

Rewriting *Three Kingdoms*: The Practice by Modern Korean Writers of Translating/Revising a Chinese Classic

권혁찬*

<目 次>

1. Introduction
2. Appearance of Modern Translations of <i>Three Kingdoms</i> and Yoshikawa's Rewriting of the Work
3. Rewriting <i>Three Kingdoms</i> : The Practice of Translating/Revising a Chinese Classic
4. <i>Three Kingdoms</i> as a "one-source multi-use" cultural

1. Introduction

"Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way."¹⁾

Three Kingdoms has been continuously rewritten and (at least partially) re-created by contemporary Korean writers, many of whom are the most influential writers with established reputation. This paper aims to clarify what makes the rewriting of *Three Kingdoms* so popular and why a great number of Korean writers attempt to publish their own modified versions of *Three Kingdoms*. This essay also discusses the sociopolitical context and writing strategies hidden behind such rewritings.

* 香港城市大學 교수

1) Andre Lefevere, cited from the general editor's preface to the *Translator's Invisibility*, vii.

2. Appearance of Modern Translations of *Three Kingdoms* and Yoshikawa's Rewriting of the Work

Modernization brought about many changes in early twentieth-century Korea, one of which was the appearance of daily newspapers and magazines.²⁾ Upon their appearance, newspapers and magazines soon became a popular means for writers to publish their literary works, mostly novels. With Japanese influence, many newspapers serialized romantic stories or detective fiction.³⁾ It seems that *Three Kingdoms* was the first Chinese historical novel to be serialized in a major newspaper: this tradition started in 1929 and continues up until now.⁴⁾

With the exception of Yang Kōnsik's *Three Kingdoms* translation that started in 1929, this trend seems to have been influenced by Yoshikawa Eiji's Japanese translation of *Three Kingdoms*, which was serialized in a Korean newspaper simultaneously with its appearance in Japan from 1939 to 1942. Since then, the tradition for celebrity writers to serialize rewritings of *Three Kingdoms* in newspapers or magazines and then publish them as books became a standard procedure for success in the book market.⁵⁾

Unlike the anonymous translators of *Three Kingdoms* in the Chosŏn period, these writers never hesitate to unveil themselves in public as

2) Taehan maeil sinbo 大韓每日申報 was founded in 1905, and Chosŏn ilbo 朝鮮日報 and Tong'a ilbo 東亞日報 were established in 1920.

3) For instance, upon its foundation, Chosŏn ilbo serialized a romantic story, Ch'unmong 春夢 (Spring dream), beginning in March 1920, and a detective story, Pakchwiusan (Batumbrella), from July 14, 1920 to September 5, 1920. Chosŏn ilbo also serialized Im Kkōkchōng by Hong Myōngt'ŭi from November 21, 1928 to March 11, 1939 and a translation of Honglou meng in 1930. The newspaper also often inserted advertisements for detective or romantic stories.

4) Yang Kōnsik started to serialize *Three Kingdoms* in Taehan maeil sinbo from 1929. See below.

5) Celebrity writers who fit this description include Yi Mun'yŏl, Hwang Sŏgyōng, and Chang Chōngil.

translators/rewriters of the classical novel: they were also distinct from the anonymous Chosŏn literati in that they were equipped simultaneously with modern education as well as education in the Chinese classics and had already attained significant fame in literary circles.⁶⁾

As a result, it is only natural that they often interpreted *Three Kingdoms* in a modern Western context. Moreover, their translations are more revealing of the characteristics of each translator than the translations made by anonymous Chosŏn literati. The early celebrity writers were also aware that translating the famous Chinese classic under their own names would bring not only monetary profit but reputation in literary circles: as a matter of fact, these concerns are still prevalent among the contemporary rewriters of *Three Kingdoms*.

With respect to *Three Kingdoms* in the colonial period, it is unavoidable to mention Yoshikawa Eiji's rewriting of the Chinese work. The translation of *Three Kingdoms* by Yi Munyŏl was motivated by the commercial success of Eiji's work in the book market and went on to become the most sold of all Korean translations of the work.⁷⁾ The popularity of Yoshikawa Eiji's *Three Kingdoms* revealed that the Chinese novel's marketability, proven over many years in the Chosŏn period, was even more valid in colonial Korea. Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* literally influenced all succeeding Korean translations, with each translator or rewriter highly conscious of that work's status and success.

