousness', and Zhao Yun's 'courage' have left a deep impression on readers and conveyed the importance of these character traits. The passage conveys the characters' sense of family and country, emphasizing their unity and perseverance in the face of difficulties. The author uses these to promote the political ideal of national unity and the heroic standard of loyalty and morality to Japanese readers. This concept

aligns with the national character of the Yamato people, which values honor, shame, and the spirit of protecting the nation.

Finally, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is distinguished by its depiction of magnificent war scenes, with a variety of great battles rarely seen in Japanese literature. The military strategy depicted in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is noteworthy. The presence of valiant warriors adds to the tension of the battlefield, while the inclusion of resourceful strategists keeps readers engaged in the story. *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* has a performative quality due to its vivid combination of characters and plot, which makes it easy to combine with stage performances such as plays and operas to better meet the daily entertainment needs of the Japanese public. Additionally, the magnificent war scenes and classic characterizations have enriched art forms such as picture books, scrolls, and related poetic compositions. From the perspective of literature to the entirety of the cultural field, the influence and vitality of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is naturally inseparable from its superior literary characteristics.

Learning and Acceptance of Chinese Culture in Japan

In addition to its literary merit, the success of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Japan can be attributed to the country's acceptance of Chinese culture. To fully understand this phenomenon, it is important to consider the cultural background of Japanese society during that time. During the early cultural exchanges between China and Japan, the Japanese nation extensively absorbed Chinese culture in various aspects, including politics, economics, institutions, literature, and art. The utilization of Confucian texts in the political system and living customs led to the formation of unique traditions in Japan, known as 'He Hun Han Cai', a type of new Japanese culture that combines Chinese Confucian culture. Japan, influenced by Confucian culture from ancient China, provides a suitable cultural environment for the flourishing of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, which also contains some Confucian cultural elements (Lin, 2021).

It is widely acknowledged that Japanese culture has been heavily influenced by Chinese culture. Japanese culture is considered an extension of both Western and Chinese culture, and it has inherited many aspects from ancient Chinese culture. During the drafting of early Japanese constitutions, numerous references were made to Confucian cultural texts (Wang, 1990). Over time, these texts deeply influenced the Japanese people and combined with the unique 'Yamato' spirit to form the national and cultural character of 1996 Japan. This historical trait is the foundation of Japanese literature and literary consciousness, and the spiritual basis on which Japanese civilization is united. The Japanese people developed values like those of ancient China, such as loyalty, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, and trust, as well as loyalty and faith in the state, the monarch, and justice, under the influence of such spiritual guidance and values (Li, 1996).

Although *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is not titled 'Loyalty and Righteousness', it is replete with loyal and righteous judgments of right and wrong, good and evil. The story begins with the 'Three Ties in the Peach Orchard', which depicts Liu Bei's brotherhood with Guan Yu and Zhang Fei that runs through the entire novel. Liu Bei's mission to restore the Han Dynasty is reflected in his army's commitment to loyalty and righteousness. Characters like Guan Yu, Zhuge Liang, and Zhao Yun exemplify loyalty, while the strong bonds between Liu Bei and his ministers demonstrate righteousness. At the same time, other loyalists in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* joined Shu Han for the sake of benevolence or remained loyal to their original masters.

They complemented the forces of Liu Bei, who represents great righteousness, like the green leaves in the scroll. This helped to deeply penetrate the values of benevolence and righteousness into people's hearts (Zhao, 1999).

This respect for loyalty and righteousness aligns with the Japanese Bushido spirit (Inazo, 1993). While there are differences with Chinese Confucianism, the Japanese firmly believe that obedience to the arrogant character of the samurai stems from deep-rooted loyalty to one's lord, respect for one's ancestors, and filial piety to one's parents. The samurai valued their loyalty and honor, which means they are willing to endure humiliation, seeking revenge for their lords. They were even willing to sacrifice their lives to save their lords. This loyalty and righteousness differ from that depicted in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, but both represent a judgment of personal qualities and attitude towards the ruler and state.

Political Needs of the Government and the Scholars

Due to Japan's long-standing study of Chinese culture, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* found a favorable cultural environment. However, it is important to note that some scholars in Japan selectively extracted elements from *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* to satisfy their own political demands or those of society and the state. *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* gained practical value due to the Japanese government's efforts to educate the public and foster a sense of identity, as well as the scholars' desire to satirize the gloomy times, express their own sorrow, and indicate their arguments towards the current political situation.

The Japanese government views *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* as promoting the ideas of loyalty and righteousness, which could contribute to the establishment of a new social order during the country's revitalization after the Warring States period. The Japanese government would need to promote the centralization of power based on the Confucian classics of China, which propose a proper division of power between the ruler and the ministers, the upper and lower classes, the superior and the inferior, and the major and the minor. During the Meiji Restoration period, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was even included in textbooks for the study of spoken Chinese at an advanced level in Japan. Although the purpose was utilitarian, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* also served to educate the public and cultivate the cultural identity of the country from various perspectives.

