

History in a contemporary medium:

The representation of the Three Kingdoms Period in four 21st century videogames

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Abstract

The Three Kingdoms period of China is the source of inspiration for Luo Guanzhong's '*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*', which is considered one of China's earliest and greatest classical works. It has also become a heavily represented part of history via the work of videogames, strangely enough it may be the most represented part of Chinese history outside of China via these means.

These videogames introduce the events of the time period for a non-Chinese audience with some of the videogames utilising narrative techniques used within Luo Guanzhong's Classic and adapted to suit the medium whilst others have decided not to.

Through looking at these games it became clear that hyperbolic representations did not necessarily always retract from even the purpose that Luo Guanzhong was trying to achieve with his *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, the idea to entertain whilst giving a narrative of the historical events are not mutually exclusive and many of these videogames are a testament to that idea.

What is interesting is the different approaches made to suit different genres and what is deemed more important fact or fiction and even who is to say which matters more even in modern day China, with the stories of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* being more common knowledge than the historical records, for now both a Chinese and non-Chinese audience.

Through the dissertation it becomes clear that in order to balance gameplay and narrative alongside not overwhelming a player who is not interested in Chinese history, exaggerated abilities have been used to garner attention. Whether it be exotic/anachronistic weapons or dispatching enemy soldiers with extreme ease and superhuman ability, all these features can be linked and represent some form of interpretation from Luo Guanzhong's work, whether the player knows it or not.

These videogames allow a player to learn about the time period unknowingly and grants them the ability to educate themselves more so with features such as the encyclopaedia which provides a substantial amount of information that would encourage anyone interested to pick up *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and give it a read with some level of familiarity.

Abbreviations

‘Three Kingdoms’: The in-text citations using the title “Three Kingdoms” refer to Moss Roberts translation of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. When talking about *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* as a classical work it will be italicised. The videogame sharing the same title will not be.

DLC- Downloadable Content, Downloadable content is additional content that can be used to expand a core videogames content, to be considered DLC it must be officially made or approved by the developers.

HDT- Herodotus’ Histories.

RotTK- Sometimes used for the videogame title of ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’ through the text this abbreviation will be followed by a number representing which specific product I am referring to. If the term “RotTK” is used without a number, then it is specifically referring to the franchise.

SGZ- Sanguozhi or ‘Records of the Three Kingdoms’ Chen Shou’s (233-297) documentation of the events during the Three Kingdoms period (219-280).

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Why this Dissertation

The Three Kingdoms period of China is one of the most well-known aspects of Chinese history nations other than just China, this due to its constant representation through history. As a child who loved playing a vast array of videogames, I found myself falling in love with a specific game series known as 'Dynasty Warriors' from a very young age. This franchise opened my eyes to a variety of characters and conflicts all taken from Luo Guanzhong's classical work *'Romance of the Three Kingdoms'* before I even knew what a Classic was. I wished to learn more and see how these battles were portrayed in different ways and not just wait for the newest instalment of 'Dynasty Warriors', with help from my father, I ended up spending many hours of my life just googling the Wikipedia entries of these characters. This all changed when I was gifted a copy of Moss Roberts' unabridged and translated copies of the classical novel and began to see the differences of the characters in videogames as opposed to the original work. This was a translation of the Classic which had now been edited by Mao Lun and Mao Zonggang during the 1660's, however the text that they edited is believed to have been published during the 14th century and may have circulated even prior to 1522 via written scripts (Roberts, 2004, Afterword).

The factual history of the time period itself seems to be less acknowledged and represented in 21st century videogames in comparison to *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and its combination of fact and fiction alongside memorable narrative.

John Zhu a masters graduate of the University of North Carolina who was raised in China explained to me that these stories from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* were broadcast on the radio and passed down through family and that these stories were more known than the official histories of the time which are not as well taught through schools in comparison, specifically at a young age (J.Zhu, Personal communication, April 27, 2020).

This legacy of the Luo Guanzhong's classic has become almost fact as the stories present more to the audience than just details of events but include Chinese values and entertaining moments and now with video games depicting these versions of events as well, the history can be considered even less relevant.

This dissertation will include my own first-hand experiences from playing, to understanding what game developers attempt to do when designing games and the different purposes of videogames in general, questioning whether *'Romance of the Three Kingdoms'* easily transitions to these purposes or is it a strange focal point.

This dissertation is looking at why Luo Guanzhong's work is so accessible to audiences outside of China and how well it transfers to a video game format. It will be looking at how these stories have been presented and why this is the case in several different videogames from the 21st century; with the latest release being looked at from 2019 and the earliest 2002. I will be looking at why the time period is deemed a good focal point exploring different approaches to bringing these ancient characters or moments to a modern audience non-Chinese audience who would not be as familiar with the source material.

This context is key to understanding what legacy is represented in these modern interpretations of the stories and time period along with helping answer what is more important to the

audience for said medium, fact or fiction? And which fiction is more interesting in the modern day.

Overall the goal is to gain a clearer understanding as to how the Three Kingdoms has become such common place amongst modern culture in and outside of China and understand how it stays 'loyal' to the source material yet can be presented so differently successfully and why it could be considered done in such ways.

1.2 Methodology

Prior to looking at the representation of the Three Kingdoms via the medium of video games, it is vital to look at and understand how the Three Kingdoms is most significantly presented through history; these means being either Chen Shou's "Sanguozhi" or "Records of the Three Kingdoms" or via Luo Guanzhong's Classical work *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

Understanding the differences between the two in purpose and how they were written is helpful to then understanding why one was perhaps a more likely source for a specific video game than the other.

In order to do that, understanding who 'Luo Guanzhong' was and what his intentions were can help understand how his work maintained the legacy it has today or how it has perhaps changed over time thanks to its most famous edits from Mao Lun and Mao Zonggang (Roberts, 2004, Afterword).

Although not directly looking at modern day politics within China, understanding the prevalence of the Three Kingdoms amongst modern society and political figures is helpful to understand the legacies and biases that are maintained. With even some of China's most influential leaders of recent times having an understanding of the time period and especially Luo Guanzhong's work, for example Mao Zedong who valued the work more than any other (Hannan, 1993).