6) Hong Sanghun. "Yang Kŏnsik ū Samgukyŏn'ūipŏnyŏketaehayŏ." 53.

7) In a recent internet television interview, Yi mentions that he decided to produce his translation when he learned that Yoshikawa Eiji's *Three Kingdoms* translation had sold far better than all of his other historical novels combined. Refer to Yi's interview with *Chung'ang ilbo* at http://tvout.joins.com/main.asp?categoryID=101001001&movieID=2008_0517_003710&.

Accordingly, the appearance of Yoshikawa's rewriting of *Three Kingdoms* marks a divide between premodern and modern translations of *Three Kingdoms* and between word-for-word translations and creative rewritings of the work. Yoshikawa's work was a turning point: after its appearance, the majority of Korean rewritings of *Three Kingdoms* were based on it rather than on the so-called Mao edition.⁸⁾

3. Rewriting *Three Kingdoms*: The Practice of Translating/Revising a Chinese Classic

Since *Three Kingdoms* was introduced to Chosŏn Korea several centuries ago, it has remained one of the most loved novels in Korea. Moreover, the popularity of Korean translations of *Three Kingdoms* did not fade away in modern Korean society. More accurately, it has become even more astonishingly popular: *Three Kingdoms* has maintained its status as the number one Korean best-seller of all time for several decades and has recently topped worldwide best-sellers, such as the Harry Potter series, in sales. Furthermore, the most famous alleged translators of *Three Kingdoms* in the Korean book market have all been renowned novelists rather than scholars of Chinese literature or literary translators. Although there is now a complete translation into Korean of *Three Kingdoms* available by a scholar of Chinese literature, it has received little attention.⁹⁾

8) Among the modern Korean translations and revisions of *Three Kingdoms* that were published between 1920 and 2004, the number of Mao edition - based translations and revisions was fifty-eight, while Yoshikawa edition - based translations and revisions was fifty-nine. See Yi Yŏng'ae, "Samgukchi han'gugŏ yŏkpon sŏmun koch'al." 140.

9) Kim Kuyong's translation that came out in 1974 is the first and the only complete modern translation of the Mao-edition *Three Kingdoms*.

These “amateur” translations are read by millions of Koreans of all generations. So great is their popularity that publishing one’s own complete translation of *Three Kingdoms* has become a measure for defining prominent Korean novelists. A great number of major Korean fiction writers have not only published a *Three Kingdoms* translation but have also taken the liberty of revising the narrative based on their ideological viewpoint. The success of Yi Mun’yŏl’s translation of *Three Kingdoms* is a case in point. Since its first publication in 1988, it has gone through 145 printings and sold some 17 million copies as of 2009.¹⁰⁾ In addition to Yi Mun’yŏl, well-known writers such as Pak Chonghwa, Chŏng Pisŏk, Cho Sŏnggi, Hwang Sŏgyŏng, and Chang Chŏng’il have all published translations of *Three Kingdoms*. Except for Pak Chonghwa and Chŏng Pisŏk, who have already died, all the other writers are among the most popular writers in Korea since the 1980s.

A survey of these “retranslations” of *Three Kingdoms* demonstrates that each of them “rewrites” *Three Kingdoms* rather than translating the source text into Korean. As Lefevere pointed out, the translations of Yi Mun’yŏl, Hwang Sŏgyŏng, and Chang Chŏng’il clearly demonstrate that each rewriting of the work manipulates the source text in accord with an ideological agenda. By way of examples drawn from these works, we can reckon that such ideological rewriting either conforms to or rebels against the dominant ideology of contemporary Korean society. Such cultural politics that underlie these enterprises contributed to making *Three Kingdoms* into a national novel of Korea. In this sense, the prefaces by the

10) Yi’s *Three Kingdoms* translation had gone through 145 reprintings as of early 2009. See the Yŏnhap News article at <http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=108&oid=001&aid=0002563487>.

three above-mentioned celebrity writers to their *Three Kingdoms* translations are a case in point. In their prefaces, these writers unveil the justification for rewriting the novel, given numerous translations of the work available already; they also explain specifically why they chose certain translation strategies. These celebrity writers, who also happen to be amateur translators of the Chinese classic, aim to clarify in their prefaces why their translations need readers’ attention and how professional they have been in terms of selecting the source text and other details of the original work.

