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INVENTING THE ROMANTIC KINGDOM: THE RESURRECTION AND LEGITIMIZATION OF THE SHU HAN KINGDOM BEFORE THE *ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS*

Simon Shen 沈旭暉

O so vast, O so mighty,
The Great River rolls to sea,
Flowers do waves thrash,
Heroes do sands smash,
When all the dreams drain,
Same are lose and gain.

—Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* 三國演義[1]

When the decline of the Roman Empire began after the second century, the demise of Rome's counterpart in the East, the Han 漢 dynasty of China (206 BC–AD 9; AD 25–220),[2] was already well into its final stage. Troubled for decades by land annexations, palace rivalries and eunuch politics, the central government of the Eastern Han gradually lost effective control over its territories after the Yellow Turban Rebellion 黃巾之亂 in AD 184. Despite the efforts of Cao Cao 曹操, the military ruler of the Han, to hold together some semblance of a united realm, dozens of warlords still competed for land and resources. After the Battle of Red Cliff 赤壁之戰 in AD 208, only three rivals remained, including Cao of the central government, and the joint winners of the battle, Liu Bei 劉備 and Sun Quan 孫權. When Cao died in AD 220, his son Cao Pi 曹丕 overthrew the Eastern Han dynasty and established the Wei 魏 kingdom.[3] With the establishment of the Shu Han 蜀漢 kingdom

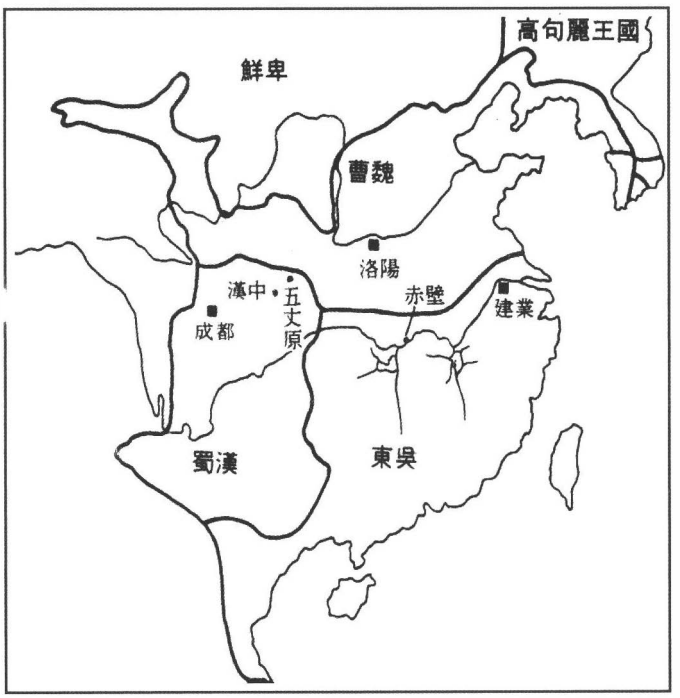
[1] Luo Guanzhong, *Romance of the three kingdoms*, trans. C. H. Brewitt Taylor (Tokyo: C. E. Tuttle, 1959), "Overture: the Beginning Song."

[2] The Han dynasty is divided into two periods: the Western Han 西漢 (206 BC–AD 9) and the Eastern Han 東漢 (AD 25–220), with an interlude of the Xin 新 dynasty (AD 9–23) in between.

[3] The official name of the kingdom was "Wei," but in order to distinguish it from other regimes named "Wei," sometimes it is conventionally known as the "Cao-Wei 曹魏 kingdom."

Map 1

Location of the Shu Han kingdom in the Era of the Three Kingdoms (roughly AD 220s) (Bo Yang, Zhongguo ren shi gang*)*



(AD 221–63)[4] by Liu and subsequently the Wu 吳 kingdom (AD 222–80) by Sun, the well-known Era of Three Kingdoms 三國時代 (*c.* AD 220–65) began (see Map 1).[5]

Each of the three kingdoms had vivid characteristics: Wei was situated in the north-central region, the heartland of the Han predecessors, with superior military strength; Shu Han, despite having the smallest territory among the three, claimed its ancestry from the Han dynasty and was antagonistic toward Wei; Wu, in contrast, was more like a purely regional regime that had evidently little ambition to conquer the whole of China.[6] None of the three kingdoms were powerful enough to conquer one another, and they were ultimately replaced by the Western Jin 西晉 dynasty (AD 265–316) within decades of their foundation.[7]

Of the three kingdoms, Shu Han attracts the most attention from historians as well as the Chinese populace. Denigrated as bandits (*zei* 賊) by the dominant Wei regime,[8] Liu Bei and his followers are surprisingly known as heroes, or lesser-gods, to most Chinese people today with Liu himself portrayed as the benevolent leader, general Guanyu 關羽 as the god of war, and chancellor Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 the symbol of the intelligent and resourceful minister. The transformation of the Shu Han leaders from bandits to heroes is not an historical accident. Without exaggeration, the long-term myth-making process has lasted almost two millennia and continues even today, with the kingdom assigned four principal attributes: stability in a chaotic world; legitimate descent from the glorious Han dynasty; a regime ruled by charismatic, benevolent, righteous and intelligent leaders; and finally, an archaic political Utopia by contrast with which present-day Chinese can reflect their disapproval of contemporary regimes.

[4] Similar to that of Wei, the formal name of the regime was "Han." However, in order to distinguish it from the unified Han dynasty, Liu Bei's regime is known as the Shu Han kingdom, and this is the name that will be used in this article (*Shu* 蜀 being the archaic name for the region it controlled—the Sichuan 四川 basin).

[5] The rulers of the three kingdoms in fact all claimed the title of emperor 皇帝. However, because none was qualified to establish a real "empire" in a divided China, their regimes are still conventionally known as "kingdoms" 王國.

[6] Despite intermittent attempts to attack the Wei border, the Wu kingdom was mainly concerned about the development of southeast China rather than focusing on its two rivals. For example, the kingdom sent an expedition to explore present-day Taiwan in AD 230 without targeting the territories of Wei or Shu Han. Sima Guang, *Zi zhi tong jian* [Comprehensive mirror for aid in government] (Taiwan: Commercial Publishing, 1966), year 230, entry 1.

[7] Sima Yan 司馬炎, the founding emperor of the Western Jin dynasty, was the grandson /of the Wei chancellor Sima Yi 司馬懿. Sima Yan's father, Sima Zhao 司馬昭, conquered the Shu Han kingdom in AD 263; he himself replaced the Wei ruler in AD 265 and founded Jin; then he finally captured the Wu kingdom in AD 280 and briefly reunified China.

[8] The Wei kingdom viewed both the other two kingdoms as usurpers, and described them as "bandits" in official documents. For instance, in AD 227 Sun Zi 孫資, a Wei official, told his ruler that "the Shu Han bandits could only hide in mountains; the Wu bandits could only hide /in lakes." Sima Guang, *Zi zhi tong jian*, year 227, entry 4 (translation by the author).

[9] Chen wrote the book during the Western Jin dynasty, when he served as a court official. Generally it appears to be an objective source recording most contemporary historic events. However, some possible biases owing to Chen's official position will be mentioned in later sections. Chen Shou, *San guo zhi* [History of the three kingdoms], ed. Chen Naiqian (Beijing: China Bookstall, 1959).

Juxtaposed with historical accounts recorded from primary sources, particularly Chen Shou's 陳壽 biographical history *San guo zhi* 三國誌 (*History of the Three Kingdoms*)[9] and Sima Guang's 司馬光 chronicle *Zi zhi tong jian* 資治通鑑[10] (*Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*),[11] the favourable attitude of the Chinese people toward the Shu Han kingdom is paradoxical—the truths largely contradicting the Utopian image of the kingdom. For, like many of its Sichuanese predecessors and successors, the Shu Han kingdom was merely a short-lived, small, regional regime in the remote Chinese past without a significant cultural or economic legacy. Like many regimes in a divided, chaotic world, the kingdom was also established by Machiavellian strategies and developed a warlike posture that resulted in limited indigenous support.

As revealed by historical evidence, the Shu Han image indeed went through a process of romanticization through which the realities gradually became buried. Of the various primary sources contributing to the romanticized images of the Shu Han, the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is easily the widest-known and most popular, with interesting variants such as the Republican novel *Fan San guo yan yi* 反三國演義 (*Reverse of Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) representing the extreme version of such romanticization (see Figure 1).[12] The result has been that most Chinese people have favoured the Shu Han kingdom over many much stronger, longer-lived, and truly national dynasties, such as the Eastern Han or Song dynasty (AD 960–1127).