The characters within the Classic such as Liu Xuande and Cao Cao became models for the dynasties that followed them even prior to Luo Guanzhong's work, with different historians and scholars having biases towards one regime or another; with even the "official" histories seeming to favour the legitimacy of Cao Wei (Roberts, 2004, Afterword.P.946). These biases began to

take form via edits of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* so much so that the edition I will be reading is the version that has been heavily edited and annotated as it is the version most well known in China and therefore has the most understood representations(Roberts, 2004, Afterword.P.938) and will be able to question why some 21st century mediums may have strayed from what is the widely understood versions of these renown characters.

As opposed to looking at every single form of media that relates to the Three Kingdoms period I decided to instead primarily focus on Video games due to their ever-growing popularity amongst the 21st century and the unique feature that they require some form of interactivity from the audience, more so than a film or play. I also made the decision that I would only look at specific video games that released in the 21st century due to different reasons, I must have first-hand experience with these games, they must have been at one point readily available outside of China, and they must be considerably popular/part of a franchise in order to understand what is a successful way of presenting the Three Kingdoms successfully amongst the market of video games.

Within the video games I decided to look at the way the events of the time period were portrayed, alongside characters personality, key traits and overall aesthetic look. Through doing this there would be a way of seeing if there were any running themes or extreme differences in different games and questioning why this may or may not be the case.

I will be looking at different aspects of the video games and the different approaches they provide to the Three Kingdoms era and what is so significant about them, in terms of both a video game product and also as a product structured around the Three Kingdoms and how the balance is achieved.

The video games based upon the 'Three Kingdoms' that this dissertation will be primarily looking at and referring to are as follows:

Romance of the Three Kingdoms XIII (2016)

A game franchise that has spanned many years now and consists of following Luo Guanzhong's narrative whilst allowing the player to alter said events via their social and political actions.

'Total War: Three Kingdoms' (2019)

A strategy game set during end of the Han Dynasty and through the Three Kingdoms period in which the player takes control of one of the warlords and attempts to be deemed victorious by meeting different criteria.

Dynasty Warriors

Dynasty Warriors is perhaps the most famous of these games that has been in the market and representing stories from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* for over a decade, these games are made by Japanese company 'TecmoKoei'. Due to the fact there are so many instalments in this franchise, I will be mainly referring to different aspects of each of them and why they were perhaps chosen.

Dynasty Tactics 2 (2003)

Another game created by 'TecmoKoei', focuses on a separate style of gameplay from Dynasty Warriors more akin to a board game like Chess. This game is significantly different in style from Dynasty Warriors in both format and presentation and shall be analysed as to why this may be.

This is not a full list of all video games that are going to be mentioned within this dissertation but instead the ones that are primarily set or revolve around the 'Three Kingdoms' period of China.

These videogames have been chosen due to first-hand experience with them so can explain how some of the content can be interpreted by both an avid gamer and by someone who is familiar with the source material whilst also recollecting my experience with said content whilst understanding the origins of the stories and influences.

In order to garner a strong understanding of the inner machinations of the game development world I will be looking at primarily two books written by those who work within the industry. These books are Scott Rogers' 'Level Up! The Guide to Great Video Game Design' (2010) and Chris Solarski's 'Interactive Stories and Video Game: Art A Storytelling Framework for Game Design' (2017)- Both authors are still relevant within the world of game design and development.

These sources are key as being able to explain what goes through the creative mind when developing a video game of any sort can then be understood and comparisons and different analytical points can be made by comparing statements from these sources in regard to the video games. I didn't deem it necessary for these authors to have worked specifically on a game featuring influences from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* as that would restrict material I could investigate.

During the writing of this project I decided to reach out to John Zhu and discuss how the *'Romance of the Three Kingdoms'* has been presented and how it has perhaps been interpreted or just presented differently for a Western audience to understand and why that is significant.

I decided these viewpoints were vital to this piece as John is not only learned in the Classic, but he is also of Chinese heritage and was exposed to the stories in an extremely different manner to me, yet now resides in America where the attention given to the Three Kingdoms period is mainly via the productions that this dissertation focuses on. John also has a podcast in which he discusses *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and other Chinese classics, his podcast is not just for a Chinese audience, so he has his own approaches to presenting the time period to a western audience.

Chapter 2

The Game, The Three Kingdoms and The Gamer

2.1 The prevalence of videogames amongst 21st century society

As technology has progressed and evolved over time, different mediums of presenting a story and invoking an audience have succeeded. Radio broadcasts that consist of reading fictional and non-fictional stories that garnered an extreme amount of attention such as the War of the Worlds incident in 1938 that led to supposed panic and the national guard being deployed as listeners believed the broadcast to be real, however this is debatable nonetheless is now part of the legacy of Orson Wells' War of the Worlds (Pooley, 2013). Video games have evolved and become an extremely profitable business with a huge demographic if a company or single developer can be successful and produce games that stand-out amongst the ever-growing library of releases.

Videogames although as complex they may be in story aspects or gameplay wise, the ultimate objective should always be simple to explain in order for anyone to understand the absolute basics and to invest into them, similar to that of board games (Rogers, 2010).

The industry of videogames is different than other forms of entertainment and media, it covers a huge spectrum of genres and styles that all require user interactivity, drawing the audience/the player into different aspects of the game and leading them to invest time and hopefully more money to future instalments.

With video games requiring different creative producers all to make one project it can be considered a somewhat amalgamation of many other forms of media, for example; Artists,

Story Writers, Musicians and Composers are just some of the jobs required to produce most video games and therefore require a lot of time and artistic vision to create (Rogers, 2010). With this understanding it becomes an even bigger question as to why the Three Kingdoms would be used and how.

2.2 The Fascination of Koei/Tecmo Koei

Prior to looking at these games all in comparison with one another and their separate approaches to the Three Kingdoms era, it is necessary to discuss the obvious amount of productions featuring involvement from Koei-now branded as 'TecmoKoei' or 'Koei Tecmo'. Koei are a company that are situated in Japan, from Yokohama and have published a large amount of games, however many of these games base some aspects around *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* even those that do not directly follow the same narrative of the time period.

Koei's other favourable time period is that of the Sengoku period of Japan and the two eras of history and the legacies they maintain are portrayed in some extremely similar ways. When asking John Zhu simply about similar character designs and why similarities may exist, he suggested that perhaps this was due to a Japanese influenced art style being used to create characters with similar archetypes within their creations (J.Zhu,Personal Communication. 5th,July,2020).