3.1 On translation practices and manipulation of the *Three Kingdoms* text

I also demonstrate that the modern Korean translations of *Three Kingdoms* are a case in point showing various cultural phenomena when a foreign text is translated and revised into another language. For example, the translation of *Three Kingdoms* text by Chang Chŏng’il, who tries to “domesticate” the text using the strategy of “ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to the target-language cultural value,” is a good example of a *Three Kingdoms* translation presenting a new interpretation of the novel according to the cultural and ideological values of the translator and the receiving culture.

3.2 Political and historical views embedded in rewritings of *Three Kingdoms*

The modern rewritings of *Three Kingdoms* reflect the political and historical views of their Korean authors. In the process of “rewriting” the

Three Kingdoms text, these writers do not hesitate to manipulate the text based on their own ideologies.

For example, the treatment of Diaochan (貂蟬) is a case in point showing how each writer manipulates the original text according to his ideology and political standing. Diaochan is an important female character in *Three Kingdoms*, who uses the “beautiful woman snare” or meiren ji 美人計 to accomplish the greater good (a cardinal principle of public righteousness 大義名分). In the original (Mao edition), Diaochan voluntarily sacrifices her chastity for public justice (the greater good). On the other hand, Yi Munyŏl describes Diaochan as an immoral woman who is a two-timer between Dong Zhuo and Lü Bu. However, Chang Chŏng’il criticizes Yi Munyŏl’s conservative and reactionary translation. Chang refuses to depict Diaochan as a means for the greater good and tries to portray her as clever and independent enough to make her own decisions. The treatment of Diaochan by these writers shows how modern Korean writers manipulate the *Three Kingdoms* text according to their ideology and political views.

4. *Three Kingdoms* as a “one-source multi-use” cultural product

4.1 *Three Kingdoms* as a “one-source multi-use” cultural product

Some unique features of *Three Kingdoms* products in contemporary Korea deserve our attention. First, *Three Kingdoms* is an excellent example of a “one-source multi-use” product with unlimited marketability. For example, *Three Kingdoms* is continuously re-produced in the form of

cultural products like animation, manga, movies, and computer games.

Also, these cultural products based on *Three Kingdoms* are produced throughout East Asia and are also consumed and appreciated in the East Asian cultural sphere. For example, the Romance of *Three Kingdoms* computer game series by Koei, a famous Japanese role-playing game company, is popular not only in Japan, but in China, Korea, and other parts of East Asia. Yi Zhongtian’s 易中天 recent essay on *Three Kingdoms* that came out in mainland China, titled *Appreciation of Three Kingdoms* (品三國), was translated into Korean soon after its publication in China and became a very popular *Three Kingdoms* reference book in Korea. The *Three Kingdoms* manga, by a famous Japanese manga artist Yokoyama Mitsuteru, has been popular in Korea for the past two decades. With these examples, we can see that *Three Kingdoms* has become a very rare “one-source multi-use” cultural product whose contents are being produced and appreciated in a truly multi-cultural sense encompassing all of East Asia.

It is also worth noting that even the researchers of the novel are often devoted fans of the work as well. Ardent fans of *Three Kingdoms* have a mania for the work that rivals that of fans of the Star Wars series. Numerous Star Wars fans seek out sequels after watching the initial installment and mostly end up watching all sequels, prequels, and ‘director’s cut’ special editions: they also end up purchasing Star Wars-related toys, souvenirs, animations, and games. Likewise, ardent devotees of *Three Kingdoms* continue to consume *Three Kingdoms*-related products, which include various versions of *Three Kingdoms* revisions/re-creations, movies, drama series, comic books, animations, and computer games. *Three Kingdoms* is a textbook example of a “one-source

multi-use” product with unlimited marketability. Also notable are the dedicated fan sites for the work, which are mostly run by supporters of the work with near-professional expertise. Webmasters of *Three Kingdoms*-related websites also tend to demonstrate vast and specific knowledge concerning particular aspects of the work, such as knowledge on its historical background or details of *Three Kingdoms* computer games. Currently, there are hundreds of such websites available in Korean alone, some of which gain monetary benefits by selling or trading so-called cultural contents (munhwa k'ont'en'ch'ü) concerning *Three Kingdoms*.¹¹⁾

It should also be noted that numerous distinct kinds of re-creations of the work are being produced to satisfy consumers of the *Three Kingdoms* cultural entertainment industry so that each reader, player, or viewer can select the revision that suits his or her stage of preference best. Sometimes the emergence of distinct re-creations of the work leads the fans of *Three Kingdoms* into specific trends. By the same token, the erudition of the consumer urges the producers to create new versions of the work.

