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คณะมนุษยศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์

The Power of Classics of the East in the Globalized Contexts:

The Romance of the Three Kingdoms or Sanguo Yen-I in

Thai Literary and Social Contexts

พลังของวรรณคดีคลาสสิกตะวันออกในบริบทโลกาภิวัตน์:
สามก๊ก หรือ ซังเกี้ยว เยียนอี้ ในบริบทสังคมและวรรณกรรมไทย

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Abstract

This The purpose of this research paper is to survey and analyze the power of one of the famous classics of the East: The Romance of the Three Kingdoms or Sanguo Yen-I in modern Thai society and its impacts on Thai literary circles and society. The Romance of the Three Kingdoms or Samkok (in Thai pronunciation) or Sanguo Yen-I was translated into Thai language in the 18th century. Since then, it has become one of the major literary texts in Thai society, not only as Chinese chronicles or the textbook of military strategies, but also as a prior text for modern Thai literature, cartoons, performing arts, mural painting, animation, website and video games. Sanguo Yen-I is renowned for its content of tricky military strategies. There are Thai proverbs which indicates Sanguo Yen-I's power that: "one who finished reading Sanguo-Yen-I three times is untrustworthy", or "if you never read Sanguo Yen-I, you cannot start a big project." Its literary values has inspired Thai writers to write Thai versions of Sanguo Yen-I, for example, Samkok: The Vagabond's version by Yakhop (Chote Praephan), Samkok: The Capitalist version by former Prime Minister M.L.Kukrit Pramoj, etc.

There are also many simplified versions and adapted versions of Samkok in forms of non-fiction, novels and short stories. In this modern era, Samkok has been reproduced and adapted into many forms of art and media from cartoons, video games, games on line, website, performing arts (satiric Chinese opera) and mural paintings. Its impact on Thai readers can be seen from Samkok fanclub and Samkok Theme Park, a tourist spot owned by a Thai millionaire with Chinese blood at Chonburi Province.

Keywords:

Adaptation, Chinese Chronicles, Romance literature

บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจและวิเคราะห์พลังของวรรณคดีคลาสสิกตะวันออกเรื่องสามก๊กในสังคมไทยปัจจุบันอิทธิพลของวรรณคดีเรื่องนี้ต่อวงการวรรณกรรมไทยและสังคม วรรณคดีเรื่องสามก๊กแปลเป็นภาษาไทยในคริสต์ศตวรรษที่ ๑๘ และได้รับการยอมรับเป็นหนึ่งในวรรณคดีเอกของไทย ไม่ใช่เพียงในฐานะพงศาวดารจีนหรือตำรายุทธศาสตร์ทางการทหารเท่านั้น แต่ยังเป็นวรรณคดีต้นแบบทำให้เกิดวรรณกรรมไทยหลากหลายรูปแบบ หนังสือการ์ตูน จิตรกรรมฝาผนัง ศิลปะการแสดง ภาพยนตร์ แอนิเมชัน เว็บไซต์และวิดีโอเกม สามก๊กเป็นวรรณคดีที่มีชื่อเสียงในด้านยุทธศาสตร์ทางการทหาร ในสังคมไทยมีสำนวนซึ่งแสดงถึงพลังของเรื่องสามก๊กว่า “หากอ่านสามก๊กเกินสามครั้งเป็นคนคบไม่ได้” และถ้ายังไม่เคยอ่านสามก๊ก จะคิดทำการใหญ่ไม่ได้ วรรณคดีเรื่องนี้ทรงพลังและสร้างแรงบันดาลใจให้นักเขียนไทยสร้างสรรค์สามก๊กสำนวนของตนเอง เช่น สามก๊ก ฉบับวนพิศ ของ ยาขอบ (โชติ แพร่พันธุ์) สามก๊กฉบับนายทุนของอดีตนายกรัฐมนตรี ม.ร.ว.คึกฤทธิ์ ปราโมช และยังมีฉบับอ่านง่ายและฉบับดัดแปลงทั้งในรูปแบบสารคดี นวนิยายและเรื่องสั้นในยุคสมัยใหม่มีการนำเรื่องสามก๊กไปดัดแปลงและปรับ

