



Brewitt-Taylor's Translation Strategies in the English *Sanguo Yanyi*

*GUO NYUHUAN

School of Foreign Studies, Zhaoqing University, Guangdong, China.

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Abstract

This study undertakes a comparative textual analysis of the Chinese source text and C.H. Brewitt-Taylor's 1925 English translation of a chapter from Sanguo Yanyi (Romance of the Three Kingdoms), one of the four great classical novels of Chinese literature. Drawing upon descriptive translation studies and theories of literary translation, this paper examines how Brewitt-Taylor navigates the challenges of rendering classical Chinese military narrative, dialogue, cultural-specific items, and narrative conventions into early twentieth-century English prose. The analysis reveals that Brewitt-Taylor employed a predominantly source-oriented strategy characterised by extensive syntactic restructuring, selective domestication of official titles, and a marked tendency towards explication in rendering classical Chinese paratactic structures. His treatment of military terminology demonstrates a consistent pattern of functional equivalence, whilst his handling of dialogue preserves the rhetorical cadence of the original through deliberate archaism. The findings contribute to the growing body of scholarship on the translation history of Chinese classical literature and illuminate the translational norms governing the early Anglophone reception of Chinese literary masterpieces.

Keywords: *Sanguo Yanyi, literary translation, C.H. Brewitt-Taylor, classical Chinese narrative, translation strategies, descriptive translation studies.*

INTRODUCTION

The translation of classical Chinese literature into English represents one of the most demanding enterprises in literary translation, requiring the translator to bridge not only linguistic difference but also vast temporal, cultural, and generic distance. Among the canonical works of Chinese literature, *Sanguo Yanyi* (《三国演义》), traditionally attributed to Luo Guanzhong and edited by Mao Zonggang in the seventeenth century, occupies a preeminent position as one of the Four Great Classical Novels. Its panoramic depiction of the turbulent century following the fall of the Han dynasty, combining historical chronicle with literary invention across one hundred and twenty chapters, presents formidable challenges to any translator. The text weaves together hundreds of named characters, intricate military campaigns, diplomatic negotiations, and philosophical reflections, creating a narrative tapestry of extraordinary density and complexity that demands exceptional translational resourcefulness.

The first complete English translation of this monumental work was accomplished by Charles Henry Brewitt-Taylor (1857–1938), a British customs official who served in China for over four decades. Published in 1925 by Kelly and Walsh in Shanghai under the title *San Kuo, or Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, this translation remained the sole complete English version for more than sixty years until Moss Roberts published his acclaimed retranslation in 1991. Brewitt-Taylor brought to the task a lifetime of immersion in Chinese language and culture, having first arrived in China in 1880 and risen through the ranks of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service whilst simultaneously pursuing sinological interests that included the compilation of Chinese-English dictionaries and the translation of classical poetry. Despite this formidable preparation and the translation's historical significance and enduring readership, Brewitt-Taylor's work has received comparatively limited scholarly attention in translation studies, with most critical discussion appearing incidentally within broader studies of Chinese literary translation rather than as the focus of sustained textual analysis.

This paper addresses this gap through a detailed comparative analysis of the Chinese source text and Brewitt-Taylor's English rendering, focusing on a single representative chapter that encompasses the characteristic narrative elements of *Sanguo Yanyi*: military strategy discourse, battlefield action, dialogue-driven characterisation, and formal narrative

framing. The chapter under examination narrates a pivotal episode in Zhuge Liang's third northern expedition against the state of Wei, including the ruse of the grain convoy, the fire attack at Qishan, the capture of Chencang, and the transfer of military command to Sima Yi. This chapter provides a rich corpus for examining Brewitt-Taylor's translational choices across multiple registers and rhetorical modes.