Such interactions, along with so-called “*Three Kingdoms* stress” (the frustration one feels at the prospect of being isolated and marginalized

11) An example of these websites is Chông Wôn'gi Samguk chi Yôn'guso (Centre for *Three Kingdoms* Research by Chông Wôn'gi: <http://www.samgookji.com>). According to the announcement on the website, the centre is run by Chông, a Ph. D. in Chinese literature who studies exclusively *Three Kingdoms*, and charges fees to subscribers for “expenses for maintenance and research of *Three Kingdoms*.” (Refer to <http://www.samgookji.com/institute/introlab.php>)

As of February 2010, there are 18,349 subscribers and counting. This website is quite influential in that it has numerous ardent fans of *Three Kingdoms* who have agreed to pay fees to stay abreast of *Three Kingdoms*-related news and recent information, and that it introduces new *Three Kingdoms*-related cultural products to both ardent and potential fans of the work. It is notable that, according to the announcement, quite a few subscribers are novice readers who seek to acquaint themselves with *Three Kingdoms* for the first time.

(Refer to <http://www.samgookji.com/institute/introlab.php>.)

from mainstream society if one lacks an adequate level of knowledge of the classic) have broadened the readership of the work for the past several decades in Korea, making it a “national novel of Korea”—according to Chang Chông'il.¹²⁾

However, we should bear in mind that this flood of revisions and re-creations often prevents readers from becoming acquainted with the original work. Although more than four hundred translations, revisions, and adaptations have emerged in Korea, an “untainted” and complete modern translation of the Mao-edition did not appear until the 1970s.¹³⁾ It remains the only complete translation of the original work mostly because this “obsolete” and rather boring masterpiece has never been popular among modern readers.¹⁴⁾ It is quite ironic that while Yi Mun'yŏl's version of *Three Kingdoms* has sold seventeen million copies over the past two decades, in striking contrast, the number of Korean readers who are familiar with the original work is exceptionally small, even though it paved the way for the success of the modern re-creations. After all, it

12) Refer to Chang's preface to his translation of *Three Kingdoms* in the previous chapter.

13) Kim Kuyong's translation (1974) is the first and the only complete modern translation of the Mao-edition *Three Kingdoms*. However, as Kim mentions in the preface, it is based on the Hyŏnt'ŏ Samgukchi 懸吐三國志 published by Pangmun sŏgwan 博文書館 in 1935, which is a modified reprint of the Mao-edition that adds Korean particles to the sentences in classical Chinese to enhance readability for Koreans. Hyŏnt'ŏ Samgukchi, the only *Three Kingdoms* edition that Kim used for his translation, also includes numerous typographical and editorial errors. Even now, Koreans do not have a complete translation of the novel “faithful to the original work” in terms of textual accuracy which is comparable to the English translation by Moss Roberts that came out in 1994. This “untainted” complete modern translation is called chŏngyŏk 正譯 or chôngbon 正本, which literally means “orthodox” or “authentic” translation, implying that all other translations more or less lack legitimacy.

14) Cho Sŏnggi, “Samgukchi ū han'gye: Chaemiŏmnŏn wŏnbon kwa chaemi'innŏn pŏnyŏkpon (The limitations of *Three Kingdoms*: Boring original and interesting translations),” 22.

can be argued that, as a renowned Korean historical fiction writer recently asserted: “[When it comes to historical fiction,] innocent knowledge [on the part of the readers] trumps no knowledge or indifference.”¹⁵⁾ Modern translators and producers of *Three Kingdoms*-related cultural works have revived one of the richest legacies in human history and have brought about the heyday of a work that first appeared some four hundred years ago. There is no doubt that *Three Kingdoms* will continue to thrive in the years to come.