These two backdrops of history have been used by Koei as the core of many different genre's of games and it is clear that they are able to work with the source material to fit their goal, the Three Kingdoms period of China and especially Luo Guanzhong's Classic is studied all across Asia especially in Japan due to the influence of Confucianism and also the significance of history amongst the Japanese culture, similarly to China (Roberts, 2004,Ch.Afterword). This could be perhaps interpretations by how Koei and how they want to represent their history in tandem with Chinese history and how they want there 'iconic' history to be perceived by a western audience, as an Asian audience who would be more exposed to these stories would already do so. A broader audience who would not be aware of the Sengoku period of Japan or

the Three Kingdoms of China would have easy access to these games and would experience the story and narrative that Koei wanted them to, masked within the scenario of 'Real-World history'.

Although Scott Rogers presents the idea of using sources you usually wouldn't take your interest as an origin for a game (Rogers, 2010), Koei did almost the opposite as they took renown stories that Asian cultures were aware of and therefore would gravitate towards almost guaranteeing some fans whilst introducing a whole new audience from the West to exciting stories that could be presented successfully in a video game format.

2.3 Genre's and Gameplay

Unlike perhaps films or books, a video game requires some form of interactivity from the audience, some more than others. This means not only does the backdrop of the game itself matter to the player but so does the actual style of game, they must complement each other in order to keep the audience invested and make the product an enjoyable experience.

The Three Kingdoms period seemingly can be interpreted to become suitable in more than just one genre of video game, however the most reputable ones consist of some form of military action.

The different games I primarily looked at for this dissertation consisted of 2 primary genres:

Hack'n'slash- "these games have players battle against wave after wave of enemies increasing in difficulty." (Rogers, 2010), in Dynasty Warriors (2002) for example pitting the player in control of one of the playable heroes able to defeat hundreds of minor foot soldiers with ease.

Strategy- "thinking and planning are the hallmarks of strategy games. They take place in both historical and fictitious settings." (Rogers, 2010).

Scott Rogers also then defined two sub-genres that these games classed under as well. These games being "Real-time" and "Turn-based", the slower pace of "Turn-based" strategy games such as Dynasty Tactics (2003) allows a player to strategically think in a similar manner to chess. Compare this to the much grander scale games such as 'Romance of the Three Kingdoms XIII' (2016) where time management is considerably more important, where time is constantly moving unless the player constantly pauses. Both provide different aspects of approaching the Three Kingdoms era and especially Luo Guanzhong's classic.

In regards to Koei, they also make games of the same genre's based upon the Sengoku period of Japan as previously mentioned, these games provide an interesting comparison of how archetypes are represented and what they deem similar between the two time periods to a 21st century audience despite such a large time gap. For example, the portrayal of Nobunaga Oda is similar that of Cao Cao, both with villainous and ambitious traits suggesting that maybe an audience aware of one could then understand the other.

Gameplay can be defined as how the player is supposed to interact with the game and is affected by every facet that goes into designing a game, the gameplay can change depending on what genre of game it is being played to what platform and control scheme being used to play it. For example, a game designed specifically for a keyboard may have more expansive controls than a normal videogame controller and that may make the gameplay more intricate and precise, or a strategy game where you control armies has vastly different gameplay to controlling one character.

Now the gameplay is of course one of the biggest features of a video game, it is what keeps the player/audience engaged and involved with the surrounding story and is a deciding factor in whether they deem the product worth its monetary value.

The strategy games themselves consist of sub-genres that pose different gameplay challenges and approach the battles and politics behind the Three Kingdoms time in a variety of different ways, with each game focusing on different aspects to the others. Both the Three Kingdoms and Sengoku period suit this style of games due to the large scale of warfare and large amount of conflicts that happened during the periods, granting the player a huge sense of changing the course of history at times.

The Hack'n'slash games such as Dynasty Warriors are perhaps the most iconic representations of the Three Kingdoms period in which the player chooses the general they wish to control and then become unrivalled on the battlefield unless overwhelmed by numbers or coming across particularly stronger enemy generals, these representations being even more hyperbolic than that of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. These games allow for the player to feel amongst grand scale battles whilst only having to pay attention to the generals on the battlefield and the confrontations between them and your allies, this gameplay structure is significantly similar to how battles are presented by Luo Guanzhong in the sense that characters are constantly duelling and interacting with one another taking very little notice of the foot soldiers.

For someone who is unaware of the significance of certain characters or even who is deemed important, having these generals being considerably stronger than basic infantry makes them instantly more recognisable and memorable. The generals that are also deemed even more significant all receive unique character designs and weapon sets to make them not only more distinguishable in a crowd of basic infantry that all share the same design but also amongst the enemy generals.

A player who has no idea about the enemy forces or the historical characters will still be able to tell that Zhao Yun is more significant than another officer within the same faction such as Jian Yong. Of course, this is somewhat subjective, and all determined by who the developers believe to be more significant, however these unique officers are usually constant characters that remain relevant and amidst the events of the Three Kingdoms.

To further emphasise the idea that these major characters are stronger and more than mere soldiers, an extremely large number of hits is required from enemy foot soldiers to put the

player in danger. This causes swarms of infantry to circle the player and defend whilst the player can dispatch them with ease, similarly to how combat goes within *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* regarding nameless soldiers. Rogers' (2010) references this idea of fighting multiple enemies whilst they line up one at a time to hit you as a way of making yourself seem more powerful and without causing the player to feel in danger - this idea is clearly something that Koei wanted to stress as earlier iterations from the Dynasty Warriors franchise being overwhelmed by foot soldiers would almost definitely cause death. This shift in danger from enemies created two things for players; it created a dramatic shift in speed that the game was played at as soldiers could be killed in the hundreds and only difficulty coming from enemy generals, it also emphasised the strength of the players character and created a more casual experience.

Rogers' compares the premise of soldiers circling the player but not necessarily all striking at once to a Bruce Lee film in which he defeats multiple opponents but it is actually one at a time. (Rogers, 2010). This once again grants the player a greater sense of strength without much challenge.

The difficulty of combat coming from enemy generals is another factor that causes players to remember who generals are and who they fight for, having to suddenly stop killing scores of enemies to then focus on one individual causes the player to take notice and even more so if they were a renown general who was hard to defeat in said battle, the greatest example of this is Lu Bu in any iteration of Dynasty Warriors and the conflicts at Hu Lao gate.