The study is guided by the following research questions: (a) what translation strategies does Brewitt-Taylor employ in rendering classical Chinese military narrative into English prose, (b) how does he handle culturally specific items including official titles, military terminology, and narrative conventions, and (c) to what extent does his translation reflect the norms of early twentieth-century literary translation practice? By addressing these questions through close textual analysis, this paper aims to contribute a nuanced understanding of Brewitt-Taylor's translational poetics and, by extension, the broader history of Chinese-English literary translation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Translation of Classical Chinese Fiction

The translation of Chinese classical fiction into English has been a subject of growing scholarly interest since the latter half of the twentieth century. Hsia (1968) provided the foundational English-language critical study of the six major Chinese classical novels, including *Sanguo Yanyi*, establishing their literary significance within the Western academy and implicitly arguing for the importance of adequate translation as a precondition for critical engagement. His chapter on *Sanguo Yanyi* remains an essential reference point, characterising the novel as a work of immense scope that combines historical fidelity with imaginative power. Plaks (1987) further consolidated this scholarly foundation through his rigorous structural analysis of the four Ming dynasty masterworks, demonstrating the sophisticated narrative architecture including complementary bipolarity, figural density, and lyric interstices that translators must contend with in rendering these texts into Western languages.

Within translation studies proper, the translation of Chinese literature has been theorised through multiple conceptual frameworks. Venuti's (2008) binary of domestication and foreignisation has proven particularly influential in analyses of Chinese-English literary translation, with scholars debating whether translators of Chinese classics should naturalise the source text for Anglophone readers or preserve its cultural and stylistic alterity. Bassnett (2014) situated such debates within the broader disciplinary development of translation studies, arguing for a cultural turn that attends to the socio-historical conditions under which translations are produced and received, a perspective particularly pertinent to colonial-era translation practices such as Brewitt-Taylor's.

Previous Scholarship on *Sanguo Yanyi* Translation

The comparative merits of the two complete English translations of *Sanguo Yanyi* have attracted scholarly commentary since Roberts's retranslation appeared. General critical consensus holds that Brewitt-Taylor's version, whilst historically significant, exhibits certain limitations in accuracy and stylistic consistency when judged against contemporary standards of sinological translation. Roberts's translation is generally regarded as more philologically precise and narratively fluent, benefiting from advances in Ming-Qing fiction scholarship, a more systematic approach to rendering names and institutional terminology, and the availability of annotated Chinese critical editions.

However, such evaluative comparisons, whilst informative, risk anachronism by applying late twentieth-century translational norms to a text produced under fundamentally different conditions. Brewitt-Taylor worked without the benefit of modern annotated editions, comprehensive reference works, or an established community of Anglophone sinological scholarship upon which to draw. Lefevere (1992) argued compellingly that translations must be understood as rewritings shaped by the ideological and poetological constraints of the receiving culture, an insight that invites a more historically contextualised reading of Brewitt-Taylor's work. The present study adopts this descriptive approach (Toury, 1995), seeking to understand Brewitt-Taylor's translational choices within the horizon of early twentieth-century British sinological translation practice rather than measuring them against contemporary standards of accuracy.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon interrelated theoretical resources from descriptive translation studies. Toury (1995) established the foundational framework for descriptive translation studies, arguing that translations should be analysed as facts of the target culture rather than evaluated against source-text fidelity alone, a methodological orientation that underpins the present study's approach to Brewitt-Taylor's work. Nida's (1964) distinction between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence provides a useful heuristic for categorising translational choices, though his primarily biblical focus requires adaptation for the analysis of literary narrative. Baker's (2018) systematic framework for analysing translation at the levels of word, collocation, grammar, and textual organisation offers operational categories for the close textual comparison undertaken here, particularly her concepts of explicitation and simplification as universal features of translated language. Newmark's (1988) taxonomy of translation procedures, particularly his distinction between semantic and communicative translation, provides a further analytical vocabulary for characterising Brewitt-Taylor's strategies across different textual domains.

These descriptive frameworks are supplemented by Lefevere's (1992) concept of translation as rewriting, which foregrounds the institutional and ideological factors shaping translational practice. The application of this concept to Brewitt-Taylor's work requires consideration of the specific conditions under which the translation was produced: a British colonial milieu in Republican-era China, for an Anglophone readership whose familiarity with Chinese literary tradition was minimal, and within the conventions of early twentieth-century popular historical romance in English.