Owing to an intellectual devotion to studying the later stages of romanticization of the Shu Han kingdom, particularly after the emergence of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, this article only aims to study the mythologization in its earlier stages—i.e. the reshaping of the artificial resurrection and legitimization of the regime before the sixth century. Without understanding the earlier processes, the easy acceptance of the future *Romance* would be hard to comprehend. In so doing, I will attempt, in the following sections, to disinter the historical truths that contrast with the myth.

[10] Although Sima Guang wrote his book in the Song 宋 dynasty (AD 960–1127), he systematically separated the historical account and sources from his subjective comments in the chronicles; thus the book can be viewed as both a primary and a secondary source. Sima Guang, *Zi zhi tong jian* (Taiwan: Commercial Publishing, 1966), unless otherwise cited. The article will also use Bo Yang's 柏楊 1993 edition of *Zi zhi tong jian* for commentaries cited by the editor (Taiwan: Far Current Publishing, 1993).

[11] The translated English title of the historiography is given in Charles Gardner, *Chinese traditional historiography* (Harvard, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938), p.14. See also Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese history: a manual* (Harvard, Mass.: Harvard University Asian Center, 1999).

[12] Zhou Dahuang 周大荒, *Fan San guo yan yi* [Reverse of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*] (Taiwan: Chit Yau Publishing, 1996).

Figures 1 (and 2 and 3 overleaf)

Romanticized images of Shu Han leaders in their extreme versions in Zhou Dayong, Fan San guo yan yi *[Reverse of Romance of the Three Kingdoms]*

Figures 2 and 3

Before exploring the details, however, let us first consider the application of the romanticization in more recent Chinese history.

Application of Romanticization

To start with, we have to acknowledge that the romanticization was motivated by political, diplomatic, ideological and social calculations. Dismantling the myth, or "returning mythic heroes to historical figures" as cultural scholar Jin Ze 金澤 suggests,[13] might be painful to some admirers. But the search for historical truths might nonetheless motivate people to further explore hidden knowledge about their past, and serve as a schema on which to develop a better understanding of Chinese history, politics, society and culture. Most

[13] Jin Ze, *Ying xiong chong bai yu wen hua xing tai* [Hero worship and cultural transfiguration] (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1991), p.13.

strikingly, the romanticization presents a classic example of the long-term distortion of primary sources by a secondary effort involving a large number of people living in different periods of time. The persistence of Shu Han's elevated status, coupled with its meagre long-term impact on history, remains a prime example of the power of historical myth-making.

Indeed, imitators of an idealized Shu Han image have sometimes influenced actual historical events. Many historical figures who explicitly modeled themselves on the Shu Han heroes unexpectedly failed to succeed in the same way the former were believed to have, or even authored political or military fiascoes. For instance, General Guo Ni 郭倪 of the Southern Song 南宋 dynasty (AD 1128–1279) imitated the wise Zhuge Liang's style of dress and used *mu niu liu ma* 木牛流馬 (the wooden oxen and the rolling horses),[14] Zhuge's mechanical tools for transportation ten centuries earlier, in the battleground. Ironically, Guo's army was roundly defeated by the Jurchen 女真, resulting in the Taiwanese writer Bo Yang giving him the nickname "Zhuge Liang with tears" (*dai zhi* Zhuge Liang 帶汁諸葛亮).[15] Without an understanding of the whole process of romanticization, historians cannot fully explain the repeated, if often peripheral, imitation of ancient figures by the Chinese people.

In the past, some historians have suggested that ancient China was a hierarchical society with limited social mobility.[16] The sociologist Max Weber labeled China a "feudal and prebendal state" that rarely permitted inter-class movements.[17] Although the Weberian characterization is no longer accepted at face value, the transfiguration of the Shu Han image still poses a forceful challenge to rigid structural interpretations of Chinese culture. It demonstrates a mixture of élitist and popular culture, as the myth-making features both state sponsorship and broader participation by ordinary people. In other words, the Shu Han mythologization was not strictly manipulated from the top down or the bottom up, but by a mixture of both, and has in that sense contributed to a national sense of cultural unity.

In tying the myth to its application today, the popular perception of history and the actual political agenda are undoubtedly still intertwined in China. Understanding the former can at times enable political scientists to predict the latter. For example, in 1999, Premier Zhu Rongji 朱鎔基 openly acknowledged the achievements of Emperor Yongzheng 雍正 (reigned AD 1722–35) of the Qing 清 dynasty (AD 1644–1912) in order to emphasize his determination to promote reforms parallelling those of the Qing emperor. As a result, Zhu created a fashion in China for glorifying Yongzheng that was viewed as popular support for this anti-corruption campaign.[18] By the same token, the projection of the Shu Han image into the contemporary political arena may enable scholars to discern popular political sentiments. Continued widespread interest in the Shu Han heroes, for instance, might imply a strong desire for a non-corrupt, righteous Chinese regime. But how was it that this

[14] *Muniu* (wooden oxen) and *liu ma* (rolling horses) were the tools of transportation Zhuge Liang used to supply resources and food to the army. They were among the earliest mechanical devices recorded in Chinese history. Sima Guang, *Zi zhi tong jian* (1966), year 231, entry 3. *Mu niu liu ma* were given additional power in the popular perception in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and became one of the symbols of Zhuge Liang. Luo Guanzgong, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, ch.102.

[15] Despite nominal rejection by traditional historians, Bo Yang is a contemporary Taiwanese scholar—and self-proclaimed amateur historian—who has exerted great influence over younger generations of Chinese. Maintaining a critical attitude toward traditional approaches to Chinese history, he assesses the contribution of ancient Chinese politicians mainly by their determination to reform. Bo Yang, *Zhongguoren shi gang* [History of the Chinese people] (Taiwan: Cosmos Books, 1997), pp.680–1.

[16] For example, Frederick Wakeman suggested that the hierarchical Chinese order from the top down was emperor, nobility, gentry and common people. Wakeman, *The fall of imperial China* (New York: Free Press, 1975), pp.19–20.

[17] Max Weber, *The religion of China* (New York: Free Press, 1968), p.33.

[18] Zhu Rongji promoted the historical novel *Yongzheng huang di* 雍正皇帝 [Emperor Yongzheng] and the television series with the same title, mobilizing a trend in the mainland to credit the Qing emperor. Relevant commentaries on the fashion can be found on the back page of the novel. Er Yuehe, *Yongzheng huang di* [Emperor Yongzheng], reprint ed. (Hong Kong: Ming Pao Publishing, 1999).

image was resuscitated in the first place? To answer this question, we should go back 1,700 years to the end of the Three Kingdoms in China.

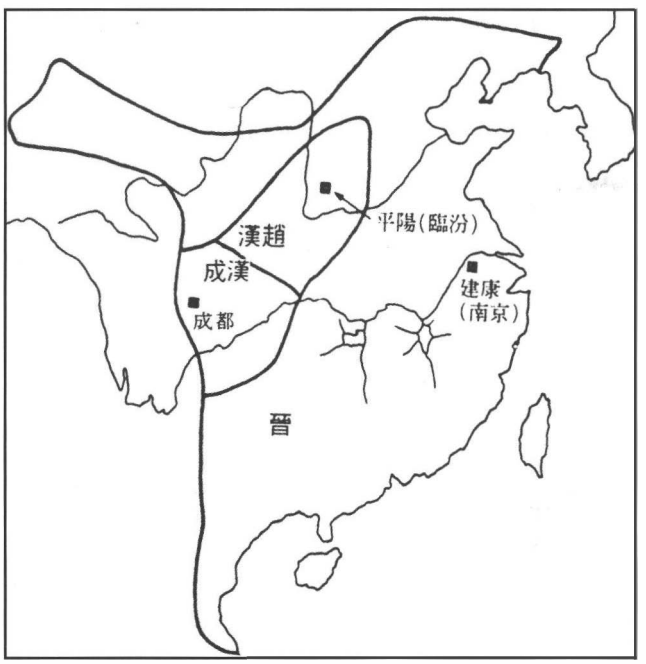
Resuscitation

As we have seen, after its immediate collapse the Shu Han kingdom was viewed as little more than a short-lived regional political entity. The whole process of romanticizion began in a low-profile manner in the fourth century. After its unification of China, the Western Jin dynasty soon faced the challenges of decentralization and non-ethnic Han 漢族 rebellions. From AD 311 to 316, the minority Xiongnu 匈奴[19] captured both Jin capitals of Luoyang 洛陽 and Chang'an 長安, resulting in the collapse of the dynasty and the beginning of the Era of Disunion 五胡十六國 (*c.* AD 304–439); the Jin royalty continued their reign in the southeast (known as the Eastern Jin 東晉 dynasty, AD 317–420), while other areas of China fell under the control of roughly sixteen kingdoms.[20] According to Huang Fanguang 黃繁光, a Chinese scholar focusing on this period, historians are hard-pressed to understand the domestic policies of these brief kingdoms because of the disappearance of primary sources.[21] As a result, most scholars have not realized that the Shu Han myth originated as early as the fourth century, resulting in the understandable unfamiliarity of this early phase of fictionalization. In fact, this period laid the foundation for the future transfiguration of the Shu Han image because it helped prolong the regime even if only in name. Although the authors of the Shu Han myth at this time were not necessarily supporters, their practices distinguished the kingdom from its regional predecessors and successors, initiating a legend with unintended consequences.

