

## Foreword

### The Language of Values in the Ming Novel *Three Kingdoms*



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*Three Kingdoms* (Sanguo yanyi) can be read as a study of values in conflict, such as righteousness (*yi*) against loyalty (*zhong*), and filial piety (*xiao*) against brotherhood (*xiongdi*). In a time of peace and stability, these ideals should coexist and enhance one another; in a time of crisis they may become incompatible. The word *yi*, a key term in the novel, can be rendered widely in English by any of the following: responsibility, obligation, duty, the Code, commitment, service, cause, self-sacrifice, honor. In his essay in this volume Jiyuan Yu translates the term as "appropriateness." At the "conventional" end *yi* refers to the duties required of a particular role. In the "Liyun" chapter of the *Liji* the phrase "duties of men" (*zhongcheng*) covers a wide range of social and political obligations including "the father's kindness, the son's filiality . . . the ruler's benevolence, the vassal's loyalty," and so on. At the "extreme" end, however, *yi* involves sacrifice, as in the common phrases *jiuyi* (to die for the mission) or *dayi mieqin* (for the sake of the greater cause to destroy family bonds). The phrase *yanyi* in the novel's title, really a genre title, probably signifies "elaborating on the moral significances of." Thus *yi* in its semantic richness and versatility forms a contrast with the more restricted term *zhong*. In early and mid Warring States texts *zhong* typically meant "single-minded sincerity"; by the end of the period, in the *Xunzi*, for example, it means a vassal's loyalty to the state or the emperor, as in the "Liyun" phrase cited above, *zhongcheng*. Thereafter, the word *zhong* stabilized in that sense, and *cheng* roughly meant "sincerity." The common compound *zhongcheng* probably is a synonym compound, "true-hearted sincerity."

Ideally, *zhong* and *yi*, loyalty and honor, should reinforce each other. In chapter 1 of *Three Kingdoms*, when the three brothers take an oath, *jieyi* (binding their honor) to die for one another and to aid the Han royal house, *zhong* and *yi* are aligned. The brothers' mutual commitment (*yi*) supports their loyal service to the Han throne. At a later point in the narrative, however, the two values become opposed. When Cao captures Lord Guan (Guan Yu), Lord Guan chooses not to die honorably for his lord, Liu Bei (Xuande), who has disappeared in the chaos of battle; instead Lord Guan surrenders to Cao Cao, stipulating that his surrender is to the Han throne and not to Cao Cao, who is virtually the shogun of the Han dynasty. In this way Lord Guan turns his submission to Cao Cao into an act of loyalty to the Han emperor, a virtual puppet of Cao Cao. Soon after, upon discovering that Liu Bei still lives, Lord Guan chooses to honor his commitment to his elder brother Liu Bei: he leaves Cao Cao's service to rejoin Liu Bei. At this point *yi* again takes precedence over *zhong*. The ambiguity of values here is reflected in Zhang Fei's behavior. The third brother has become suspicious of Lord Guan's sojourn with Cao Cao, and attacks Lord Guan for betraying Liu Bei (chapter 28). It falls to Liu Bei's wives to defend Lord Guan's conduct and avert a showdown between the two brothers.

Two decades later, in the final crisis brought on by Shu's ill-fated invasion of Wu, it is Liu Bei's turn to repay Lord Guan's devotion. The Southland leader Sun Quan has captured Lord Guan and put him to death; Liu Bei decides to avenge his brother (to satisfy the demands of *yi*) by leading the Riverland (Shu-Han) attack on the Southland (Wu). By launching this invasion, Liu Bei forsakes his quest to overthrow the usurping Wei dynasty and restore the Han (*zhong*). Kongming (Zhuge Liang), who stands for *zhong* and for *xiao*, but not for *yi*, had opposed this campaign, just as he has had his doubts about the brotherhood all along. The novelist, however, means to show that *yi* prevails over *zhong*. It is perhaps for this very reason—namely, the brothers' commitment to one another rather than to Liu Bei's imperial career—that readers have taken the three into their hearts.