One gameplay feature that has been featured in the Dynasty Warriors franchise but is more prevalent in Total War: Three Kingdoms and the 'RotTK' games is the idea of "duels". A one on

one duel is an extremely intense moment in all the games they are featured in but also within *Romance the Three Kingdoms* as well. Each game deals with duels somewhat differently but all cause different reactions from the player and a more intense environment for the duration.

In 'RotTK XIII' (2016) duels consist of two generals going back and forth striking each other whilst mounted on their horses with duels lasting several bouts as opposed to somebody having to die. With each bout the two generals joust each other and the player must take part in a "rock,paper,scissor" like system in which one technique beats another, after each bout damage is done depending on how good a general is and if they won the "rock, paper, scissor" interlude. At the end of the bouts whoever has the least health remaining or dies is deemed the loser of the duel and they suffer massively in the battle that is ongoing around them. This causes the player to not only have a favourite warrior who they have faith can output the most damage in a duel, but also requires agency of the player to take part in a somewhat luck based mini-game allowing the most unlikely of victories at times, creating a huge risk and reward system for the duels.

In Total War: Three Kingdoms (2019), duelling causes two generals to fight each other whilst the battle continues around them, the forces of whichever general loses the duel incur an extremely heavy morale loss and will be more likely to rout and flee. This system places a huge emphasis on the importance of generals amongst forces, as without the generals even the larger numbered force will flee from a smaller force with a general, this places a huge significance on whether your own general should partake in a duel but also shows the player just how influential these single figures were.

The duelling in Dynasty Warriors 4 (2003) was a feature new to the franchise and exclusively in that game afterwards as well, when coming across specific enemy generals such as Hua Xiong outside of Hu Lao gate, they will challenge the player to duel with the option of declining. There are benefits to both accepting and declining and the player must be weighing these options up considerably but also within a short time frame as the offer only lasts around thirty-seconds. If the player accepts the duel, then an arena forms around both the player and the enemy combatant and you must face each other one on one with a time limit, the enemy general will typically strike harder in these duels, however, without the interruption from surrounding soldiers or other generals intervening it allows the player to focus primarily on this enemy. The duel arena lacks any form of health boosts that are generally easy to find on the battlefield when not in a duel, and also restricts the distance the player can get from the enemy if they are losing, if the player loses the battle is over and they must start the whole battle from the beginning. If the player wins the enemy general and the units under his command will flee the map no longer hindering progress of you and your allies.

In *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* duels are constantly emphasised and their importance is not understated. The campaign against Dong Zhou, leads the allied coalition to reach Hu Lao and Si Shui gate which is being held by Dong Zhou's forces, these conflicts are not mentioned in Chen Shou's records (SGZ) and they originate from Luo Guanzhong's work yet they are still so iconic due to the conflicts involving Lu Bu, Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei.

Firstly, Hua Xiong is able to defeat several of the allied generals which causes them to lose morale, until Guan Yu decides he will face them and dispatches him with ease

(Guanzhong, *Three Kingdoms*, Roberts, 2004) causing the allies to be able to push through. In Dynasty Warriors 4 (2003) allowing the player to duel Hua Xiong allows them to partake in what

can be considered one of the most significant parts of that battle and become debatably the most vital general in the conflict even if they are not controlling Guan Yu.

Lu Bu's duel against the three sworn brothers that were Liu Bei, Zhang Fei and Guan Yu, may not have ended up as a one on one contest but nonetheless Lu Bu retreating from the duel and forcing Dong Zhou's forces to retreat to Chang'an coincides with the influence these duels possess over the whole battle.

Chapter 3

Telling the story through Videogames

3.1 Narrative

The narrative of the Three Kingdoms period is perhaps the most significant part of not only 21st century media but all presentations of the time period throughout history. The idea that these events can be presented to a wider audience via different ways in order to fulfil different purposes is not exclusive to just video games.

One of the original documentations of the events of the Three Kingdoms was Chen Shou's 'Sanguozhi' or the 'Records of the Three Kingdoms' which can be deemed one of the greatest works of early Chinese historical documentation, written in a style that depicted the events of each kingdom; Wu, Wei and Shu via mainly biographical entries (Mittag, 2008). This presentation of the events of the Three Kingdoms depicts a bias favouring that of the Cao family and via different means such as referring to the Wei monarchs exclusively as "di" which means emperor (Mittag, 2008). This support of Wei and their abdication of the throne also provided legitimisation to the Jin abdication in the same manner, who were the dynasty that emerged from the Three Kingdoms period (Mittag, 2008).

However despite relying on primarily on Chen Shou's records in order to create his Classic, Luo Guanzhong compiled and ordered the events chronologically granting an easier understanding of the events on the grand scale of the time covered/ better convenience for readers (Roberts, 2004). The influence to transform the events into more of a novel could stem from the annotations that were added to Chen Shou's records that Luo Guanzhong studied from, these annotations would include testaments to some of the personalities of key figures i.e. Liu

Xuande which is considerably similar to his depiction in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Roberts, 2004).

These annotations were seemingly the first additions of fiction to the attempted documentations of fact, along with dynamic personalities to biographies that were originally created to record history on a grand scale (Roberts, 2004).

One similarity that the Classic and the 'Records of the Three Kingdoms' share is what can be deemed the starting point; what is deemed pivotal to the fall of the Han and the prelude to the actual emergence of the warlords and future Emperors of the eventual Three Kingdom Era. The uprising of the Yellow Turbans and their way of peace led by Zhang Jiao/Jue is the beginning of both works and this has not gone unnoticed within 21st century video games, the 'Yellow Turban Rebellion' as its commonly coined has become an iconic part of the narrative within these games despite being somewhat of a prelude to the grand scale battles and events.

The Dynasty Warriors franchise despite the numerous instalments it consists of always features and emphasises the significance of the 'Yellow Turban Rebellion', now in the Classic this a time where the reader is introduced to who is going to a pivotal figure in the wars to come and also happens around the same time as the contentious story of the "Oath in the Peach Garden" which only happens in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and is not mentioned in the Records whatsoever (Guanzhong. *Three Kingdoms*)(Shou.SGZ.36.6).

The idea of the Yellow Turbans being the preface and the eventual cause of these events can not only be seen in both Luo Guanzhong's work and video game representation but is also used as an incentive to buy products based around the Three Kingdoms period. For example, Total War: Three Kingdoms (2019) promoted the game by giving customers who bought the

game within the first week of release DLC that allowed players to control different Yellow Turban factions. After the first week the DLC then was no longer free and required purchasing separately from the game, this was not the only DLC surrounding the Yellow Turbans either as another one released including the events preceding Dong Zhou's control of the emperor, as that is the starting point for the core game.