<Bibliography>

Chang Chǒng'il, trans. *Samguk chi*. 10 vols. Seoul: Kimyǒngsa, 2004.
 Chang Chǒng'il et al. *Samgukchi haeje* (Annotated Reference to *Three Kingdoms*). Seoul: Kimyǒngsa, 2003.
 Cho Sǒnggi. “Samgukchi ūi han'gye: Chaemi ōmnūn wǒnbōn kwa chaemi innūn pǒnyōkpon” (The limitations of *Three Kingdoms*: Boring original and interesting translations). *P'ŭllaetp'om* 2007 July and August: 20-5.
 Chǒng Won'gi. “Samgukchi yǒnūi yǒn'gu charyo mongnok” (List of Research Materials for *Sanguo zhi yanyi*). *Chungguk sosŏl yǒn'gu hoebō* (Newsletter for Research on Chinese Fiction) 29 (March 1997): 95-116.
 Lefevere, Andre. *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*.

15) Cited from the interview with Yi Chǒngmyǒng in *The Hankyoreh Newspaper* on October 30th, 2008. (News article available at http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/specialsection/newspickup_section/319016.html)
 Yi is currently the most famous Korean “faction” writer who in his recent work depicts a famous Chosŏn painter Sin Yunbok as a transvestite woman. In the interview, he acknowledges that he does not believe in actuality that Sin Yunbok was a woman, but that it was worth trying to draw attention from his readers.

London and New York: Routledge, 1992.
 Roberts, Moss. trans. *Three Kingdoms*. (abridged version) Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
 Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
 Venuti, Lawrence. *The Scandals of Translation*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.
 Yi Mun'yŏl, trans. *Samguk chi*. 10 vols. Seoul: Minūmsa, 2002.

<국문제요>

현대 한국 사회를 사는 사람이면 누구나-삼국지(<삼국지통속연의>, 이후로 삼국지로 통칭)의 독자이건 아니건 상관없이-삼국지의 영향을 받고 있다. 예를 들어 정치가들은 자주 자신과 정적을 삼국지의 주인공들과 비교하며, 흔히들 친구간의 우정을 강조할 때 유비 의형제간의 도원결의에 비유하고, 삼국지에서 파생된 숙어나 비유는 일상생활에 널리 퍼져있으며, 삼국지를 소재로 하는 만화, 영화, 드라마, 소설, 게임 등도 끊임없이 등장하고 있다. 상기한 삼국지의 지대한 영향에 비추어 볼 때 삼국지가 현대한국문화에 끼치는 영향에 대한 구체적인 연구는 아직 미흡한 실정이다. 이에 본고에서는 삼국지와 현대 한국문화간의 관계를 개략적으로 고찰해 본다.

1. 현대 한국 사회를 사는 거의 모든 성인이 (정도간의 차이는 있지만) 삼국지에 대한 지식이 있다. 하지만 이런 지식은 원발명초 나관중이 지은 가정 본 삼국지연의나 청대 모종강의 개작 본에 근거한 경우는 거의 없으며, 대부분 현대 한국 작가들의 각색 본 삼국지의 영향을 받았다. 한편 20세기 중반 이후 수십 여편 이상 출현한 삼국지의 근현대 한국어 번역은 사실상 반 이상이 근대 일본 사무라이 소설 작가 요시카와 에이지가 각색한 삼국지의 영향을 받은 것이 사실이다. 즉, 현대 한국 독자 (혹은 문화 수용자)들이 알고 있는 삼국지는 원작보다는 일본 개작본의 영향이 훨씬 크다.

2. 당대 한국 사회에서 유행하는 한국어본 삼국지는 박종화, 이문열, 황석영, 장정일 등 유명 남성 작가들이 자신의 정치적, 문학적 취향에 맞춰 개작한 작품들이다. 같은 원작을 “번역”한 삼국지라 하더라도 작가의 정치적 입장에 따라 보수주의적, 민중주의적, 혹은 민족주의적, 국수주의적인 다양한 해석이 시도되고 있는 실정이다. 한편 중국문학 전공자들에 의한 원작에 충실한 번역은 대중적인 인지도가 거의 없는 실정이다.

주제어: 삼국지연의 삼국지 번역 현대한국문화 요시카와 에이지

이 논문은 2012년 5월 20일에 접수되어 2012년 6월 8일에 심사가 완료되고 2012년 6월 20일 편집회의에서 게재가 확정되었음.