ประยุกต์เป็นศิลปะและสื่อหลากหลายรูปแบบ อาทิ การ์ตูน วิดีโอเกม เกมออนไลน์ เว็บไซต์ ศิลปะการแสดง จิวเอเลียม การเมืองและภาพจิตรกรรมฝาผนัง ผลกระทบและอิทธิพลของเรื่องสามก๊กจะเห็นได้จากการเกิดแฟนคลับสามก๊กและการสร้างอุทยานสามก๊กของมหาเศรษฐีคนไทยเชื้อสายจีนที่จังหวัดชลบุรีซึ่งเป็นจุดสำคัญทางการท่องเที่ยวที่ต้องแวะไปชม

คำสำคัญ:

การดัดแปลง, พงศาวดารจีน, วรรณกรรมจีนนิยม

Introduction

"After three times of reading Sangou-Yen-I, one becomes untrustworthy"

"Never read Sanguo Yen-I, one cannot start a big project"

These two Thai proverbs indicate Samkok or Thai version of Chinese Sanguo Yen-I's power in contemporary Thai society. Among Thai classical literature, Samkok seems to be the only one masterpiece which is still popular and powerful. The dynamic aspects of this text generates not only in literary reproduction, but also in various digital media from computer games, websites, games on line, T.V series and movies. Its popularity can be seen from social activities, such as Samkok Fan Club, Samkok Tour and communities on line. This major classical text had inspired a Chinese-Thai millionaire to build Samkok Theme Park in Chonburi province.

The adaptation of the Chinese Sanguo Yen-I to the Thai Samkok

Sanguo Yen-I or the Romance of the Three Kingdoms written during B. E. 1873-1943 (c.1330-1400) or about 700 years ago by Lo Kuan Chung, a Chinese writer, is one of the world literary masterpieces. The Romance of the Three Kingdoms reflects the picture of over 1,000 characters' lives in different dimensions, for example, the fight among many potential political leaders for political power and supremacy, the utilization of the arts of strategic leadership, foreign affair, clever military

administration and good governance, the law of karma, and the arts of writing, etc. The story was translated into over 10 languages. In Thailand, Chaophraya Phrakhleng (Hon) was the first translation director of this master piece which was done during the reign of The King Rama I of Bangkok period. As the work was translated through the interpreters, its content had been changed and adapted from the Chinese original of Lo Kuan Chung to Thai literary and social contexts. Later, scholars have raised the point that the political meanings hidden in the story are the merit of this masterpiece that generates the dynamic and various interpretations still suitable in this modern era.

Samkok is a Thai translation of a 14th century greatest work of Chinese literature, San-kuo Yen-I by Lo Kuan-chung. This masterpiece was created out of historical facts and legends which were transmitted by oral tradition. The most important historical facts of this text came from the many volumes of official chronicles (or letters) of historical events of the latter part of the Han Dynasty (221-265 A.D.) when China was split up into three kingdoms and the Chinese emperors were fighting against one another. This started when the Chinese emperor became debilitated, turning the country into a state of disorder. The dishonest nobles took this chance to stir up problems by suppressing the people and performing acts of injustice.

The translation of *Sanguo Yen-I* started in the late 18th century and finished in the early 19th century under the editorial supervision of Chaophraya Phrakhlung (Hon), a prominent Thai poet and nobleman. It was commissioned by King Rama I (1782-1809) during a time of military and political change. The social and political climate of the time provided a social environment for the important of Chinese impact. The rapid growth of the Chinese community in Thailand during the period was caused by three factors. First, the desperate demand for manpower following the ruinous wars with Burma between 1758-1767 opened a great opportunity for the Chinese immigrants who were recognized as free layman to fulfill that need. Second, as the Chinese were at the time the key instrument for Thailand's international trading which in turn was essential as the main source of the State revenue, the government's policy regarding the Chinese immigration was accordingly favorable. Third, Chinese immigrants were attracted to the country by the fact that the new Thai rulers were of Chinese descents and for that reason good treatment and attitudes on the part of the Thai authorities seemed to be guaranteed. As a result, Chinese communities became dense, especially in the capital as they constituted over half of the population. By that time, the impact of the Chinese was greater than ever in social, economic, and cultural aspects. The influence of Chinese literature appeared for the first time in the form of literary writings, which was in part made possible by the enthusiastic interest in foreign literature by the King and his contemporaries. *Samkok*, being the first piece of translated