The Romance of the Three Kingdoms served as a platform for Japanese scholars to express their sentiments regarding contemporary society and its circumstances. Since the Meiji Restoration movement in 1868, Japanese writers have focused on the Three Kingdoms stories, often using them as a metaphor for the evolution of Japanese society. In terms of poetry, Doi Bansui wrote a long narrative poem titled "Star Falls in the Autumn Wind at Wuzhangyuan" in 1896, using the story of the Three Kingdoms as a background and the life of Zhuge Liang as a metaphor for the social turmoil and political revolution of the country. In his 1897 novel *Zhuge Wuhou*, Naito Konan used the stories of the Three Kingdoms to satirize the political changes during the Meiji Restoration period. He also employed the images of the talents of the Three Kingdoms to express his longing for talents in Japan. *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, with its war-torn and turbulent background, provided Japanese scholars with a wealth of themes to express their own perceptions and thoughts. The reality of numerous heroes also contributed to this inspiration.

Evolution of The Romance of the Three Kingdoms

Following its extensive circulation in Japan due to its literary value and cultural influence, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was profoundly integrated into Japanese local culture. Its cultural value and connotations were continuously studied and explored by Japanese literary circles. In addition to the influence of the political and social environments, it was inevitably shaped by political imprints, resulting in a series of evolutions in terms of its literary characteristics and embedded value orientations.

Evolution in Literary Features

In terms of literary features, the most prominent ones are the re-imagining of classic characters and the purposeful adaptation of the storyline. The characterization of these characters is influenced by the creator's own purpose and the social and cultural context in which the novels are set. The classic characters in the novels are given new features. When it is necessary to arouse the public's enthusiasm and confidence in government and society, Cao Cao transforms from the ambitious lord of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* into a romantic poet, who can detach himself from successes and failures and who maintains enthusiasm and fighting spirit in a life of Cao Cao experienced a series of ups and downs. When it was necessary to satirize the government's ignorance of talent and his own lack of success in a turbulent society, he became a monarch who, rather than cherishing and utilizing talents, had a penchant for collecting the world's most renowned men. His insatiable appetite for talent reached such proportions that he became paranoid, and he was indifferent to the practical value of the talents he was cultivating. Instead, he pursued them with a maniacal fervor. These widely publicized figures are starkly different from the image of the "treacherous hero" presented in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Concurrently, Zhuge Liang, who in the novels is depicted as the epitome of wisdom, has become more accessible to the common reader in Japanese literature. He has been portrayed in greater depth as an ordinary man who is loyal, aware of his limitations, and dedicated to his country and his aspirations (Naito, 2019). In Japanese literature, the adaptation of the storyline is more flexible and common, and a series of female characters are added to the story, together with the heroes, to complete the uniquely Japanese story of the Three Kingdoms. For example, in "Zhuge Kongming Dingjun Tales," two women of the Three Kingdoms, Jinshilian, wife of Sima Zhongda, and Yu Furong, wife of Zhuge Liang, contribute to the development of the storyline. Female characters in Japanese elegiac literature are often depicted as dignified but difficult individuals who are willing to sacrifice their own interests for the greater good of the storyline. Conversely, the original ending of the novel *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, the final winning of the Jin Dynasty, is rarely seen in literary creations. In the majority of literary works, the death of Zhuge Liang is employed as the tragic conclusion of the narrative (Yoshikawa, 2011) or the "safe and peaceful" resolution in which the three kingdoms maintain equilibrium with one another and each becomes a sovereign ruler, in order to fulfill the expectations of the Japanese people as well as those of the rulers. In conclusion, Japanese literature has permitted *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* to evolve in various ways. One approach has been to alter the characters and introduce new ones to enhance the narrative. Another strategy has been to reimagine and reorganize the plots to achieve a more profound cultural impact. Japanese literature has also been profoundly influenced by the people and politics of Japan.