Because the legacy of the Shu Han kingdom was still vivid in the minds of contemporaries after the Jin fell in the north, some insurgent kings purposely forged links between themselves and the Shu Han leaders, or even claimed direct kinship with the Liu family, enlisting Liu Bei as a spiritual co-founder of their own kingdoms. Two different strategies for using the Shu Han legacy can be distinguished at this time. The first was devised by rulers seeking a broader appeal for their regimes, such as the Xiongnu leader Liu Yuan 劉淵 who founded the Han-Zhao 漢趙 kingdom in AD 304.[22]

Map 2

Location of the Han-Zhao kingdom and the Cheng-Han kingdom in the early Era of Disunion (roughly AD 300s)



[19] Some historians use the term "Huns" as a synonym for the Xiongnu, but no concensus has been reached regarding their relationship. The article will describe this minority group as the "Xiongnu."

[20] Note that "sixteen" is not an accurate number, as there were further tiny regimes established at the time on a more temporary basis. Moreover, only four of the many kingdoms were indeed established by the Han Chinese.

[21] Huang Fanguang, who studies one of the minority kingdoms named Cheng-Han 成漢 (AD 304–47), suggests that most primary sources of the Cheng-Han kingdom—a regime that we shall soon look into—were lost when the Jin dynasty conquered it in AD 347. Huang Fanguang, *Cheng Han xing wang ji ji dui dwai guan xi* [The rise and fall of Cheng-Han and its external relations] (Taiwan: Private Chinese Culture Institute, 1973), p.141.

Although Han-Zhao comprised less than a third of the northern region of China, including Loyang and Chang'an (see Map 2), Liu Yuan still aimed at replacing the Jin dynasty and unifying the whole country. In order to attract popular support, gain favour from the ethnic Chinese, and challenge the legitimacy of the Jin dynasty, Liu Yuan awkwardly linked his Xiongnu ancestry with the Han emperors and named his new kingdom "Han." According to the *Jin shu* 晉書 (*History of the Jin*), written in the Tang period (AD 618–907), Liu's self-identification as a Han descendant was based on the following logic: the Xiongnu leader shared the same surname with Han royalty, Liu, because one of his ancestors had married a Han princess four centuries earlier—which was, ironically, distasteful to Liu Bang 劉邦, the founder of the Western Han dynasty.[23] As the Xiongnu king proudly told his ministers,

> The Han dynasty has lasted for a long time and granted many merits to the people. I am the nephew of Han descendants. As the Eastern Han has met its demise, why can I not acceed to the Han throne?[24]

As a side-effect of this claim to his lineage, the Shu Han founder Liu Bei, who had the same family connection, was naturally a welcome addition to Liu Yuan's arbitrary ancestor list. Without a tangible legacy within the Shu Han region, Liu Yuan relied on official and religious ceremonies to link him with his alleged Han ancestors. As recorded in the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*, when Liu Yuan formally founded his kingdom,

> [he] officially honoured Liu Chan 劉禪, the last Shu Han ruler, as "Emperor Xiao Huai" 孝懷皇帝; built three main royal temples to worship Liu Bang, Liu Xiu 劉秀[25] and Liu Bei as the "Three Great Ancestors" [*san zhu* 三祖], and constructed five lesser temples to worship the "Five Lesser Ancestors" [*wu zong* 五宗].[26]

This is the first known record in history associating Liu Bei with the founders of the Western and Eastern Han dynasties after the collapse of Shu Han. More important, Liu Bei in the Han-Zhao temple was placed even higher in status than many genuine Han emperors, such as the famous Emperor Wu 武帝 (141–87 BC). Thus, a wider symbolic resurrection of the Shu Han was unconsciously prompted by Li Yuan's efforts, through which Shu Han rulers were posthumously legitimized as heirs to the Han dynasty.

The Badi 巴氐 minority leader, Li Xiong 李雄, who founded Shu Han's regional successor, the Cheng-Han 成漢 kingdom (AD 304–47),[27] made a different calculation. Establishing his kingdom in Sichuan, Li Xiong had no evident ambition to expand his kingdom beyond the Shu Han boundaries (see Map 2). Unlike the Xiongnu, who dreamed of unifying China, the Badi were content to control Sichuan alone as a regional power. The Shu Han experience thus became an historic justification for the existence of their new Sichuan regime, and a recent precedent to inculcate indigenous Sichuan people with separatist sentiments. By associating itself with Shu Han, Cheng-Han succeeded in maintaining its regional hegemony with little territorial ambition for thirty years, since other powers neither recognized nor focused on it.

[22] The Xiongnu kingdom was first named Han by Liu Yuan in AD 304, then renamed Zhao 趙 by Liu Yuan's descendent Liu Yao 劉曜 in AD 318, and thus was known as the Han-Zhao or Early Zhao 前趙 kingdom in Chinese history. In order to emphasize its linkage to Han, the article will use the former name for convenience.

[23] Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 et al., eds., *Jin shu* [History of the Jin dynasty] (Beijing: China Bookstore, 1974), pp.2644–52. Also Sima Guang, *Zi zhi tong jian* (1966), year 304, entry 17.

[24] Ibid. (translation by the author).

[25] Liu Bang was the founder of the Western Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 9); Liu Xiu was the founder of the Eastern Han dynasty (AD 25–220. The "Five Lesser Ancestors" were other genuine Han emperors.

[26] Sima Guang, *Zi zhi tong jian* (1966), year 304, entry 17 (translation by the author).

[27] The kingdom was first named Cheng 成 by Li Xiong in AD 304, and was renamed Han by Li Xiong's descendent Li Shou 李壽 in AD 338; thus it is known as the Cheng-Han kingdom for convenience.

Because the regional concentration of the Badi has not attracted much historical attention, unlike the straightforward Han-Zhao ancestor-hunt, historians often neglect the Cheng-Han contribution to the Shu Han myth. In fact, the Cheng-Han policies aroused indigenous Sichuan separatist sentiment by substantially continuing or, more correctly, modifying the Shu Han legacy in the region. When the kingdom was founded, Li Xiong explicitly imitated Shu Han policies in ruling Sichuan, such as appointing a Zhuge Liang-type hermit, Fan Changsheng 范長生—who was alive in Zhuge's time and was elevated to quasi-god status after his death in AD 318—as his chancellor.[28] As recorded in the *History of the Jin*, Cheng-Han rulers also reintroduced the Shu Han chancellor's internal legal reform in the territories to pursue a continuation of regional policy, even if the policy was not welcomed by landholders in either regime. For instance, Li Xiong confiscated lands owned by the gentry and nobility, and forbade illegal land annexations that were commonly practiced in the Eastern Jin dynasty.[29] Such reforms were compatible with Zhuge's attempt to use legal measures to promote the dignity of government in AD 214, including strict military and taxation laws, as he openly confessed:

> I use the laws to scare people today, because people will know the grandeur of the government when the laws are effectively enforced.[30]

Moreover, although not explicitly documented in the historical record, the preservation of Shu Han sites and relics during the Era of Disunion should probably be credited to the subsequent Sichuan regimes, including Cheng-Han. Famous Shu Han relics, including the palace of the White Emperor City 白帝城[31] and the Zhuge Liang and Liu Bei Temples, were extant for later poetic romanticization,[32] and still exist today due to their efforts. Indigenous people were thus enabled to continue visiting and memorializing their old rulers, leaving the veneration of Shu Han leaders undisturbed even down to the twentieth century, as visitors have observed.[33]

In an eventual *volte-face*, Cheng-Han also euphemistically imitated Han-Zhao's ancestor-seeking propaganda. Because Li Shou 李壽, the fourth Cheng-Han emperor, was dissatisfied with the limited territorial achievements of his Badi ancestors, he turned to model himself on Emperor Wu of the Western Han dynasty and switched his nation's focus from regional interests to the unification of China. Thus, in AD 338, he renamed his country Han, naturally including Liu Bei and his son Liu Chan in his list of ancestors. Ironically, Li Shou's ambitious pretension burdened his small country, resulting in the annexation of Cheng-Han by the Eastern Jin in AD 347.