Methodology and Corpus

The corpus for this study comprises a single complete chapter of *Sanguo Yanyi* in the Mao Zonggang recension alongside Brewitt-Taylor's 1925 English translation. This chapter, which appears as Chapter 97 or 98 depending upon the edition consulted, was selected for its representative quality, containing multiple narrative modes including strategic deliberation, military manoeuvre, battle description, and formal chapter-closing verse. The Chinese source text consists of approximately 2,800 characters divided into 187 narrative segments, each of which is aligned with its corresponding English translation segment in a parallel corpus format.

The analytical procedure involved systematic comparison of source and target texts across four dimensions: (a) lexical choices in rendering military terminology and official titles, (b) syntactic restructuring patterns in narrative prose, (c) treatment of dialogue and reported speech, and (d) handling of formal narrative conventions including chapter titles and closing couplets. For each dimension, translational patterns were identified, categorised using the theoretical frameworks outlined above, and interpreted with reference to the historical and cultural context of the translation's production. The analysis does not aim at a comprehensive inventory of every translational decision but rather seeks to identify recurrent strategies and patterns that characterise Brewitt-Taylor's overall translational approach within this chapter.

Comparative Analysis

Military Terminology and Official Titles

The rendering of military and bureaucratic terminology constitutes one of the most immediate challenges in translating *Sanguo Yanyi*, given the text's dense deployment of historically specific ranks, commands, and institutional designations. Brewitt-Taylor's approach to this challenge is characterised by a pragmatic eclecticism that resists simple classification within any single translation strategy.

For military ranks, Brewitt-Taylor demonstrates a marked preference for functional equivalence through the use of approximate Western analogues. The title 都督 (*dudu*), a senior military governor commanding regional forces, is rendered variously as "Commander-in-Chief" when referring to Sima Yi's supreme command and more simply as "commander" for subordinate officers. This variable rendering reflects a contextual sensitivity that prioritises functional clarity over terminological consistency, a strategy consistent with Newmark's (1988) communicative translation approach. Similarly, 将军 (*jiangjun*, general) appears consistently as "leader" or "general", whilst 先锋 (*xianfeng*, vanguard commander) is rendered as "van leader", a slightly archaic English military term that preserves the flavour of the source text. The term 寨 (*zhai*, military encampment or stockade) is consistently translated as "camp", a simplified rendering that sacrifices the specifically military connotations of the Chinese term which implies a fortified encampment for ready comprehensibility.

Official titles present a more complex picture. Brewitt-Taylor translates 陛下 (*bixia*, Your Majesty) as "the Ruler of Wei", a decision that domesticates the Chinese honorific by replacing it with a descriptive appellation intelligible to Anglophone readers unfamiliar with Chinese court protocols. This strategy of explication extends to other titles: 丞相 (*chengxiang*, chancellor or prime minister) becomes "Prime Minister", and 魏主 (*Wei zhu*, the Wei sovereign) is consistently rendered as "the Ruler of Wei". These choices reflect what Lefevere (1992) would term the poetological constraints of early twentieth-century English historical narrative, in which consistent descriptive designations were preferred over the retention of source-culture terminology that would require explanatory annotation.

Brewitt-Taylor's treatment of personal names follows a clear pattern. Major historical figures are referred to by their courtesy names in the Chinese text (e.g., 孔明 for Zhuge Liang, 仲达 for Sima Yi, 子丹 for Cao Zhen), but Brewitt-Taylor consistently substitutes these with the figures' formal names in English, thereby sparing Anglophone readers the cognitive burden of tracking multiple appellations for single characters. This decision, whilst practical, inevitably entails a loss of the register shifts and interpersonal nuances conveyed through the strategic use of courtesy names in the source text. In the Chinese original, the choice between a character's formal name and courtesy name signals degrees of respect, intimacy, or narrative distance; these distinctions, which are central to the social texture of the narrative, are levelled in translation.