Evolution in Cultural and Philosophical Connotations

Secondly, there is the evolution of the ideology and values accompanying the bloom of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Japan's inheritance of the cultural and philosophical concepts conveyed in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is based on the study of Chinese Confucianism. Japanese scholars keep promoting the combination of Confucianism and the spirit of Japanese bushido, which has resulted in the formation of Japan's unique view of the Three Kingdoms culture. The individual characters of loyalty, courage, benevolence, and wisdom promoted in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, as well as the novel's overall emphasis on the pursuit of righteousness, loyalty to the emperor, and love of the country, have become the basis for the promotion of the spirit of Bushido in Japanese literature. The spirit of Bushido focuses on the idea of samurai loyalty, which is defined as the absolute obedience of the warrior class to the king. In the book of *TaiPingji*, there is a scene in which the Three Kingdoms character Zhuge Liang compares the Japanese Bushido spirit to the Japanese Bushido spirit of Nanaki Masanari and this comparison is made in the context of Zhuge Liang's loyalty. During the Edo period, the Shogunate government promulgated the cultural and philosophical strategy of "ruling the country by Confucianism," and the samurai class paid more attention to the absorption and reference of Chinese Confucianism. In addition, literary creation in the Edo period saw the emergence of works that used characters from the Three Kingdoms as metaphors for the Japanese warrior spirit of Bushido (Li Supin, 1992). For instance, in Japanese Kabuki, a play employed the character Guan Yu from the Three Kingdoms as a metaphor for the Japanese warrior's notions of loyalty, righteousness, and courage (Kawatake, 1994). In *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, loyalty is defined as a commitment to one's conscience and to the path one adheres to. In Japanese literature on the Three Kingdoms, however, the concept of loyalty is more complex. It encompasses a sense of unwavering devotion to one's lord, which may extend to the point of self-sacrifice. This devotion is often accompanied by a certain degree of foolishness, reflecting a lack of emotional restraint and a tendency towards brutality. Consequently, in numerous related literary works, samurai who espoused this form of loyalty frequently endeavored to rectify their lord's missteps in various ways. When this was not accepted, the samurai typically resorted to spilling their own blood as a final act of loyalty and conscience to their lord. It is evident that the original text of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* places undue emphasis on the portrayal of "great benevolence and righteousness," to the detriment of the portrayal of family, affection, and life at the individual level. Additionally, Japanese literature of the Three Kingdoms has contributed to the evolution of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. The heroes in Japanese literature are also depicted as "loyal" to their own love for their own sons and daughters. This represents an evolution of the original text, as it emphasizes the importance of familial love and loyalty (Huang, 2008).

Conclusion

The Romance of the Three Kingdoms, regarded as a pinnacle of ancient Chinese literature, has also flourished in Japan, where it has become a pervasive cultural phenomenon. This phenomenon reflects the enduring appeal of Chinese literature and the capacity of Chinese culture to resonate with diverse audiences. The success of this cultural dissemination calls for a comprehensive analysis of contemporary China. This analysis should aim to summarize the experience, identify the appropriate attitude towards foreign cultures, and promote Chinese culture to the world in a more refined and effective manner.

Firstly, in the context of a foreign culture such as *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Japan has demonstrated the capacity to fully realize its cultural values while simultaneously adapting them to the cultural connotations required by its own society. This has enabled Japan to develop itself by borrowing from foreign cultures, while simultaneously preserving the core characteristics of its own national culture. To construct the superior culture in the world, it is essential to fully recognize the value of one's past cultures and to maintain their strengths. It is also crucial to absorb the strengths of other cultures. In the contemporary world, however, an exclusive focus on one's own culture and a rejection of other cultures is not an optimal solution (Naito, 1997).

Secondly, the transmission of the same culture in different nation-states is subject to different levels of acceptance and choice at different times. This is influenced by the prevailing societal norms and the dominant political regime of the country in question. It is also a choice made by the political culture to consolidate its own construction. For instance, in Japan, the cultural connotations of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* were selected to laud the virtuous qualities of the individual (loyalty, courage, sincerity, etc.). The pursuit of righteousness and loyalty in the novel became absolute loyalty to the lord in the Japanese cultural context, which ultimately served to promote the spirit of Bushido in Japan and to align with the needs of the politics and culture.

In conclusion, the globalization of cultural communication has become a dominant trend in the contemporary era. As a nation with a long and profound cultural history, maintaining our own cultural characteristics amidst the intricate cultural exchanges, correctly engaging with foreign cultures, and effectively disseminating its own exemplary culture to the world has become a core issue for contemporary China. The preceding research on the success of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in Japan is summarized in this paper, along with some experiences and suggestions.

Culture is both powerful and fragile at the same time, and it needs a nation's eternal perseverance to protect it and unremitting efforts to perfect it. To enhance the international influence of Chinese culture in today's world, it is crucial to promote the construction of cultural self-confidence at home. This can be achieved by calling for the cooperation of the whole country in learning, recognizing, and understanding their own culture. This will result in the formation of a strong sense of cultural identity and sense of belonging. Based on firm cultural self-confidence, it is imperative to engage in extensive and selective study and learn from exemplary foreign cultures. Concurrently, it is crucial to adopt the attitude of prioritizing our own culture and utilizing foreign culture for our own purposes. Furthermore, it is essential to selectively transform the beneficial elements of foreign cultures into culturally relevant content that aligns with Chinese values and sensibilities.

Finally, in the process of promoting Chinese cultures to the world, it is essential to accurately grasp the connotations and values of these cultures. At the same time, it is also necessary to endow them with elements that align with the values of China. It is similarly important to encourage the development of regional and national research in related fields, to study the cultural background of target countries in depth, and to fully release the infectious power and influence of culture. Only by grasping every aspect of cultural exchange in the new era can we be firm in ourselves and our culture can go global in a high quality in nowadays' cultural communication world (He, 2023).

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