Viewed from another angle, Shu Han was fortunate in that the Era of Disunion followed within half a century of its collapse, because popular history is often distorted, especially by accounts exaggerating the merits of the founding emperors and the evils of the final rulers.[34] Owing to "the interdepartmental obstructionism that is always inseparable from bureaucracy," as British sinologist Denis Twitchett observed, Chinese official historians faced restrictions in providing objective biographies.[35] The fate of other

[28] Huang Fanguang, *Cheng Han xing wang ji ji dui wai guan xi*, p.103.

[29] Fang Xuanling et al., *Jin shu*, p.3041. Also Sima Guang, *Zi zhi tong jian* (1966), year 214, entry 5.

[30] Ibid. (translation by the author).

[31] The palace of the White Emperor City was the place where Liu Bei died, and also where he asked Zhuge Liang to assist his son, Liu Chan, to rule the *Shu* Han kingdom.

[32] For instance, "The Ancient Cypress" 古柏行 written by Du Fu 杜甫 in the Tang dynasty:

> There is an ancient cypress in front of the Kongming [Zhuge Liang] Temple,
> With branches bronzy and roots seemingly of stony cane.
> The smooth and hoary trunk is thick for forty arms to span around,
> Its dark green leaves wave in the sky two thousand feet beyond ...
>
> 孔明廟前有老柏/ 柯如青銅根如石/ 雙皮溜雨四十圍/ 黛色參天二千尺

Translated in Wu Juntao, 300 *Tang poems, a new translation* (Beijing: External Translation Co., 1988), p.178.

[33] For instance, a Chinese scholar, Li Dongfang 黎東方, in 1938 still observed some indigenous Sichuan people wearing white turbans in the style of those that commemorated the death of Zhuge Liang in AD 234. However, it should be noted that such practices may well have been kept alive by the popularity of other aspects of the Shu Han myth, such as the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Li Dongfang, *Xishuo san guo* [Talking about the Three Kingdoms in detail] (Taiwan: Legend Literature Publishing, 1977), p.358.

[34] From the last ruler King Jie 桀王 of the mythical Xia 夏 dynasty (2205–1766 BC) on, most 'last' emperors were recorded as terrors or fools by historians of the following dynasties. The most famous include King Zhou 紂王 of the Shang 商 dynasty (1766–1122 BC), King You 幽王 of the Zhou 周 dynasty (1122–770 BC), and Emperor Yang 煬帝 of the Sui 隋 dynasty (AD 580–618).

[35] Denis Twitchett, "Problems of Chinese biography," in *Confucian personalities*, ed. Arthur Wright and Denis Twitchett (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press), p.27.

Sichuan regimes, among other regional dynasties, frequently demonstrated their diminished historical status. The principalities of Ba 巴 and Shu 蜀 in the Warring-states Era 戰國時代 (403–221 BC), for example, lasted for hundreds of years, but their histories were said to have been destroyed in the book-burning frenzy of the Qin 秦 dynasty (220–206 BC) after earlier being involuntarily incorporated by the Qin state.[36] The little-known, short-lived Cheng Jia 成家 kingdom (AD 25–36) ruled Sichuan for eleven years during the founding years of the Eastern Han dynasty,[37] but even its status as a regional regime is omitted by most historians.[38]

Thus, if the Jin dynasty had lasted for another century or more, perhaps the Shu Han kingdom would reasonably have followed the historic path of Ba, Shu and Cheng Jia. In fact, the Jin dynasty did try to eliminate the Sichuan regional veneration of the old Shu Han leaders and modify Shu Han history in a number of ways. As a humiliating act, the last Shu Han emperor, Liu Chan—whose nickname Ah Dou 阿斗 became a synonym for a foolish ruler in the works of later historians[39]—was put under house arrest in Luoyang after his kingdom was destroyed. Chen Shou revealed Liu's humble position in the Jin court:

> Liu Chan was asked to move the entire royal family to Luoyang. The Jin emperor told him, "Now you become the Duke of Anle 安樂公 of our dynasty. As you cared about your people and surrendered to our great dynasty, your land is now safe … I really appreciate your decision![40]

Moreover, in writing the history of Shu Han for the Jin royalty, Chen deliberately camouflaged Wei's inability to defeat the Shu Han army, and exaggerated the setbacks of Shu Han policies.[41] The Russian literary scholar Boris Riftin even suggested that Chen made some personal attacks on the son of Zhuge Liang in the *History of the Three Kingdoms*:[42]

> The Sichuan people memorialized Zhuge Liang, thus crediting his son, Zhuge Zhan 諸葛瞻, with most of the government decisions of other ministers after Zhuge Liang's death. However, Zhuge Zhan was mediocre, his reputation was credited [with] much more than he deserved.[43]

Riftin suggested that the way Chen criticized the heir of Zhuge Liang as the over-assessed noble might be Chen's personal revenge on the Zhuge family, because the son of Zhuge Liang had once punished Chen when he was serving the Shu Han government. Riftin, of course, believed that Zhuge Zhan was not 'mediocre'.

Lastly, we can assess the importance of the resurrection of Shu Han by contrasting its fate with that of the contemporary Wu kingdom. Wu was militarily stronger and territorially larger than Shu Han, but later regional rulers never used it for propaganda, perhaps because its territory was fully occupied by the subsequent Eastern Jin dynasty, which had no need to forge a new ancestry to gain national appeal fifty years after its foundation. Wu's strong regional stance and lack of unifying ambitions also discouraged regimes from appealing to the entire nation to claim it as their predecessor.[44] Thus, because of the aloof attitude of insurgent rulers toward it, in contrast to Shu Han, the Wu

[36] Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shi ji* 史記 [Records of the grand historian] (Beijing: China Bookstore, 1959), pp.254–5.

[37] Sima Guang, *Zi zhi tong jian* (1966), years 25–36.

[38] Other regional regimes founded in the Sichuan region in Chinese history include the Shu kingdom (AD 405–13) in the later Era of Disunion, the Early Shu 前蜀 kingdom (AD 907–25) and the Later Shu 後蜀 kingdom (AD 934–65) in the Five Dynasties 五代 (*c.* AD 907–60), and the Xia 夏 kingdom (AD 1362–71) at the beginning of the Ming 明 dynasty (AD 1368–1644).

[39] There is a Chinese idiom, ***le bu si Shu*** 樂不思蜀 (too happy to remember Shu Han), describing Liu Chan's happiness in the Jin capital when Shu Han went into demise. Adou, Liu Chan's nickname, now also denotes a useless person unable to be assisted even by people with Zhuge Liang's intelligence.

[40] Chen Shou, *San guo zhi*, Book *Shu* 蜀, pp.901–2 (translation by the author).

[41] Sima Yi, the Wei chief commander, was the grandfather of the first emperor of the Jin dynasty. Chen Shou was subject to pressure from the Jin royalty to glorify the Sima ancestors. However, some scholars, like Li Dongfang, also suggest that Chen's version of history is objective enough. Li Dongfang, *Xi shuo san guo*, pp.369–70. As Chen's account is the main primary source available on the history of the Three Kingdoms, whether the source is biased remains a matter of academic controversy.

[42] Boris Riftin, *San Guo Yan Yi yu min jian min xue chuan tong* [*Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and civic literary tradition], trans. Wan Shikeng (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Script Publishing, 1997), p.15.

[43] Chen Shou, *San guo zhi*, Book *Shu*, p.932 (translation by the author).

[44] The ancient Wu predecessors, the kingdoms of Wu and Yue 越 during the Warring-states era, had also been considered culturally peripheral to the "cradle" of Zhou civilization.

kingdom was not a candidate for romanticization in Chinese history.

* * *

The images of Shu Han confabulated with the Xiongnu and the Badi, the legitimate national government and the indigenous regional hegemon, respectively, did not match the historical facts in the Three Kingdoms era. Here this article will explain the exiled nature of the Shu Han kingdom and its distinction from an indigenous regional regime, and will reserve arguments against the asserted nationwide Shu Han legitimacy for later.