If for the brothers *yi* takes precedence over *zhong*, it also takes precedence over family ties and values. The rubric phrase comes from the *Zuozhuan* (Yin 4): *dayi mieqin*. This means "for the sake of the higher cause to sacrifice the bonds of kinship." The principle of *dayi mieqin* is enacted in the opening of chapter 42 of *Three Kingdoms*, when Liu Bei hurls (or pretends to hurl) his newborn son, A Dou, to the ground. Zhao Zilong had found A Dou stranded on a battlefield, carried him safely back to camp, and then presented the baby to Liu Bei. (The novelist gives the task of saving A Dou to Zhao Zilong because Zilong belongs to Kongming's camp and is not part of the fraternity.) But instead of gratefully rewarding Zhao Zilong, Liu Bei throws A Dou aside, crying out, "For the sake of an infant I risked losing a commander!" Perhaps Liu Bei intended an homage to the first Han emperor, Liu Bang, who is occasionally invoked in the novel. Fleeing Xiang Yu's cavalry, Liu Bang offers to throw his son from his carriage to lighten it, as recounted in the *Shiji's* "Annals for Xiang Yu." Both leaders, Liu Bang and Liu Bei, have good reasons for publicly rejecting their sons.

Why do Liu Bei and Liu Bang reject their offspring? Why does Agamemnon sacrifice Iphigenia? Why does Abraham offer up Isaac? Each case exemplifies the rejection of *qin* (kin) for the sake of *yi*, as a means both to sustain morale among the followers and to protect a leadership position by a transcendent self-denial. This shows the power of the term *yi* to bind commitment outside as well as inside conventional relationships; *zhong* and *xiao* apply only within established relationships. *Yi* is an outer virtue. The sacrifice of personal interest and affection to the larger mission (*dayi*) enhances a leader's virtue and stature. In the specific circumstances of *Three Kingdoms*, Liu Bei is putting the principle of brotherhood above narrow family interest. An underdog contender, Liu Bei does not want his brothers and comrades to see him give in to a fatherly concern, lest it threaten the solidarity on which the whole military enterprise depends. And yet, the father-son relationship is the bedrock of dynastic government in that it effectively addresses the all-important succession problem. Every king must name an heir or risk losing control of the succession. This is the very reason Kongming values the filial tie above all others. Is it possible, then, to reconcile fraternal comradeship and filial dynasty building? I think that this is the principal problematic of *Three Kingdoms*.



In the *Analects*, *xiao* (filial piety), is a primary value and generally in harmony with state service and loyalty. "It is rare for someone who is filial and fraternal to defy his superiors" (*Analects* 1.2). The *Analects* advocates the integration of family and state roles in such phrases as *jun jun chen chen*, *fu fu zi zi*, which means "Let the ruler rule as he should and then the ministers will serve as they should; let the father guide as he should and then the sons will serve as they should" (*Analects* 12.11). Notwithstanding the placement of loyalty first in this formula, we still find an *Analects* passage where political and familial loyalty conflict, and Confucius requires the subordination of *zhong* to *xiao*, state to family. In *Analects* 13.18 Confucius expresses disapproval of a son who reports his father to the authorities for stealing a sheep.

Filial piety is the core value, the cornerstone of the Confucian ethical system. The "Zengzi" chapters of the *Da Dai Liji* are organized around this principle. The bond of father and son supports and integrates all other relationships. For the *Analects* and most other Confucian texts the *junzi* (noble man, man of honor) is the central figure. The *junzi* is an idealized royal son, fit either to rule or to support a ruler. But the *junzi* is also more than that; he is a humanitarian. Perhaps this is why in the *Analects*, we find connected to *xiao* some recognition of the complementary and faintly egalitarian principle of brotherhood (*ti*). The best-known instance is the above-cited *Analects* 1.2. Youzi, perhaps Confucius's leading disciple, combines *xiao* with *ti*, to make of each equally, the foundation of *ren*, the broad humanitarian principle that is the paramount sociopolitical value of the Confucians. Thus, Youzi used the brother-tie to widen the scope of filial

discipline. Despite holding a major place in the *Analects* (Youzi is the text's second speaker, appearing only after Confucius in book 1), Youzi seems less important than other disciples; and *xiao* and *ti* are combined only one other time in the *Analects*, whose editors may not have done Youzi justice. We read in the *Mencius* (MIIA.4) that after Confucius's death three noted disciples (Zizhang, Zixia, and Ziyou) had tried to put Youzi in the Master's place, only to be thwarted by Zengzi. Note that Zixia speaks the famous phrase "within the four seas all are brothers; need a man of honor fear having no brothers?" (*Analects* 12.5). Zixia spoke these words to comfort Sima Niu for lacking kinsmen. Perhaps, Zixia and Youzi were part of a *fraternité* faction close to the Mohists, for whom the principle of *jian ai*, comprehensive love, was a family-transcending ideal.