Although there are several DLC's for this one game alone, the fact that the Yellow Turbans were used as an incentive to encourage customers to buy the game as early as possible and therefore at its highest price just shows that the developers felt that customers/players deem the Yellow Turbans as a vital faction in regards to the Three Kingdoms period. Part of this can of course be attributed to the Classic focusing on them as a starting point, they have become just as iconic through different 21st century games that the audience have had more access to than *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

3.2 Dynasty Warriors: the evolution of narrative

For example, the Dynasty Warriors franchise has changed its approach throughout its instalments with the earlier productions allowing the player to select a character that would partake in a number of battles for their respective kingdoms journey - however seemingly to make sure each character was worth playing and had a considerable amount of playtime they were included in battles that they had no participation in. This leads to difficulties for someone who is unaware of the vents or the time scale of the period, as they can play as the same character in battles that take place even **after their deaths**, for example in Dynasty Warriors 3 (2002) you can play as Sun Jian leading the forces at Chi Bi/Red Cliff. In regards to examples like Sun Jian's case this is a change that is almost required due to the fact that there are not many battles represented in Dynasty Warriors 3 that take place prior to Chi Bi and therefore he wouldn't be provide much to the game for the player despite being such an important figure of the time period despite his lack of longevity.

The scale of Dynasty Warriors games and the attempt at covering such a grand variety of conflicts have constantly attempted to better themselves with the second entry taking an extremely different path from the presentation of the first which was released in 1997. With the first game (1997) being a 1vs1 fighter seemingly representing that the Three Kingdoms periods and events were not as important as the characters themselves. This idea is similar to how Luo Guanzhong interprets and portrays events via characters such as Liu Bei and Cao as being extremely influential and with the ability to drastically change the course of history whereas Chen Shou strays away from that premise not placing unnecessary significance on minor events or interactions (Roberts, 2004).

The Dynasty Warriors instalments eventually changed the way the narrative was portrayed again for later iterations slightly shifting the focus from singular characters to the events of each kingdom and the issues/conflicts they faced. In Dynasty Warriors 5 (2005) each character you would begin the game with would discuss their own personal opinions on the political state of China and towards the feelings that they felt for the upcoming battle, this allowed the player to get a better understanding of what the character they were playing as stood for and that they were part of a bigger conflict, it would also introduce many Western players to a sense of honour and loyalty that was prevalent within Chinese culture at the time, especially when their character would voice their displeasure for the upcoming battle yet take part anyway and gladly risk their life on behalf of their ruler.

These narrative changes further shifted towards allowing the player gaining a better understanding of each Kingdom's perspective which was also more accurate to the Classical text, in later iterations the player would now select which Kingdom's timeline they wished to play through and would now select which character to play as for each battle out of options provided. For example in Dynasty Warriors 8 (2014) the player could follow the paths of: Shu, Wu, Wei, Jin, "Other" and in the Complete edition (2014) that this dissertation is referring to also includes Lu Bu's storyline. Whether players were aware or not, they were now once again being given a more accurate representation of Luo Guanzhong's Classic and the perspectives he focused on within each battle.

These games consist of non-interactive cutscenes piecing events to one another usually with an overview of what has happened throughout China during the events between each battle, these non-interactive cutscenes provide context for the player and the use of this allows the player to understand how these characters are supposed to be understood and the relationship they are

supposed to feel between friends and enemies irrespective of the players feelings, this also works for the in-battle dialogue (Solarski, 2017). Koei clearly felt that this change in presentation of the events was more succesful or at least a clearer representation as they then proceeded to use this format over to the Sengoku-based 'Samurai Warriors'(2014) franchise and followed the fates of the clans of the time as opposed to singular characters.

Interestingly enough the Jin Kingdom/Dynasty was not acknowledged until the more recent iterations of the Dynasty Warriors franchise, instead many of the games tend to feature the battle of "Wu Zhang Plains" which involves the death of renown Zhuge Liang and then begins the eventual fall of Shu. This is quite similar to Luo Guanzhong's attention to the earlier events of the Three Kingdoms period and the conflicts featuring the 'original' founding Emperors i.e. Liu Bei, Sun Quan and Cao Cao (Although Cao Cao was never officially Emperor, he all but in name puppeted the Han Emperor), Luo Guanzhong commits a lot of attention to the earlier stages of the period with even the Battle of Red Cliff/Chi Bi being almost the apex of the story despite not even being halfway through the period chronologically (J.Zhu,Personal Communication. 5th,July,2020). Prior to being an official 'faction' that the player was able to follow, many of the prominent figures were just merged within the story and narratives of Wei which makes sense due to Sima Yi, the head of the family that begins the Jin Dynasty is a subordinate under Cao Cao and somewhat irrelevant until Cao Pi's ascension and is mentioned almost subversily. This lack of attention to Jin/considering them part of Wei may be due to those battles no longer consisting the chaarcters that people would now know as they have all passed away, but could also just be due to the similarities they in fact share with Wei and were the reason that Dynasty became legitimised as they used the same abdication ceremony as Wei did to usurp power (Mittag, 2008).

One interesting factor about the Dynasty Warriors franchise and almost every single Three Kingdoms related game made by Koei is the inclusion of an “Encyclopaedia”. This constant feature shows that not only do Koei want to allow players to control characters and experience the drama of the Three Kingdoms, but they also are trying to encourage players to educate themselves and take an interest in more than just the game.

Although it can be obviously ignored and is not part of the main gameplay whatsoever, the “Encyclopaedia” gets larger with every instalment with short biographical entries of every character that is named in the series. The encyclopaedia even makes distinctions on who is a fictional character that only exists within Luo Guanzhong’s work from those who existed factually even if the depictions they then use in the game are all based off of the traits they show in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

3.3 The Strategy Struggle: Brain over Brawn

Strategy is a hugely important part of all warfare and is especially even more impressive when numbers of soldiers are irrelevant thanks to devastating ruses or individual prowess, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* not only emphasises this massively but so do the video games presenting the events. With extremely intelligent characters that serve opposing factions such as Zhuge Liang for Shu, Guo Jia for Wei and Zhou Yu for Wu you start appreciating how vital to these figures are to the success of their respective kingdoms without trying to seize power. John Zhu suggested that this extreme loyalty to even the ineptest rulers, for example Zhuge Liang's refusal to take command of the Shu forces after Liu Bei's death is perhaps a concept a modern Western audience may struggle to understand (J.Zhu, Personal Communication. 5th, July, 2020), Games like *Dynasty Tactics 2* (2003) and *Total War: Three Kingdoms* (2019) separate the intellect from the authority that these figures have making it clearer to the player and Western audiences that a good tactician who achieves victory a lot is not necessarily a good leader.