Although the historian Ray Huang explains the division of the Three Kingdoms in terms of geopolitics, suggesting that Sichuan was already isolated from central China in the third century,[45] the Shu Han regime was in fact alien to the indigenous people. While the Shu Han policies were emulated by the later Sichuan regime of Cheng-Han, they were little more than dictatorial orders issued by outsiders. Already noticed in the Cheng-Han kingdom by some officials, though not condoned by the royalty, the participation of indigenous Sichuan people in the Shu Han government was negligible.[46] When Gong Zhuang 龔壯 persuaded Li Shou, the fourth Cheng-Han ruler, to hire more indigenous Sichuan people in the government, he reminded Li of Shu Han's alien posture toward the Sichuan people:

> When Liu Bei ruled Sichuan, those in power came from the north and the east. Sadly, when Shu Han was overthrown, most outsiders were slaughtered.[47]

In fact, indigenous people of the Shu Han kingdom were dissatisfied, as implied by Qiao Zhou 譙周, one of the few Sichuan élite serving in the Shu Han government.[48] In his "Essay on Enemy Kingdoms" (*Chou guo lun* 讎國論) submitted as a petition to Liu Chan in AD 257, where he describes Wei as a "*zhao jian zhi guo*" 肇建之國 (a booming country) and Shu Han as a "*yin yu zhi guo*" 因餘之國 (a doomed country), Qiao warned the last Shu Han emperor:

> Riots will break out when people can no longer tolerate their current hardships; the country will collapse when the ministers cease to care about the people, and the officials are brutal to citizens … . If there are constant wars and a mishap occurs, even the wisest will be unable to show the way of safety.[49]

Switching sides to serve the Jin government after the collapse of Shu Han, Qiao, representing indigenous interests, was already discontented with the Shu Han regime. The description in his petition implied that, with a primary focus on external warfare against the Wei kingdom, Shu Han rarely set any long-term goals for developing Sichuan apart from extracting the region's resources to expand its territories. Some Sichuan landholders also resented the Shu Han distrust of them in government, as shown by the way in which the strict social control imposed by Zhang Yi 張嶷, governor-general of present-day Yunnan 雲南, stirred up a number of local rebellions.[50] Shu Han control over Sichuan was indeed fragile,[51] as proved by the stance of local élites who

[45] Ray Huang, *China: a macro history* (New York: East Gate, 1996), pp.63–4.

[46] For instance, among the top generals recorded in Book *Shu* of *San guo zhi* (the most famous including Guan Yu 關羽, Zhang Fei 張飛, Zhao Yun 趙雲, Ma Chao 馬超, Huang Zhong 黃忠 and Wei Yan 魏延), none came from the Sichuan region. Among the top administrative ministers recorded in the same book (the best known including Zhuge Liang, Pang Tong 龐統, Jiang Wan 姜琬, Fei Yi 費禕, Deng Zhi 鄧芝, Fa Zheng 法正 and Qiao Zhou 譙周), only Fa and Qian were indigenous Sichuan people. Chen Shou, *San guo zhi*, Book *Shu*.

[47] Sima Guang, *Zi zhi tong jian* (1966), year 338, entry 9 (translation by the author).

[48] Qiao had served in different educational and internal affairs positions in the *Shu* Han government. Ibid., year 257, entry 6.

[49] Qiao Zhou, *Chouguolun* [Essay on enemy kingdoms], as quoted in Sima Guang, *Zi zhi tong jian* (1966), year 257, entry 6 (translation by the author).

[50] For instance, refer to the rebellions led by indigenous leaders Wei Lang 魏狼 and Dong Feng 冬逢. Chen Shou, *San guo zhi*, Book *Shu*, p.1073.

[51] Luo Kaiyu, a contemporary Hong Kong scholar, emphasizes the lack of indigenous support of the *Shu* Han regime. Luo Kaiyu, *San guo zhi* [History of the Three Kingdoms] (Hong Kong: China Bookstore, 1998), pp.174–5. Luo's book also presents some other modern perspectives in the study of the real history of the Three Kingdoms.

did not provide the regime with any support when the Wei army beseiged present-day Chongqing 重慶 in AD 263.[52] As the leading indigenous scholar, Qiao was the first Shu Han official to even propose surrender.[53]

In short, the Shu Han regime was merely an exiled government based temporarily in Sichuan, dominated by élites from present-day Hunan 湖南 and Gansu 甘肅, not caring much about the region at all. "Governors, but no government," suggested the Japanese historian Hisayuki Miyakawa, correctly noting that "the attitude of the native southern subjects was conditioned by the individual character of the local official."[54] Just as few historians would would argue that the Nationalist 國民黨 government's temporary settlement in Sichuan during World War II (AD 1937–45) was a beneficial interlude for the indigenous Sichuan people, the same could be said of the Shu Han regime.[55]

Nevertheless, the combination of the Xiongnu glorification of the regime and the Badi continuation of Zhuge Liang's legacy rescued Shu Han from possible oblivion. Without attempts to link Shu Han with other indigenous powers in the Era of Disunion, the Sichuan people would not have felt any particular nostalgia for the regime. By the same token, without attempts to equate Liu Bei with Liu Bang, such positive sentiment would never have extended to China as a whole. Although Cheng-Han and Han-Zhao collapsed within a matter of decades, the image of Shu Han among fellow Chinese was nonetheless reinstated, if not yet romanticized; such a reinstatement was vital for the unfolding of the myth-making process.

52 Sima Guang, *Zi zhi tong jian* (1966), year 263, entry 8.

53 Ibid.

54 Hisayuki Miyakawa, "The Confucianization of South China," in *The Confucian persuasion*, ed. Arthur Wright (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1960), p.36.

55 The Shu Han regime has some interesting parallels with the exiled Nationalist government that had Chongqing as its temporary capital during WWII. For instance, the Chongqing government was also dominated by outsiders who mainly cared about extracting Sichuan's manpower and resources for the war, and rarely set any long-term goals for the internal development of Sichuan. For the move of the capital from Nanjing to Chongqing in AD 1937, refer to Immanuel Hsu, *The rise of modern China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.583–5.

Legitimization

Although Shu Han surpassed Wu and other regional powers in being resurrected by insurgent rulers in the fourth century, the kingdom was still illegitimate in the view of traditional historians, who applied the "rule of the central capital" (*shoudu lun* 首都論),[56] which judged the legitimacy of regimes by the possession of the central (i.e. dynastic) capital city. When the Wei kingdom controlled the central regions of China, including the ancient capitals of Luoyang and Chang'an, most contemporary historians, like Chen Shou, treated Shu Han rulers as usurpers, subordinate in status to Wei.[57] The Jin court, too, acknowledged Wei's legitimacy in the Three Kingdoms era because it theoretically inherited the Mandate of Heaven 天命 from the former.[58] Fortunately for Shu Han, after the Jin's withdrawal to the south in AD 316, Jin and subsequent southern regimes gradually reevaluated their assessment of the Three Kingdoms, and finally replaced Wei with Shu Han as their legitimate predecessor prompted by two political impulses. First, almost solely under the influence of the Northern Wei 北魏 kingdom (AD 386–556) founded by the Xianbei 鮮卑 minority, northern China was gradually unified by the Northern Dynasties 北朝. At the same time, southern

56 The information is cited in Bo Yang's edited version of the *Zi zhi tong jian*, which includes Liang Qichao's 梁啟超 commentary on legitimacy. As quoted in Sima Guang, *Zi zhi tong jian*, ed. Bo Yang (1993), year 221, entry 4.

57 As shown in *Sanguozhi*, Chen Shou viewed the Wei family as the national leader, and *Shu* Han and Wu rulers as illegitimate insurgents. This value-loaded attitude was revealed by Chen's working: he used "*ji*" 紀, a format to record events of emperors, to introduce Cao Cao in Book *Wei* but used "*zhuan*" 傳, a format for recording ministers, to introduce Liu Bei in Book *Shu*.

58 Emperor Yao 堯 first yielded the Mandate of Heaven, in essence the throne, to Emperor Shun 舜 in the legendary era of 2500 BC. As Mencius 孟子 recorded, "in antiquity, Yao recommended Shun to Heaven and Heaven /●VER

accepted him." Mencius, *Mencius*, trans. D. C. Lau (Harmondsworth, Mddlx: Penguin Books, 1970), Book 5A, V. However, the alleged voluntary practice was transformed into a formula by which every ambitious minister could overthrow the dynasty, such as the manner in which Jin replaced Wei.

59 Luo Guanzhong, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, p.viii.

60 Confucius, *The analects* 論語, trans. D. C. Lau (Harmondsworth, Mddlx: Penguin Books, 1979), Book III, 5.

61 The same treatment also applied to other minority regimes controlling central China in later periods of division, such as the Liao 遼 dynasty (AD 916-1125) and the Jin 金 (Jurchen) dynasty (AD 1115–1234).