A particularly revealing case is the rendering of Zhuge Liang's honorific title 武侯 (*Wuhou*, the Martial Marquis), which appears in the chapter title. Brewitt-Taylor chooses to translate this fully as "the Martial Marquis" rather than retaining

the Chinese term or simplifying it. This decision suggests a recognition that certain honorifics carry sufficient narrative significance to warrant faithful transmission, even where less prominent titles are domesticated.

Syntactic Restructuring and Narrative Prose

The most pervasive translational operation in Brewitt-Taylor's rendering is syntactic restructuring, driven by the fundamental typological difference between classical Chinese parataxis and English hypotaxis. Classical Chinese narrative prose typically proceeds through the juxtaposition of clauses without explicit logical connectives, relying on context and reader inference to establish causal, temporal, and logical relationships. English prose, by contrast, demands the explicit signaling of such relationships through subordinating conjunctions, relative clauses, and other grammatical devices. This typological gap necessitates constant translational intervention, as any attempt at formal equivalence at the syntactic level would produce prose that English readers would find fragmented and incoherent.

Brewitt-Taylor's translation systematically supplies the logical connectives that the source text leaves implicit. Consider the following passage describing Sima Yi's strategic assessment:

Source: 臣算蜀兵行粮止有一月，利在急战。不须一月，蜀兵自走。

Translation: "Therefore I can give the invaders a month to exhaust their food. Hence their advantage lies in forcing a battle; In a month the enemy will have to retreat."

The English version inserts "Therefore", "Hence", and the semi-colon as logical articulators where the Chinese original presents a sequence of statements linked only by paratactic juxtaposition. This pattern of explicitation what Baker (2018) identifies as a universal tendency in translation operates throughout Brewitt-Taylor's text at both the sentential and paragraph levels. Causal relationships that are implied in the Chinese text by sequential presentation are rendered explicit through the insertion of conjunctive adverbs and subordinating constructions.

A further dimension of Brewitt-Taylor's syntactic strategy involves the segmentation and recombination of source-text units. The 187 narrative segments of the source text do not correspond neatly to English paragraph boundaries; Brewitt-Taylor frequently combines multiple Chinese segments into a single English paragraph or, conversely, divides a single Chinese sentence into multiple English sentences. This restructuring responds to the differing information-density tolerances of classical Chinese and English prose and demonstrates Brewitt-Taylor's attentiveness to target-language readability norms. Where the Chinese text can accommodate multiple shifts of subject and perspective within a single unbroken narrative flow, English prose convention demands clearer paragraph segmentation to guide the reader through changes in narrative focus.

The treatment of temporal markers provides an instructive example of adaptation to target-language narrative conventions. The classical Chinese narrative convention of opening segments with 却说 (*qieshuo*, approximately "it is told that" or "let us now turn to") serves as a chapter-internal scene transition device, signalling a shift in narrative focus from one group of characters to another. Brewitt-Taylor consistently renders this formula with variations such as "Now", "Then", "But", or simply by beginning a new paragraph without any transitional marker, adapting the Chinese convention to the less formulaic norms of English narrative pacing. Similarly, the formula 忽报 (*hubao*, "suddenly it was reported") is rendered variously as "they heard that", "suddenly a messenger came to say", or through indirect paraphrase, each time adapting the formula to English narrative expectations.

Another notable syntactic feature is Brewitt-Taylor's treatment of the classical Chinese topic-comment structure, in which a topic is introduced at the beginning of a clause and then elaborated through subsequent commentary. English syntax strongly prefers subject-predicate structures, and Brewitt-Taylor consistently reorganises topic-comment constructions into conventional English subject-verb-object patterns. This grammatical restructuring, whilst necessary for producing idiomatic English, inevitably alters the information structure of the source text, shifting emphasis from the topical element to the grammatical subject.

Dialogue and Reported Speech

Dialogue constitutes a substantial proportion of the chapter, functioning simultaneously as a vehicle for characterisation, a medium for strategic exposition, and a demonstration of rhetorical skill. Brewitt-Taylor's treatment of dialogue reveals a deliberate stylistic strategy that might be characterised as selective archaism.