As games these strategy games grant the player an opportunity to try and change the events with the idea that they were a supernatural being that influences the choices that characters make, for instance you are not actively one general but you are restricted in what you can make that general do by the confines of their own abilities. This allows the player to understand the struggles each kingdom faced in terms of territory controlled, recruitment advantages and also begins to favour specific generals as they may suit the player's style of warfare more, which allows them to feel a personal bias similarly to the biases within the Classic itself.

As the Dynasty Warriors games evolved, they changed the formula to no longer be about just killing as many enemies as possible (which if you do you can still win) but they shifted into placing objectives into each battle. Objectives that were once mentioned in dialogue but could be ignored by a player not paying attention, now are a lot more significant, failing to meet battlefield objectives can lead to catastrophic consequences such as vital allies fleeing from the battle earlier than they were supposed to or vital defections failing. These objectives once again draw attention to how important strategists were to each Kingdom as they can make a battle drastically easier, they also cause the player to focus on what they are doing and why they are doing it somewhat more as they do not wish the battle to get harder and result in failure of progression.

Some of these strategic objectives even lead to the creation of "What-if" scenarios where if the player succeeds in enacting a strategist's orders they can change the course of a battle that they lose in history/in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. These hypothetical scenarios not only provide the player with more interesting stories than just the constantly repeated set of events, but they also enable the developers to act with more freedom in their biases of certain factions and or characters whether it be via keeping them alive when they were supposed to die, or succeeding in a fire attack that would eventually change the outcome of one battle and therefore possibly the fate of the Three Kingdoms period.

This idea almost allows for companies like Koei to envisage what the Mo Zonggang edits would have preferred to happen historically but could not change the purpose of the Classic in retelling history.

Even with the premise that strategy games can cause a player to change history or the events that people now believe to be history thanks to the Classic, some revered or famous stories can still be forced into the narrative for the player to get a greater understanding of certain characters. The best example of this was during my own personal playthrough of Total War: Three Kingdoms (2019) in which I was in command of an ahistorical Wu Kingdom, in my kingdom Lu Bu had become one of my leading generals despite not only supposed to being dead by this time in both history and fiction (De Crespigny, 2007) (Guanzhong. *Three Kingdoms*, Roberts, 2004). In my playthrough Lu Bu settled a quarrel between two officers by striking a target with his bow and arrow from a ridiculous distance, this story to those aware of Lu Bu or some of the tales from the period will know this is how he supposedly stopped war ensuing between Liu Bei and Yuan Shu (Guanzhong. *Three Kingdoms*, Roberts, 2004). Although the circumstances and context are extremely different, the developers still deemed it important that this showmanship of Lu Bu's ability was a defining part of his character that the player can be made aware of even without knowing the origins of the story.

3.4 Characters: Presentation and Personality

This section will be looking at how different characters have been represented from the Three Kingdoms period through video games and film whether it is via dress, arsenal of weapons or personality.

I decided to challenge John Zhu to a form of quiz as he was someone who had only played 'Total War: Three Kingdoms' (2019) and during our Zoom call (J.Zhu, Personal Communication. 5th, July, 2020), in which I showed him several character models from Dynasty Warriors 8 (2014) without making him aware of who was who. The characters I decided to show him were; Guan Yu, Huang Gai, Zhuge Liang, Sima Zhao, Gan Ning and Xu Zhu. I chose these characters for a variety of different reasons, they are allied to different Kingdoms, some characters like Guan Yu are almost guaranteed to be depicted in an expected way due to the high esteem they are still valued today and also the newer characters to the franchise such as Sima Zhao who is part of the Jin Dynasty with less focus in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

The reason I picked Huang Gai's depiction for John Zhu to look at was purely due to the symbolism in his arsenal such as a small boat as a weapon- clearly representing his importance and proficiency in naval warfare and significance in the battle of Red Cliff and the fire attack that ensured victory (Guanzhong. *Three Kingdoms*, Roberts, 2004). This battle can be considered Huang Gai's legacy and his actions during it are somewhat of an "aristeia" for him, an aristeia being a term in Greek Epics in which a hero has their finest moments such as Menelaos in the Iliad (Stelow, 2009). John after less than a minute of looking at the depiction of Huang Gai was able to determine who he was due the emphasis of his white facial hair and beard showing the signs of a veteran and then deduced the boat was representative of something significant to the character (J.Zhu, Personal Communication. 5th, July, 2020),

The fact John with no prior showings of this image or even character design and no hints was able to deduce who this was supposed to be from a time period and Classical work that features hundreds of vital characters shows heavily that these designs have been heavily worked on and the distinguishing features of Huang Gai are his age and the service he provided at the battle of Red Cliff. In the 2009 film 'Red Cliff' in both the extended and original release Huang Gai is portrayed in an honourary light with his valiant effort to make sure the fire attack succeeds is focused upon and even emphasised via slow motion camera shots, the scene also includes him being shot by an arrow after succeeding which is accurate according to Chen Shou (De Crespigny, 2007).

What is interesting and a deviation from Luo Guanzhong's classic is the interactions between Zhou Yu and Huang Gai prior to the battle itself, in one of their conversations Huang Gai suggests a plan to feign dissent in the camp by having Zhou Yu punish him publicly, in the film Zhou Yu dismisses this in regard to his close relationship with Huang Gai, however in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* they do in fact enact this ruse (Guanzhong. *Three Kingdoms*, Roberts, 2004). Many of the games try to stray away from this ruse as well, either by refusing to mention it entirely or having Zhou Yu refuse the idea, although this is not entirely clear why, it would seem to me that it is due to the fact that this plan is not the focal point of the battle. The fire attack succeeding and the alliance between Wu and Shu is what makes the battle interesting so the dynamics between the two are what is focused on as opposed to in-faction relations, especially without slowing down the pace of gameplay with extremely intricate details.