work from a Chinese text, seemed to be the most appropriate choice for two reasons: there was a demand for this popular Chinese tale among the Thai readers: and the text contained some useful knowledge applicable quite well to the nature of military campaigns of the time.

Although *Samkok* was largely intended as a text of military tactics, it has become a major literary work in its own right. In fact, *Samkok* has become an important work in Thai literary history not only because it is the first work of translation made from a Chinese source, but also because it has a unique place in Thai literature as the only translation from Chinese to receive general acclaim as a classic literary work and a great source of literary entertainment. The merit of this text, apart from its highly interesting account of war and intrigue, is in its prose-writing which exhibits a perfection of style in the art of writing which exhibits a perfection of style in the art of writing which was later on, raised by the Royal Academy of Literature during King Rama VI's reign as the best one of story in prose.

It is interesting to compare Chinese *Sankuo Yen-I* and Thai *Samkok* that in the process of translation, the aspects of Chinese philosophical and religious thoughts had been changed to Thai and Buddhist beliefs. It is obvious that the Thai editor had to initiate such a drastic change of concept for the purpose of making the translation a relevant and acceptable work of literature in the Thai cultural contexts

and way of thinking. Samkok, therefore, is a highly adaptive work essentially in its philosophical and religious embodiment. The role of Buddhism was empowered in all aspects during the time Samkok was translated. Buddhism was not only the state religion in the newly established dynasty of Cakri or Bangkok period, but also was significant as being the ideological foundation for all kinds of cultural reconstruction strongly pushed and encouraged by its founder, King Rama I. Literary reconstruction was done in the tradition to teach and uphold Buddhist thought.

In Sankuo Yen-I, a common belief in the existence of a supreme providential power called Tian (Heaven) or sometimes "huang Tian (Imperial Heaven) is very important. Tien exercises an ultimate control over matters in the human world. Human fate is, therefore, determined by Heaven. In Thai Samkok, the editor replaces the Chinese concept of Tian with the idea of the Buddha and the concept of "Boon" and "Kam" (merit or good deeds and bad deeds). While the Chinese version maintains that human destiny is designed and controlled by Tian, the Thai Samkok explains that the predestination is the result of moral retribution which depends upon one's previous good or bad deeds which is a central concept of popular Thai Buddhism.

With the adoption of the Buddhist concept of good and bad deeds, the central concept of Samkok is that man himself, not any supernatural power, through the good and bad nature of his deeds,

is solely responsible for his own destiny. The concept of "fate" in Samkok is therefore a matter of individual concern. In adopting the moral approach of Buddhism in Thai Samkok, it has offered a different interpretation of the theme of fatalism. All characters in Thai Samkok, the protagonists and minor characters have been portrayed as men and women of Buddhist faith.

The intertextuality of Samkok in the Globalized contexts: In Academic World and Cyber Space

The intertextuality of Samkok in Thai literary and cultural contexts is extremely productive. The space of its intertextuality can be classified into two realms: the academic and the popular.