The speech of high-status characters, particularly Zhuge Liang and Sima Yi, is rendered in a register that evokes formal oratory through syntactic inversion, periodic sentence structures, and archaic lexical choices. For instance, Zhuge Liang's strategic exposition is translated with constructions such as "wherefore I set Hao Zhao to guard it" and "How can they imagine that I shall be deceived by this sort of thing, when I have fought them with fire so many times?", where "wherefore" and the elaborate conditional construction establish a rhetorical elevation absent from the more compressed

Chinese original. This archaizing tendency aligns with early twentieth-century expectations for the representation of ancient or classical speech in English historical narrative, reflecting what Venuti (2008) would identify as a domesticating strategy that assimilates the foreign text to target-culture stylistic norms.

The strategic deliberations of military commanders, which in the Chinese text are delivered in terse, densely allusive language characteristic of classical Chinese strategic discourse, are expanded in Brewitt-Taylor's rendering through the addition of explanatory clauses and inferential connectives. Zhuge Liang's famous observation 吾平生专用火攻，彼乃欲以此计诱我耶 (approximately "All my life I have specialised in fire attacks; do they think they can lure me with this stratagem?") is expanded to "How can they imagine that I shall be deceived by this sort of thing, when I have fought them with fire so many times?", where the rhetorical question form is retained but elaborated with explanatory material that makes explicit the logical basis of Zhuge Liang's scepticism.

Direct speech attribution follows source-text conventions closely, with the Chinese 曰 (*yue*, said) most frequently rendered as "said", occasionally varied with "cried", "remarked", "replied", or "spoke". Brewitt-Taylor's repertoire of reporting verbs is more varied than his source text, reflecting the English prose convention of avoiding monotonous repetition of the quotative "said" a minor but telling instance of target-culture stylistic norms shaping translational choices. This variation in reporting verbs also serves a characterising function, with more forceful verbs such as "cried" associated with moments of heightened emotion or urgency.

Military commands and strategic instructions, which in the Chinese original are delivered in terse imperative constructions, are expanded in translation through the addition of explanatory clauses and contextual framing. Zhuge Liang's deployment orders to his generals, for example, are rendered with supplementary detail that clarifies the tactical rationale implicit in the Chinese commands. This pattern of explicitation in military dialogue reflects both the translator's assessment of Anglophone readers' needs and the conventions of English battle narrative, which typically provides more explicit tactical exposition than its classical Chinese counterpart. The Chinese text assumes a readership familiar with military conventions and capable of inferring tactical logic from minimal cues; Brewitt-Taylor's translation supplies what this implied reader would have brought to the text.

Narrative Conventions and Formal Framing

The chapter under analysis is framed by two formal conventions characteristic of *Sanguo Yanyi*: the chapter title couplet and the chapter-closing verse. Brewitt-Taylor's treatment of these framing devices illuminates his overall approach to the translation's paratextual apparatus and reveals a more source-oriented strategy than that employed in narrative prose.

The chapter title, 追汉军王双受诛 袭陈仓武侯取胜 (*Pursuing the Han Army Wang Shuang Meets His Death; Raiding Chencang the Martial Marquis Scores a Victory*), is rendered with notable fidelity to both semantic content and syntactic parallelism. Brewitt-Taylor preserves the couplet structure through a semi-colon division, maintains the active verbal constructions of the original, and retains the honorific epithet "Martial Marquis" for Zhuge Liang (武侯, *Wuhou*). This relatively faithful treatment of the chapter title contrasts with his more adaptive approach to narrative prose, suggesting a recognition that the formal framing devices carry a structural significance meriting closer adherence to the source text. The chapter title functions as a paratextual threshold that announces the chapter's content and establishes generic expectations; Brewitt-Taylor's decision to preserve its formal features signals respect for the source text's literary architecture.