Zhao Yun/Zilong is one of the most recognisable characters within Three Kingdoms media and especially videogames thanks to his representation since the very beginning of the Dynasty Warriors franchise. Zhao Yun is the focal point of many of the main extravagant intro

cinematics in which he is fighting hordes of enemies with extreme ease, this idea stems from perhaps one of the most famous stories of the Three Kingdoms the rescue of Liu Bei's son. In the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* depiction of the story Zhao Yun charging through Cao Cao's lines and obtaining one of his most treasured swords, he then proceeds to rescue Liu Bei's son and bring him back to safety unharmed (Guanzhong. *Three Kingdoms*, Roberts, 2004). This event is key to showing Zhao Yun's loyalty to Liu Bei but also his strength as a warrior. Seeing these hugely exaggerated cinematics before even playing the game almost subconsciously places a favourable bias for a player to select Zhao Yun whenever they can, and especially so for the battle of Chang Ban where he commits this brave act.

Even more focus is put on Zhao Yun in the earlier instalments in which Zhao Yun would be the first character available to pick amongst the Shu Kingdom, almost encouraging the player to select him over anybody else.

Although there are so many symbolic gestures in the Dynasty Warriors franchise such as Zhuge Liang's ability to summon the wind or Chen Gong literally using a scroll, one of the more fascinating and obscure representations is that of Meng Huo; a character who is already debated in regard to historicity.

Meng Huo in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is the king of the Nanman people, southern tribes that eventually rebel against Shu (Guanzhong. *Three Kingdoms*, Roberts, 2004). The Nanman people were tribal people that tattooed themselves and used totems as the centrepiece of their faith (Brindley, 2015). This is extremely interesting as in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* depicts Meng Huo considerably well including his armour and weapon of choice which were two swords (Guanzhong. *Three Kingdoms*, Roberts, 2004). However, in the

later iterations of Dynasty Warriors, number 8 for example (2016) his unique weapon is a “Stele” which is a form of totem. This is hugely symbolic of what kind of people the Nanman were by having their king wield a stele as a symbolic weapon, this shows a subverse way of showing how the Nanman were different to the other forces in the game without the player being actively told they worshipped totems.

These character representations embed subtle and not so subtle symbolic gestures of what characters stand for and have a deeper meaning than just providing a unique playstyle for each character, although that has to be the primary focus, making combat enjoyable (Rogers, 2010).

This ability to inadvertently make the player more aware of the source material and the history without them knowing, allows them to play without feeling like they are forced to learn but if they were to decide to learn about the period or even read *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* they would not only be able to feel some personal connection to the characters but also understand these symbolic links.

Chapter 4

After the Success of the Three Kingdoms

4.1 Why Troy for Creative Assembly?

After Total War: Three Kingdoms (2019) Creative Assembly announced the next game they will be releasing is based on the Trojan War and hopes to be successful at “peeling back the layers of myth and legend to reveal the realities that may have inspired them” (Creative Assembly, 2020). Going from a project structured around the Three Kingdoms to now an era of historical legacy but not necessarily fact like some aspects of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. This announcement leads to the question of what similarities do these time periods share in both the literary sources but also the style of content they contain. With similarities identified it also becomes easier to understand why a non-Chinese audience may gravitate to the events of the Three Kingdoms period or even just Luo Guanzhong's work as a source of entertainment/education in comparison to other Chinese works. Although not considered an Epic, Herodotus' histories also contain similar features to *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* with it being a retrospectively biased look at history with an agenda, and the inclusion of large-scale warfare. Perhaps not as relevant within video games of the 21st century, the idea and legacy of the Spartan warriors is extremely prevalent in video games such as 'God of War' and of course they are a huge part of the events of the Trojan war which will be covered in Creative Assembly's next production.

So, the question remains, what similarities do these Greek works share with *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* that could explain why they both work in 21st century media and especially videogames?

Luo Guanzhong's dramatization of the events during the Three Kingdoms period is filled with adventure, dynamic characters, political intrigue, and epic battles. These are key components to both Homer and Herodotus' work as well.

The agendas and biases of kingdoms or authorities can be edited to suit a narrative when the head of these regimes are given personalities, for example the understanding of why the Spartans did things and why they are remembered how they are is due to works such as Herodotus' 'Histories' which attempts to explain to the rest of Greece how and why they acted during the Peloponnesian war (Rahe, 2016), similarly the heroes and villains of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* all maintain character traits that they are well known for thanks to the way they are portrayed in the novel, even if that isn't necessarily accurate, their memory is now almost fact.

Moss Roberts compares the popular misunderstanding of the history of the Three Kingdoms with the portrayals put forth in the Classic to the works of Shakespeare and how they have shaped popular beliefs of Richard the Third (Roberts, 2004, Ch.Afterword). This idea was further expanded upon to me by John Zhu, he explained how growing up in China he was exposed to the stories of the Classic via radio, figures and comics at the age of ten, yet you do not learn about the events in history class at the same age and must seek to learn the history almost independently (J.Zhu, Personal Communication. 5th, July, 2020).

A prime example that is still prevalent today, the edits that Luo Guanzhong's work received from Mao Zonggang and his son is believed to have revised the portrayal of Cao Cao, deeming him to be more villainous than he was originally intended to be and is now remembered for (West, 1996).

Although they are considered separate works that we read in the modern era, the Iliad and the Odyssey are one coherent story detailing the war with Troy and then the aftermath. With the previously mentioned comparison of the Three Kingdoms and the Iliad from a review that the Moss Roberts translation received by Anthony.C.Yu, as well as by Roberts himself (Roberts, 2004).

Romance of the Three Kingdoms consists of universal themes and genres that a Western audience can appreciate and be entertained by even no knowledge or understanding of ancient Chinese culture, with aspects of epics, dramas and with the literary style of a novel (Roberts, 2004).

The Iliad follows the story of war for love, two sides clash over a woman causing even the divine to get involved and intervene taking up arms against one another. Both sides consist of forces can be deemed honourable and just, and with bias from the author, however one side has to end victorious for Homer it is the Greeks as is a tale of their ability and wrath whilst the Three Kingdoms had a factual victor that had to end up victorious in spite of whatever bias the author may have had.