In the academic world, it is interesting that this literary text can flourish as a research object for scholars and graduate students, not only for those of literature but also for experts in politics and management. Many draw conclusions of their studies to confirm Samkok's merit of wisdom and universal aspects. For examples, "Leadership and Management as Reflected in the Romance of the Three Kingdoms" in Manit Sangiumpornpanichya (1979) analyzes the nature of knowledge considered essential for effective leadership and management. It is found that the norm of administrative behavior essential for successful leadership is based upon the ability of the leader to change his own character and

to know how to select management methods to suit changing situations and environments. The leader had to be intelligent, capable, powerful, self-sufficient, highly determined and ambitious in order to achieve his goals in creating and maintaining autonomy of his organization. The leader had to be interested in building up the strength of his organization so that sufficient manpower as well as other resources could be secured to protect himself or to eliminate his competitors and enemies who might threaten the security of his organization or his own position. The study also concludes that the concepts of leadership and management in this text are quite similar to Machiavellian concepts which confirms Machiavelli's assertion that his ideas are realistic and can be universally applied to states and men.

"Political Philosophy in Romance of the Three Kingdoms: On Justice" by Sarawut Tanasillapagul (1999) examines the meaning of justice in the Romance of the Three Kingdoms and concludes that in its context, the stronger is one who has the Heaven's appointment (Tian Ming) to be the emperor (the son of Heaven). As for those who are not born in the Royal family, but claim that they receive "Tian Ming" or Heaven's appointment, to make the "legitimate" to become the emperor that should not be rejected by the states. The study also concludes that the meaning of justice in this text is similar to the meaning of justice in Plato's Republic which one of the characters, Thracymachus, states that "justice is nothing but the interest of the stronger."

As for the popularity of Samkok in Thai society, one interesting evidence is number of websites and web boards in cyber space. One who tries searching "Samkok" in Google, the result will be 1,780,000 websites and web boards. The most active websites are "Thaisamkok.com," "website samkok" and "samkok gamesonline." The intertextuality of Samkok in modern Thai society can be classified, by forms and media, into four groups.

First, in the form of books, there are hundreds of new versions and interpretations of Samkok by Thai writers, for examples, The Vagabond's Version by the renown writer "Yakob" (Chote Praephan) and the parody of this version, the Capitalist's Version by former Prime Minister M.R.Kukrit Pramoj and the translated version (31 volumes) by Wanwai Phatthanothai. Samkok Cartoons by many artists are among best selling books. There are also many simplified and adapted versions of Samkok in forms of fictions, novels and short stories, and non-fiction.

Second, in the age of globalization and mass media, Thai people, especially young generation, know the story of Samkok, not from books but from T.V. series and movies from China and Hong Kong. These forms of media generate this master piece on the global level.

Third, animation and games on line are the most popular forms among young generation. Not only animated series by Japanese

Yokoyama Mitsuteru Sangokushi and Dynasty warriors or Shin Sangokumuso, but also Thai animated series by “Moo Ninja” which had been translated into Korean are among the successful ones.

Fourth are live performances and drama which are still active in Thai society. Main figures in Samkok are quite well-known among Thai audiences, therefore, new interpretations of each character can be adapted to new social and political events as satiric Chinese opera. Samkok is also a representative of Chinese opera.

The popularity of Samkok can also be seen from Samkok Fclub and Samkok Theme Park. The Three Kingdoms Theme Park is a testament of filial piety that the six children have for their father, Mr. Kiarti Srifuengfung, a successful Chinese-Thai businessman whose favorite Chinese epic was the Romance of the Three Kingdoms. It also provides Kiarti Srifuengfung a textbook on human psychology. This impressive project strives to generate for the society and Kingdom of Thailand.

Inside the Three Kingdoms Theme Park are the three pagodas set on basis of Chinese geomancy principles. There are many artistic objects about Samkok, for examples, an introduction to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms, showing figures of main characters made in Jiangxi, China, along with each character’s personal records, the shrine of Guan Yu, who is admired by many Thai and Chinese as “The God of Honesty”

and the hand-painted ceramic tile corridor which is said to be the world’s longest painted corridor, depicting 56 episodes from the Romance of the Three Kingdoms.

It can be concluded that Samkok, one of the major classical texts in Thai society, is impressively active in this modern era because of its merits of amusement and wisdom.

Three Kingdoms Main Park





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