Zengzi, the famed exponent of filial duty, blocked this proposal to anoint Youzi as Confucius's heir; the "Zengzi" chapters never mention *ti*. (And Confucius, as Sima Qian tells us—perhaps ironically—in his "Kongzi shijia," died without naming an heir, *mo neng zong yu*.) Not only did Zengzi emphasize *xiao*, but also he is the disciple credited with emphasizing the bond between family and state. Zengzi reinforced the doctrine of *xiao* as state ethic. Zengzi also links *xiao* with *zhong* in the Zengzi chapters, but he still used *zhong* in its older sense of "single-minded dedication." The compound *zhong-xiao* occurs as early as the Later Han, but does not become a keynote value until the neo-Confucian era. From the Song period on down, in Japanese (*chū-kō*) as well as in Chinese, we find the binom is pervasive, and always in the sequence *zhong-xiao* (never *xiao-zhong*), crystallizing the primacy of state over family.

As a touchstone of the ideology of Chinese civilization, *zhong-xiao* prevailed. Youzi's idea of balancing (if not equalizing) filial and fraternal devotion, of widening *xiao* to include *ti*, did not develop in the main Confucian tradition. Tied to and shaped by *xiao*, *ti* was limited to mean obedience to the elder brother. An interesting instance of *xiao-ti* is in the Guodian text *Liu de*, where it seems to mean "family values." In this text, family takes precedence over state: "[S]everal relations with the ruler before severing relations with the father." In the *Analects*, however, only traces of *xiao-ti* survive, as we have seen.

Mencius saved something of Youzi's *xiao-ti* formula, though in weakened form, by linking filial piety to *ren* and fraternal love to *yi*. *Ren-yi* exists in the *Mencius* mainly as a bound term, and sometimes seems equivalent to "civilized values." Seldom taking up *yi* as an independent value—indeed, opposed to construing *yi* as an "outer ethic"—Mencius often speaks of *ren* as a gate and *yi* as a road, *ren* implying an orientation or direction or even a frame of mind, in contrast to *yi*, the actual course of conduct. Thus, for the most part *yi* was subordinate to *ren*. Much as *ren-yi* seems to function as a term that transcends its components, with a meaning like "civilized values," so *xiao-ti* probably meant little more than family values—filial service and fraternal harmony. The two terms lose their individual force and the first dominates. Perhaps allowing *ti* to have equal status with *xiao* would have made inheritance patterns too chaotic. Perhaps there was enough to do

to control the sons of multiple wives without the complications that including the claims of brothers (and the nephews) would create. Wasn't this one of the lessons of the round-robin interkingdom wars of the entire Warring States era, wars driven by succession crises?

Thus, *xiao* become the dominant value. The main Confucian interest was supporting aristocratic lineage. The impulse to limit, refine, or reform *xiao* never prevailed, because generational continuity, meaning stability of inheritance of position and property, was all-important to the Confucians, who spoke for the landholder lords and the state bureaucracy that served them. And those interests prevailed over the idealist strains in the tradition. Zhuge Liang's political orthodoxy on this point is underscored by his *hao*: Kongming, "wise as Confucius."



In Chinese culture, brotherhood, as an independent relationship outside the established roles, acquired a quasi-subversive significance. Though not called *ti*, but rather *baixiongdi*, fraternal devotion severed from filiality and family, or in conflict with them, is the crucial relationship in certain major works of Chinese fiction, among them *Three Kingdoms* and of course *Shuihu zhuan* or *Outlaws of the Marsh*. In the latter work, the central figure is Song Jiang. He aids, joins, and eventually leads the outlaw brotherhood, but his filial devotion conflicts with his commitment to his brothers. And this contradiction not only defines his character, but also drives the narrative's dialectical swings between rebellion and capitulation.

Perhaps *fraternité* would be a translation for *jieyi* (strangers taking an oath of brotherhood), distinguishing it from the more limited fraternal devotion (*ti*), which is restricted to blood brothers. Notice particularly the independent use of *yi* and the absence of the more familial *ren* in this brotherhood discourse. The brother-oath has a touch of the "barbarian" as well as the underworld about it, since most Ming readers would remember that before going into battle Mongol warriors took the *anda* or the pact of brothers-in-arms, the band of brothers.