62 Chen Shou, *San guo zhi*, Book *Shu*, p.871.

China was never seriously divided: Eastern Jin and four consecutive dynasties, known as the Southern Dynasties 南朝 (*c.* AD 420–589), dominated the region. Consequently, the distribution of power in China gradually shifted, from the late fourth century onwards, from a balance between several centres to a north–south divide. The historical status of the north and the south were subtly exchanged, the previously "barbaric" south being home to the civilized Jin dynasty, while the former cultural centres in the north fell into the hands of non-Han minorities. Thus, maintaining the legitimate status of Wei inevitably attracted the same status for the Northern Dynasties in general, and the Northern Wei kingdom in particular. Doing so meant demeaning the Southern Dynasties, reducing them to the same "barbaric" or insurgent status that Chen Shou had previously assigned Shu Han, which was intolerable for the southern élites. As a result, legitimizing Shu Han simply meant symbolizing the southern regimes as the central legitimate government in China. As Robert Hegel argues in his introduction to Brewitt Taylor's translation of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*:

> [D]uring periods when China was threatened by invasion from the north—or was divided or occupied by northerners—sympathies tended to extend that favored position to [Shu Han]. Those who did not question the rectitude of the so-called "conquest dynasties" who took power by main force have generally remained pro-Wei in their reading of history; in times of national division, Liu Bei and his forces became emblematic of Han Chinese national sentiment.[59]

Hegel's comment indicates that an ethnic dimension was part of the process of romanticization. To ethnic Han scholars, particularly before the Mongol Yuan 元 dynasty (AD 1279–1368), legitimacy should or would never fall into the hands of minorities, because they had long developed discriminatory attitudes toward the latter. Even Confucius said, "Barbarian tribes with their rulers are inferior to Chinese states without them" 夷狄之有君不如諸夏之亡也.[60] Because most northern regimes in the Era of Disunion were founded by minorities, they were naturally barred from attaining legitimacy from the point of view of contemporary Han scholars, most of whom placed ethnic consciousness above other political considerations.

In searching for arguments to legitimize the Shu Han kingdom, the southern scholars turned to the "rule of inheritance" (*xuetong lun* 血統論), which granted legitimate status to regimes with a blood heritage from the last dynasty. Throughout his life, the Shu Han founder Liu Bei repeatedly asserted his legitimacy by inheritance from the Eastern Han royal family, claiming himself to be the direct descendant of the fourth Western Han emperor Jing 景帝 (157–141 BC) and the uncle of the last Eastern Han emperor Xian 獻帝 (AD 189–220).[62] Chen Shou recorded, perhaps apocryphally, that Liu Bei's aspiration from childhood was to be an emperor:

> Liu Bei's home had a tree five feet tall that looked like a crown when seen

> from far away. People thought that the tree represented a nobleman … . When Liu was playing chess when he was young, he told his playmates, "I will surely sit in a royal cart in the future."[63]

Lacking the technology to confirm the genetic relationship of these rulers, southern scholars—although rarely explicitly confronting the Wei legitimacy—obliquely agreed with Liu's claim to the Han line. For example, in commenting on Chen Shou's *History of the Three Kingdoms*, Eastern Jin scholar scholar Xi Zaochi 習鑿齒 acknowledged Shu Han as the legitimate regime by using its years as the dating entries in *The History of Han to Jin* (*Han Jin chun qiu* 漢晉春秋).[64] In fact, the legitimization of Shu Han became unconsciously eased by traditional Chinese historiographic methodology. Because Chinese historians had no universal dating system other than using the titles of emperors to record years, the controversy of legitimacy was not only a symbolic issue but also a practical one for them in attempting to create a chronology in their writing. As Sima Guang suggested, some historians granted legitimate status to regimes simply for convenience in recording history, and did not thereby impose any value judgments.[65]

The choice of Shu Han to be the target of legitimization also owed something to the political appeal of its specific leaders to the contemporary world order. The historical accounts of the Shu Han leaders conveniently turned them into role models of ethnic Han people, whose ultimate aim was to fight the evil northern enemies. Roughly speaking, three typical Confucian moral values—righteousness (*yi* 義), benevolence (*ren* 仁) and wisdom (*zhi* 智)—could be said to represent the three Shu Han founders respectively. For instance, the value of *yi*, a prerequisite of the Southern Dynasties to guarantee the exclusive support of ethnic Han élites, was represented by the absolute loyalty of Guan Yu and Zhang Fei 張飛, two famous Shu Han generals, to Liu Bei.[66] To consolidate further the cult of *yi*, Guan Yu, in particular, was even gradually elevated to the status of a god serving Heaven's court.[67] *Ren*, the value at the center of political propaganda contrasting the "civilized" Southern Dynasties with their "barbaric" northern counterpart, was represented by the idealized image of Liu Bei as a benevolent ruler. *Zhi*, an element the militarily inferior Southern Dynasties largely needed to balance the northern aggression, was represented by the Shu Han chancellor Zhuge Liang in the division of labor, as Zhuge was also facing a militarily-superior northern army.

The legitimization of Shu Han was basically sewn up when the Sui dynasty (AD 589–618) reunified China. Most later scholars echoed this attitude, a notable example being Zhu Xi 朱熹, the synthesizer of Neo-Confucianism in the Southern Song dynasty 南宋 (AD 1128–1279). In *Tong jian gang mu* 通鑑綱目 (*An Abridged View of the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*), his commentary on Sima Guang's chronicles which soon became an authorized version of Chinese history, Zhu presented a thorough list of legitimate regimes in the country's history, which placed Shu Han between the Eastern Han and the Jin.[68] Thus, subsequent Chinese historians, in adhering

[63] Ibid.

[64] Xi's book is not extant today; the information is cited in Bo Yang's edited version of *Zi zhi tong jian*. Xi Zaochi, *Han jin chun qiu*, as quoted in Sima Guang, *Zi zhi tong jian*, ed. Bo Yang (1993), year 221, entry 4.

[65] Ibid.

[66] In *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, the three were even sworn brothers. Luo Guanzhong, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, ch.1.

[67] Guan's status in heaven was secured after AD 1096, when Emperor Zhe 哲宗 (AD 1085–1100) of the Northern Song 北宋 dynasty officially promoted him as the god of war and granted him a separate temple. Guan initially had to share the temple of the god of war with Yue Fei 岳飛; however, after Emperor Yongzheng of the Qing dynasty removed Yue from the temple, Guan became the indisputable god of war in China.

[68] Zhu Xi, *Tong jian gang mu* [An abridged view of the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*] (Hong Kong: Commercial Publishing, 1976).

to this chronology, did not necessarily agree with the legitimacy of the Shu Han, but accepted it as a *fait accompli*.

* * *

Ironically, as neither Sima Guang nor Chen Shou recorded any popular echo of Liu's assertion of royalty, most Shu Han contemporaries, other than Liu's followers, were probably skeptical of Liu's alleged royal status for two possible reasons. First, except for a doubtful family annal, even Liu Bei was unable to provide any evidence to prove his relationship with the last Eastern Han Emperor. As it is recorded in *History of the Three Kingdoms*,

> Liu Bei was an orphan when he was young, and could only earn his living by making straw sandals … . He was not interested in studying, but rather enjoyed horse-racing, music, and fine clothes … [69]

In other words, Liu's family was extremely poor when he was born, and making straw sandals was not a practice that uncles of emperors often engaged in.

Moreover, many other contemporary warlords with prominent backgrounds also belonged to the Han royal family, including Liu Yu 劉虞, who ruled Youzhou 幽州 (present-day Beijing); Liu Biao 劉表, who ruled Jingzhou 荊州 (present-day Hunan); Liu Yao 劉繇, who ruled Yangzhou 揚州 (present-day Jiangxi 江西); and Liu Zhang 劉璋, who ruled Yizhou 益州 (Sichuan), before being expelled by Liu Bei. The Liu were at times in an undeclared natural alliance against anti-Han warlords, such as Dong Zhuo 董卓, who murdered a young Eastern Han emperor,[70] and Yuan Shu 袁術, who once briefly claimed the title of emperor.[71] More crucially, no historic records showed that the Liu ever attacked one another in this period. But suspiciously, although Liu Bei tried to use his claimed Han ancestry to accumulate political capital, he was the only Liu who attacked other royal lines for power. The *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* records an ample amount of evidence about how he assisted an allied warlord Gongsun Zan's 公孫瓚 attack on Liu Yu in AD 191,[72] replaced Liu Biao's son as governor-general as the latter surrendered to Cao Cao in AD 208,[73] and seized Liu Zhang's Sichuan by military force in AD 212–14.[74] Liu Ba 劉巴, Liu Zhang's minister, who later served Shu Han, once warned his old master,

> Liu Bei is the most evil leader of our generation. When he comes to Sichuan, he will surely harm our interests![75]

In fact, Liu Bei acted more like a Cao Cao-type warlord aiming at expanding his sphere of influence as much as possible, than like Han royalty aiming at upholding the Liu authority and the central government. If Liu Bei's battles against other Liu did not necessarily refute his royal heritage, they at least disclose his unfilial behavior to his ancestors.