Although *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* does not consist of one war, they still maintain some similarities even to the point of women causing the downfall of powerful men and the end of powerful forces. Whether it be Diao Chan and her influence and sewing of mistrust between Lu Bu and his adoptive father Dong Zhou or the Two Qiao's who were supposedly part of the reason for Cao Cao's campaigns to the South, the way they are depicted and the events caused because of their beauty are extremely similar to that of Helen of Troy/Sparta.

The Iliad contains strategies and schemes that are still extremely famous and cunning and even consists of one that is famous to those outside of classic students, such as the Trojan Horse. Although it is debatable whether or not the strategies within *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* are as well known to the layman especially outside of China however they are just as cunning and entertaining to read the success of such as 'the empty city' employed by Zhuge Liang (Sawyer, 2014).

Chapter 5

Final Thoughts

The Three Kingdoms period of Chinese history has become such a widely represented piece of Chinese culture to the world outside of China, and video games have been used to entertain and introduce an audience to a more culturally significant part of Chinese heritage than they realise. Despite its historical importance a gamer may like the gameplay of the Dynasty Warriors franchise without even acknowledging its relevance to Chinese culture as they find it interesting and interactive enough for them to be entertained without context.

The fiction of Luo Guanzhong's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* has not only become known as fact to the people of China as John Zhu explained through his exposure to the stories (J.Zhu, Personal Communication. 5th, July, 2020), but now also to the outside world as these games derive and hyperbolically present these events from the Classic and make them accessible to more than those just fond of history.

The popularity of the Three Kingdoms period is clearly still on the rise outside of China with Creative Assembly's 'Total War :Three Kingdoms' (2019) able to achieve record concurrent player numbers (Yin-Poole, 2019) within a franchise that had not only never attempted to portray this time period before but also via means unique in comparison to the other historical simulation titles within the 'Total War' franchise as a whole.

The importance placed upon characters and how they are almost mythical figures even today is really emphasised within games, these representations really coincide with what separated Luo Guanzhong's Classic with just the official documentation that was Chen Shou's 'Records of the Three Kingdoms'. The characters are depicted in such ways that even when extremely

hyperbolic regarding weaponry and armour, they are distinguishable and recognisable for instance when asking John Zhu to try and decipher who characters were from simple in-game models of Dynasty Warriors 8 (2016) characters.

The different genres of games have presented different ideas and perspectives of the Three Kingdoms perspective and even pose hypothetical questions and scenarios that would perhaps change the fate of the period itself and therefore China. For example, the branching paths of Dynasty Tactics (2003) suggest that these events would have changed history entirely and even if the player attempts to follow the narrative of Luo Guanzhong's Classic with the players influence a different kingdom may have won battles the commanding general would not have. The ability given to players in these games is one that allows them to either follow narrative with personal touches or by trying to rewrite the events of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, despite the grandeur of the games in the sense of being able to control literally thousands of troops, they all revolve around the generals leading them- especially in "Romance mode" in Total War: Three Kingdoms (2019) where the generals themselves are able to change the tide of battle just by themselves.

Warfare and the ideological attitude towards warfare in China is viewed as teachings from philosophical thinkers such as Mencius and Confucius who were statesman and not specifically military generals (Ge, 2015), of course the other authority of how warfare should be handled was Sun Tzu in which focuses primarily on outwitting and mentally sapping your enemy and the different means to do so (Ge, 2015) which is clearly also a major theme in these modern day representations as the significance and ability even on the battlefield characters such as Zhuge Liang or Zhou Yu possess, especially Zhuge Liang considering he is never mentioned to fight in battle yet in the games he is able to somewhat control elements.

Within the majority of video games focused upon the Three Kingdoms and of course mainly *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* the ability to follow the source material is optional, allowing both someone learned of the period or Classic to experience it in different ways but also expose an audience who would be unaware of how the events transpire to now experience them also first-hand without actually reading a Classical Chinese work.

The evolution of how the Three Kingdoms have been portrayed through history and not just in the 21st century is primarily due to Luo Guanzhong and these exact narrative techniques the “70% fact and 30% fabrication” (Ge, 2015) have played a significant part on why these stories are still so entertaining and accessible throughout history, the shift from plays and opera to 21st century film is an almost natural one similar once again to Greek works. The film ‘Red Cliff’ (2008) is the perfect example of a story from Chinese history being magnified and revered via *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* similarly to that of Thermopylae and Herodotus’ ‘Histories’ and then the film ‘300’(2006) which released two years prior showing the audience these stories could attract with their similar aspects in both warfare and legacy.

The Three Kingdoms and more specifically Luo Guanzhong’s telling of the events have become so accessible to a Western audience that now these fictions will become fact just as they are to a Chinese audience that has grown up not specifically learning about the distinguishable differences.

If I were to do an even more analytical depth of the representations of the Three Kingdoms throughout 21st century media, I would include the several televised series that were produced within China and how they were received along with more specific character insights and portrayals alongside the long running series. With these series being created within China it

would provide an insight of how China not only wishes its past to be looked upon for entertainment purposes but also for nationalistic purposes with Three Kingdoms being so relevant to modern Chinese life. I would also decide to look at more film productions in a more centralised way, focusing on them primarily and what they represent as opposed to what they perhaps do differently or similarly to videogames.

Video games allowing players to experience these characters and this time period in such a personal way allows for a much more accessible way to learn the fundamentals without even trying, if you are controlling a general and doing the objectives you are set during battle, then the player is unknowingly performing sequences derived straight from one of China's great classical works of literature. The exaggerated characters and combat in games such as Dynasty Warriors help provide an instantly recognisable understanding of what many of the characters stand for and if you were to then decide to read Luo Guanzhong's work you could understand how these depictions have been formed and thought about as opposed to the developers just being unnecessarily exuberant with no reasoning whatsoever.

Although these games are not history lessons or a full scale reading of the Classic, they are a great entry-point for someone who was completely unaware of the events and create a personal connection for the audience to the events after they've "experienced" and played through them.

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Review Quote

"*Three Kingdoms* gives us the *Iliad* of China. First of the five-great works of traditional prose fiction, this master narrative transforms history into epic and has thereby educated and entertained readers of five centuries with unforgettable exemplars of martial and civic virtue, of personal fidelity and political treachery. Moss Roberts's translation is of surpassing excellence and impeccable scholarship. It should delight and captivate Western readers for many years to come." --Anthony C. Yu, University of Chicago, regarding Moss Roberts' Abridged text of Luo Guanzhong's Romance of the Three Kingdoms

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