In the first chapter of *Three Kingdoms*, three unrelated warrior-heroes-to-be—Liu Bei, Lord Guan, and Zhang Fei—pledge a fraternal oath in the Peach Garden (the peach symbolizes fidelity in marriage according to *Shijing* ode 6, "Tao yao"). The three loyally place themselves at the service of the Han emperor Ling, and win signal honors in suppressing the Yellow Scarves revolt. In effect, the oath ties loyalty to brotherhood and *xiao* is left out. The brothers' oath supersedes all other family ties, with the exception of the useful claim that Liu Bei is a distant relation of the emperor. This family connection counteracts the barbarian or underworld taint on a brotherhood formed by strangers, and it also endows Liu Bei with a degree of lineage prestige or virtue, for he is a Liu and thus can claim royal blood and a remote right of succession. At the same time, the brotherhood's moral standing is enhanced by contrast with established families in power, both at the imperial court and in the regional capitals. These families are breaking apart due

to succession conflicts among sons and brothers—manifest failures of both *xiao* and *ti*. In these ancillary conflicts the junior usually displaces the senior brother—a sign of moral disorder and a harbinger of political disintegration. Dong Zhuo commits the same offense against descent protocol when he deposes Shaodi (age 14) and enthrones his younger brother Xiandi (age 9), who reigns until the end of the Han. With conventional family bonds breaking down at the dynastic and regional governing levels, the Peach Garden brotherhood initially offers a possible new way to organize political rule, a reaching toward something like *fraternité*, even *égalité*. (*Shui hu* further develops this theme in a revolutionary direction.)

But can dynastic government be organized this way? Can the realm be governed on such a principle? The author of the novel raises the question but does not resolve it. He simply shows the conflict between *fraternité* and dynasty (with its dependence on *xiao*) as forms of organization, and he portrays Liu Bei as the liminal figure who must choose between the two. Note, for example, how Liu Bei's adoption of Kou Feng annoys his two brothers, who protest their elder brother's acquisition of a son with the remark, "What do you want with another's young?" Later the other two brothers acquire families, too. These acts and other instances of filial relations and responsibilities weaken their fraternal bond.

Another example of the conflict between family and comrade solidarity concerns Liu Bei's loss of Shan Fu, his first military adviser. Cao Cao manages to lure Shan Fu to his camp by appeals to his filial piety. In order to win Shan Fu over, Cao Cao has taken Shan Fu's mother prisoner and uses her handwriting to forge letters to her son calling him home. Taken in by Cao Cao's ruse, Shan Fu tells Liu Bei he must leave his service to go to his mother. An adviser urges Liu Bei to kill Shan Fu because he knows so much about the brothers' military operations, but Liu Bei magnanimously lets Shan Fu go over to the enemy side. When Shan Fu reaches his mother, however, she condemns him for joining Cao Cao and then hangs herself, both to shame her son and to prevent him from serving Cao Cao. The incident puts filial piety in a negative light on the mother's authority.

The parting of Liu Bei and Shan Fu is a crucial episode forming the bridge to the imminent meeting between Liu Bei and Kongming. Each man tests the other. Liu Bei needs to confirm that Shan Fu will not serve Cao Cao; Shan Fu needs to verify Liu Bei's acclaimed high-mindedness. In their parting scene Shan Fu reassures Liu Bei that he will never use his knowledge to aid Cao Cao. But he remains unconvinced that Liu Bei will actually let him go. It is a defining moment. Only after he has ridden safely beyond reach can Shan Fu confirm to his own satisfaction Liu Bei's legendary virtue. Having done so, he then rides back to Liu Bei and recommends Kongming. Mindful of Liu Bei's need for a substitute adviser, Shan Fu describes Kongming's talents and urges Liu Bei to seek him out. Then he parts with Liu Bei for the second time. In one of the novel's humorous touches, Shan Fu rides by Kongming's dwelling to inform him that Liu Bei may visit. When Shan Fu knocks on the gate, Kongming receives his visitor personally and promptly. (Later Kongming will compel Liu Bei to make three arduous trips before gaining an

audience.) In this way the novel prepares the reader for the entry of Zhuge Liang (Kongming) in chapters 36–37.