Even given that there is no historical proof that the righteous loyalty of Guan Yu and Zhang Fei surpassed other relationships between followers and their leaders at the time, the benevolent image of Liu Bei was perhaps

69 Chen Shou, *Sanguo zhi*, Book *Shu*, p.871 (translation by the author).

70 In AD 189 Dong Zhuo murdered Emperor Shao 少帝, who had succeeded to the throne six months earlier. Many Liu joined the coalition against Dong in AD 190. Sima Guang, *Zi zhi tong jian* (1966), year 190, entry 1.

71 Yuan's family was the most prominent contemporary gentry family. However, Yuan became the enemy of the Li when he called himself the Zhong 仲氏 emperor in AD 197, and was soon defeated. Ibid., year 197, entries 3 and 4.

72 Although *Zi zhi tong jian* did not directly record that Liu Bei attacked Liu Yu, Liu Bei belonged to Gongsun Zan's army at that time when the two warlords were fighting against one another. Ibid., year 191, entries 15 and 16.

73 Ibid., year 208, entry 10.

74 Ibid., year 212, entry 12; year 214, entry 5.

75 Ibid.

the most distorted Chinese story. Liu was, in fact, infamous for his repeated betrayal of allies in his time. For instance, he attacked Cao Cao after Cao gave him as elaborate welcome as guest-of-honor when he was defeated by other warlords and sought help[76]; he broke his alliance with Sun Quan and occupied Sun's prefectures[77]; and he seized Sichuan from Liu Zhang when the latter invited him to defend its boundaries against another warlord, Zhang Lu 張魯.[78] Liu Bei was not particularly benevolent toward his followers: when he hypocritically stressed his unwillingness to accept the Shu Han throne in AD 219, he imprisoned the army-secretary Fei Shi who supported his refusal to take the imperial title.[79] In short, Liu Bei was merely a typical power-seeker who used both practices of "the fox and the lion" described by Machiavelli.[80] The strategy of Liu Bei recorded in the later *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* can even be considered as *The Prince*:[81] according to Ruhlmann, it is "a mine of all tricks and stratagems needed in war and politics,"[82] featuring Liu Bei as one of its best performers.

Moreover, concerning the Shu Han policies under Zhuge Liang, John Wills, a scholar who has studied various Chinese heroes, concludes that Zhuge "proved to be an effective, tough state-builder whose policies were not very different from Cao Cao's."[83] In other words, Wills believes that both Zhuge and Cao favored ruling by tough laws rather than the Confucian ideal of benevolence. Will's assertion is supported by the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*, where it is recorded that many indigenous people were discontented over Zhuge's tough laws in governing Sichuan, especially following the previous Sichuan warlord, Liu Zhang, who was famous for his lenience.[84] In order to invent a benevolent country for emperors and ministers to imitate, Confucian scholars simply omitted most of the Machiavellian practices of Liu Bei and ignored the legalist nature of Shu Han as a regime administered by less than benign laws under Zhuge Liang. Zhuge may perhaps have been one of the most intelligent figures in Chinese history,[85] but ironically his military talent—the talent stressed in the novel—was his weakest point. As Chen Shou noted, and it is probably a fair comment, Zhuge was "strong in internal politics, weak in military tactics,"[86] in describing how Zhuge failed to advance beyond the Shu Han border in his six military campaigns against Wei (*liu chu Qishan* 六出祁山) and disappointedly died in his last campaign in AD 234.[87] Perhaps the amateur historian Bo Yang is correct to point out that Zhuge had already lost Shu Han's golden chance to conquer the central regions of the Wei kingdom because of his overcautious character evident in his first campaign in AD 227.[88]

Nevertheless, the southern scholars' legitimization of the Shu Han regime was a watershed for its image in history. Afterwards, Shu Han exchanged its previous position as usurper with Wei, and successfully replaced the latter as the legitimate regime of the Era of the Three Kingdoms, thus overcoming the historic barrier to contention for legitimacy.[89] In other words, at the end of the sixth century, the Shu Han kingdom appeared as the legal continuation of the Eastern Han dynasty instead of a new, insurgent regime from the fourth century on. The Shu Han leaders finally became the would-be-rescuers

[76] Ibid., year 200, entry 1.

[77] Ibid., year 209, entry 14.

[78] Ibid., year 212, entry 12.

[79] Ibid., year 220, entry 4.

[80] "... because the lion does not defend itself from snares and the fox does not defend itself from wolves. So one needs to be a fox to recognize snares and a lion to frighten the wolves." Niccolo Machiavelli, *The prince*, trans. Harvey Mansfield (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 18, p.69.

[81] For instance, founders of the Qing dynasty even used the novel as their military handbook in the sixteenth century. Huang Huazhe, *Guan gong di ren ge yu shen ge* [Guan Yu's character as a man and a god] (Taiwan: Commercial Press, 1995), p.170.

[82] Robert Ruhlmann, "Traditional heroes in Chinese popular fiction," in Wright, *The Confucian persuasion*, p.162.

[83] John Wills, *Mountain of fame* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p.103.

[84] Sima Guang, *Zizhi tong jian* (1966), year 214, entry 5. See also *supra*, footnote 40.

[85] It is noteworthy that historical sources like *Zi zhi tong jian* and *San guo zhi* did not emphasize the intelligence of Zhuge Liang so much as glorify his incorruptible character and sense of responsibility to the government.

[86] Chen Shou, *San guo zhi*, p.930.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Bo Yang, *Zhongguoren shi gang*, p.369.

[89] Although there were still some disputes about the Han Shu versus Wei legitimacy in later history, Shu Han's legitimacy was nevertheless widely recognized in the public eye, as shown below.

of failing Han glory, and have continued to enjoy the attention of modern hagiographers—something that is beyond the scope of the present paper.

Conclusion: Reassessing the Nature of the Shu Han "Heroes" for their Later Romanticization

Although at the end of the sixth century the Three Kingdoms era was not a period of remote history, its historical realities and the image of it presented in history was already much blurred. Not only was Shu Han resurrected and legitimized in the process of romanticization outlined in the above, but the kingdoms of Wei and Wu were also vetoed as future subjects of myth-making. From the above account, we can briefly conclude by synthesizing the following initial characteristics of the Shu Han heroes for their later romanticization, as illustrated, particularly, in the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

First, considering the chaotic situation of the Era of Disunion and the Southern Dynasties, the Shu Han image reflected a tendency for contemporary Chinese to want to see their heroes succeed—or even to repudiate their baleful endings.[90] The Shu Han heroes in fact were possessed of tragic elements in their lives: Liu Bei lost his last battle decisively to the Wu kingdom and died the next year; both Guan Yu and Zhang Fei 張費 were ultimately defeated in battle and executed[91]; Zhuge Liang also died during his last military campaign. But paradoxically, the Chinese people had "little sense of tragedy or irony," as David Keightley proposes as one of his seven distinctive Chinese cultural features, because Chinese history often "witnessed the general success and uncomplicated goodness of legendary heroes."[92] Thus, we observe that the Chinese myth-makers gradually minimized the tragic sense of the Shu Han figures, and granted them outstanding abilities so they could be victorious in imaginary battles. Through labeling evil characters in history, Chinese mythmakers also tended to shift readers' attention from the tragic end of heroes to cursing those responsible for their deaths.[93] With the readers dissatisfied, even the final outcome of the Shu Han kingdom was eventually rewritten.

Second, as repeatedly stressed by many Western scholars such as David Keightley, Paul Ropp and Robert Ruhlmann, contemporary myth-makers already started to feature traditional Confucian values in their myths, which were "Confucianized fiction[s]" to use Ruhlmann's terminology.[94] While Westerners favored more rebellious, anti-establishment heroes, Confucian tenets discouraged ambitious individual characters in society.[95] Arthur Wright outlined thirteen "approved attitudes and behavior patterns" for Confucian role-models in *Confucian Personalities*, including notably the qualities of "submissiveness to authority," "reverence for the past" and "non-competitiveness."[96]

Thus, although Liu Bei and his followers challenged the *status quo* of the Eastern Han dynasty, the myth-makers changed their image to legitimate suc-

90 For example, Denis Twitchett suggested that the Chinese people did not favor "epic heroic poetry" or tragedy. Twitchett, "Problems of Chinese biography," p.34.