Kongming represents the traditional values of filiality bonded to loyalty; he proves to be an ideal dutiful son to Liu Bei, a veritable *Analects junzi*. His fidelity to his roles contrasts with Cao Cao, who overreaches as prime minister and becomes a usurper for his clan. Later in the story, Kongming (together with Zhao Zilong) supports Liu Bei's natural son Liu Shan (A Dou) as the rightful successor to the throne of Shu-Han. Liu Bei views Kongming (twenty years his junior) as the ideal prime minister and political counselor. But the brothers see him as a threat to themselves and the brotherhood, and they show their hostility to the young consigliere. For his part, Kongming is determined not to serve under Liu Bei until he has established his authority over Lord Guan and Zhang Fei. Thereafter, he makes a point of humbling them at every opportunity, while seeking to educate Zhang Fei. The ideal vassal, he wants the brothers to show loyalty to Liu Bei, to serve him as subordinates and vassals, not as brothers; he is hostile to the quasi-egalitarian brother-bond even if he recognizes its military usefulness. But Kongming will not win his battle against the brotherhood.

The contradiction between the filial and the fraternal reaches a climax when Liu Bei has to choose between his role as elder brother and his role as father-emperor. After Cao Cao and the Southern leaders capture and execute Lord Guan, the Peach Garden oath is inevitably invoked. Liu Bei yields to Zhang Fei's pleas and decides to avenge his fallen brother. Significantly, Lord Guan has brought defeat on himself by putting his parental interest above Liu Bei's political cause. Lord Guan's refusal to let his daughter marry Sun Quan's son violates Kongming's primary strategic principle: protect the alliance with the south in order to maintain a united front against the Cao-Wei northern kingdom. Kongming tries his best to assure Liu Bei that after Wei is defeated, the South will fall, but Liu Bei remains determined to attack the South at once, sacrificing his imperial hopes to honor the brother-oath. Thus *yi* prevails over *zhong*, brother-bond over *jun-chen*, and military solidarity over dynastic politics. Lord Guan's death has forced on Liu Bei a fateful choice: to attack the South at once rather than follow Kongming's long-range war plan. Kongming's bitterness over Liu Bei's choice is immortalized in the last line of Du Fu's poem "Bazhentu" (The Maze of Eight Ramparts): "A legacy of rue / that his king had choked on Wu" (end of chapter 84).

The failure of the attack on the Southland does not mean that the novelist finally rejects the brotherhood principle. The novel does not validate either the succession of Liu Shan or the brotherhood; both lead to failure. Dynastic politics are criticized, but no cure is proposed. *Three Kingdoms* is a problem novel. To Ming readers some twelve centuries later, the failure of Kongming's plan to save the Han dynasty sounds the tragic doom of Chinese civilization as a unified imperium. The grandeur and the glory of Han were rapidly fading. And Kongming, not the brotherhood, represents an idealized Han dynasty that might have been restored. The historical reunification under the Jin dynasty (with which the novel ends) was a

weak stay against the northern foes. The Jin lasted one generation, from 280 to 317. Thus, the fall of the Han meant that invading powers were to play a large role in a China that remained divided for almost four hundred years, until the Sui-T'ang reunification at the beginning of the seventh century.

The interim was marked by short dynasties, with no magnificent lineage like that of the Han, and no vast integrated territory governed by a unified bureaucracy; and Buddhism became more ideologically powerful than Confucianism. The Han became the archetype of dynastic achievement, perhaps never again to be equaled, but always alive in the collective imagination. If the author of *Three Kingdoms* had any contemporary agenda, perhaps it was to warn whichever Ming emperor(s) reigned during his lifetime about the fragility of political power. For the Ming began with an emperor who imagined himself as following the model of the first Han emperor, Liu Bang, thus creating a standard of self-evaluation for his successors. The novel, however, dwells not on the first Han reign but on the last. Did the novelist perversely portray the fall of the Han to a dynasty that took the Han as its model?

Perhaps China's only tragic hero in the Shakespearean sense, Kongming is immortalized in Du Fu's "Lines written in memory of Zhuge Liang, Prime Minister of Shu-Han," a poem included in chapter 105 of the novel. In the poem Du Fu freezes Kongming in time. Like the figures on Keats's Grecian urn, fixed in their poses of eternal expectation, Kongming is imagined dying with his men at the front, ever-awaiting word of victory over the Wei, a victory that history never delivered.

"His Excellency's shrine, where would it be found?"

"Past Damask Town, where cypresses grow dense."

Its sunlit court, gem-bright greens—a spring unto themselves.

Leaf-veiled, the orioles—sweet notes to empty air.

Thrice to him Liu Bei sued, keen to rule the realm:

Two reigns Kongming served—steady old heart—

To die, his host afield, the victory herald yet to come—

Weep, O heroes! Drench your fronts, now and evermore.

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