91 Guan Yu was defeated by the Wu kingdom in AD 219, and was executed by the Wu ruler. Sima Guang, *Zi zhi tong jian* (1966), year 219, entry 16. Zhang Fei was murdered by his soldiers, Fan Jiang 范疆 and Zhang Da 張達, in AD 221, when he led an army against the Wu kingdom to seek revenge for Guan's death. Ibid., year 221, entry 11.

92 David Keightley, "Early civilization in China" in *Heritage of China*, ed. Paul Ropp (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1990), pp.50-1.

93 For instance, Qin Gui 秦檜, the Southern Song chancellor supposed to be responsible for anti-Jurchen hero Yue Fei's death, was cursed fiercely in popular literature on Chinese history. Qin's appearance in China will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

94 Robert Ruhlmann, "Traditional heroes in Chinese popular fiction," in Wright, *The Confucian persuasion*, p.176.

95 For instance, "the Master said, 'A young man should be a good son at home and an obedient young man abroad' 弟子入則孝出則弟," showing Confucius' discouragement of rebellious individuals to achieve social accomplishments. Confucius, *The analects*, trans. Lau, Book I.6.

96 Although "courage" was also listed by Wright, it was not "courage" in the Western sense, but rather the "courage and sense of responsibility in a great tradition." Arthur Wright, "Values, roles, and personalities," in Wright and Twitchett, *Confucian personalities*, p.8.

cessors to the Han thereby prolonging the old order. Confucian myth-makers also glorified their benevolent, righteous behavior instead of their bold and independent courage in gambling for power in a chaotic world. As a result a figure like Zhuge Liang, for example, was transformed into a "loyal minister to a fallen dynasty," the very words Ralph Croizier has used in describing the myth-making process applied to the seventeenth-century pirate leader Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功 (Koxinga).[97]

By the same token, the monkey Sun Wukong 孫悟空, another formerly rebellious hero in the classic novel *Xi you ji* 西遊記 (*Journey to the West*), was transformed from a rebel against the order of Heaven to become a security guard protecting a priest and submitting to the authority of Buddha.[98] Even the bandit heroes in *Shui hu chuan* 水滸傳 (*Water Margin*) in the latter third of the novel surrender to the Song court and help the state suppress other peasant leaders.[99] Of course, the Chinese people also honored many founding emperors of dynasties;[100] but as the cultural scholar Jin Ze argues,[101] the honor was more a response to the emperors' ability to promote order or the "approved attitudes" that Wright listed.[102] Mao Zedong 毛澤東 in contemporary China is perhaps the great exception to the above rule.[103]

Finally, as seen from the resurrection and legitimization of Shu Han before the sixth century, the Chinese myth-making process involved active state intervention in addition to public participation. "The bureaucratization of historiography" in China, identified by Denis Twitchett, only glorified "the bare account of a subject's performance of his limited role as a member of the bureaucratic apparatus."[104] More crucially, as Ruhlmann has noted, the Confucian bureaucrats in China could prevent private heroes from emerging through "the pressure of censorship on writers, publishers, and actors, particularly in the later dynasties."[105] Thus, private writers in China could not create the Shu Han myth on their own, because they faced restrictions in granting regimes or individuals legitimate status, the fundamental criterion for any glorious reputation and enduring legacy to be achieved in China. If the state rejected certain figures as historical heroes, ordinary Chinese people tended to ignore them, as evidenced by the lack of respect shown by most Chinese towards Fu Jian 符堅. Most leaders of peasant revolts were also disdained in ancient China[106] when their image as "bandits" was reinforced in most traditional history textbooks in China before the Communist Revolution in 1949, as well as in Taiwan and Hong Kong today.[107] Of course, there are still some exceptions in Chinese history, such as the case of abiding popular admiration for the pirate leader Zheng Chenggong, the short-lived ruler of Taiwan who was nominally loyal to the Ming court and opposed the establishment of the Qing dynasty.[108]

Once the state becomes involved in the myth-making process, heroes are inevitably invested with elements of the state-dominated ideology, as we can observe in Communist China's transfiguration of the images of historic peasant leaders from 1949 on. As an example, the Beijing scholar Zhang

97 Zheng was nominally loyal to the Ming court during the Qing dynasty. Ralph Croizier, *Koxinga and Chinese nationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: East Asian Research Center, 1977), p.33.

98 The novel was written in the Ming dynasty. In chapters 1 to 7, Sun Wukong was assigned a rebellious role in destroying the order of the court in heaven. However, from chapters 13 to 100, Sun became a Buddhist convert and, in order to redeem his previous crimes in heaven, had to protect a Buddhist priest on his journey to collect primary Buddhist manuscripts from India. Wu Cheng'en, *Xi you ji* [Journey to the west], ed. Zhang Fengqi (Hong Kong: Fung Wah Publishing, 1991).

99 Shi Nai'an, *Shuihu chuan* [The water margin], trans. J. H. Jackson (New York: Paragon Book Reprint, 1968).

100 For instance, there was widespread Chinese admiration for Liu Bang (206–109 BC), the first emperor of the Western Han dynasty, and Li Shimin 李世民 (AD 626–49), the second emperor of the Tang dynasty. However, unlike the Shu Han heroes, these emperors were mainly idols of intellectuals and rulers, but remained relatively remote from the masses.

101 Jin Ze, *Ying xiong chong bai yu wen hua xing tai* [Heroic worship and cultural transfiguration] (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1991), pp.101–6.

102 Arthur Wright, "Values, roles and personalities," in Wright and Twitchett, *Confucian personalities*, p.8.

103 Jin Ze, *Ying xiong chong bai yu wen hua xing tai*, pp.158–209.

104 Denis Twitchett, "Problems of Chinese biography," p.37; p.34.

105 Ruhlmann, "Traditional heroes in Chinese popular fiction," p.176.

106 The People's Republic of China is the first regime to attempt glorifying historic peasant leaders in China. Except for those who ultimately became legitimate emperors, such as Liu Bang and Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋, most peasant leaders, like Chen Sheng 陳勝 and Wu Guang 吳廣 of the Qin dynasty, and Huang Chao 黃巢 of the Tang dynasty, were not admired by people in imperial China.

107 In modern Chinese history textbooks, most peasant leaders are still categorized as "rioters" with value-loaded descriptions of their /OVER

/movements, such as the "Huang Chao Rebellion" 黃巢之亂 of the later Tang dynasty. Refer to Qu Shiqi, *Guo shi shu yao* [Selected national history] (Hong Kong: Ball Man Bookstore, 1982), pp.115–18. Qu's book is used as a textbook of Chinese history in Hong Kong.

108 Croizier, *Koxinga and Chinese nationalism*, pp.33–5.

109 The peasant uprising of Chen Sheng and Wu Guang marked the beginning of the collapse of the Qin dynasty. Notice that Communist scholars label the event as an "uprising" instead of the "riot" that traditional historians use. Zhang Chuanxi, *Zhongguo tong shi jiang gao* [Speeches on Chinese history] (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 1982), pp.114–20.

110 Liang Xiao, "Lun fajia" [On the Legalists], (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1974).

111 Luo Guanzhong, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, "Overture: the beginning song."

Chuanxi 張傳璽 has compared the "uprising" of Chen Sheng 陳勝 and Wu Guang 吳廣 against the Qin dynasty with the peasant movement led by Mao in the 1920s.[109] The notorious official writing team "Liang Xiao" 梁效 during the Cultural Revolution 文化大革命 even borrowed Communist jargon to credit Chen's contribution in inspiring Mao's revolution as being an anti-federalist forerunner.[110]

Nevertheless, the transition of the Shu Han kingdom from a weak, short-lived, illegitimate, Machiavellian, regional regime to a powerful, orthodox, Confucian political Utopia for the Chinese people to fantasize about is now a *fait accompli*. The romanticization was neither a pre-determined routine repertoire in Chinese history, nor simply a creation for leisure. Had China not disintegrated between AD 280 and 589, the Shu Han myth might well never have been created.

Yet, as the kingdom became a political Utopia, everyone would be able to project his or her different hopes onto the non-existent regime. Although their messages are not necessarily the same, the dream of a harmonious, happy, living world with a responsible, non-corrupt government is never questioned. No matter how artificially distorted, the abiding images of Shu Han effectively represented, represent, and may continue to represent the same dream for the Chinese people in the future.

Green mountains remain,
As sunsets ingrain,
Hoary fishers and woodcutters,
And some small rafts and calm waters,
In autumn moon, in spring winds,
By the wine jars, by porcelains,
Discuss talk and tale,
Only laugh and gale.

—Luo Guanzhong, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.[111]

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