The chapter-closing couplet, 正是：旧帅印为新帅取，两路兵惟一路来 ("Truly: The old commander's seal by the new commander is taken; Two routes of soldiers as one route now come"), is rendered with similar fidelity: "The seal of office changes hands, two armies now one force becomes." Brewitt-Taylor compresses the Chinese original's eight-character-per-line structure into a briefer English couplet that preserves the antithetical parallelism whilst sacrificing some of the source text's semantic specificity. The choice to render the closing verse in verse form, rather than converting it to prose, demonstrates respect for the generic conventions of the source text and a willingness to stretch target-language norms to accommodate source-culture literary forms. The compression reflects the practical constraints of English verse, where an eight-syllable line in Chinese each character being a meaningful unit carries considerably greater semantic density than an equivalently brief line in English.

The narrative formula 正是 (*zhengshi*, "truly it was a case of"), which introduces the closing couplet and signals the transition from narrative to commentary, is elided in Brewitt-Taylor's version, its function absorbed into the chapter's narrative closure. This minor omission is consistent with the broader pattern of adaptation in Brewitt-Taylor's handling of formal conventions: structural features are preserved where they contribute visibly to the text's generic identity, but formulaic markers that lack an obvious functional equivalent in English narrative convention are discreetly removed or absorbed into the surrounding prose.

Translation of Figurative Language and Idiom

The chapter contains several instances of figurative language and classical Chinese idiom that pose particular challenges for translation. Brewitt-Taylor's strategies for handling these elements range from literal rendering to adaptive paraphrase, with the choice of strategy appearing to depend upon the perceived accessibility of the source idiom to Anglophone readers.

The description of arrows flying "如飞蝗" (*ru fei huang*, "like flying locusts") is rendered literally as "arrows fell like a swarm of locusts", preserving both the simile structure and the specific imagery of the original. This choice reflects what might be termed a strategy of image preservation, where the figurative vehicle is retained on the assumption that the image a dense swarm of flying creatures carries sufficient cross-cultural resonance to be intelligible without explanation. Similarly, the description of soldiers moving with "人皆衔枚，马尽勒口" (men with gags in their mouths, horses with bits tightened) is rendered with descriptive fidelity: "the men all kept silence, all the horses having gags".

More culturally embedded expressions, however, receive adaptive treatment. The description of Zhuge Liang's foresight as supernatural characters exclaiming that he is genuinely superhuman is preserved in Brewitt-Taylor's rendering: "Really, you are supernatural, O Prime Minister!", maintaining the hyperbolic quality of the original praise. This preservation of what might be termed the supernatural register of character evaluation is particularly significant, as it constitutes one dimension of the source text's characterisation strategy that Brewitt-Taylor consistently respects.

DISCUSSION

The foregoing analysis reveals a translator navigating between competing imperatives: fidelity to a culturally prestigious source text and accessibility for an Anglophone readership whose familiarity with Chinese literary tradition was, in 1925, extremely limited. Brewitt-Taylor's translational practice, as exemplified in this chapter, resists characterisation as uniformly domesticating or foreignising. Rather, it exhibits a differentiated strategy in which the degree of intervention varies systematically according to textual domain.

At the level of narrative prose, Brewitt-Taylor's practice is markedly target-oriented, with extensive syntactic restructuring, logical explicitation, and the insertion of transitional and explanatory material. This approach is consistent with the norms of early twentieth-century literary translation, which prioritised fluency and readability, and with the practical exigencies of introducing a long and culturally remote narrative to a new readership. The result is a text that reads as idiomatic English historical romance, assimilated to the stylistic expectations of its receiving literary system. Brewitt-Taylor's syntactic interventions are so thoroughgoing that the translated text bears the structural imprint of English rather than Chinese narrative conventions, a feature that undoubtedly contributed to its accessibility and enduring readership.

In the domain of military terminology and official titles, Brewitt-Taylor's strategy is more balanced. Functional equivalents drawn from Western military vocabulary coexist with the retention of certain Chinese institutional terms, and variable rendering within the same text reflects a context-sensitive pragmatism rather than a rigid translational doctrine. This eclecticism may frustrate expectations of terminological consistency, but it also demonstrates a translator responding flexibly to the demands of different narrative contexts rather than imposing a uniform translational template upon the entire text.

In the treatment of dialogue and formal framing devices, Brewitt-Taylor demonstrates greater source-text fidelity, preserving the rhetorical architecture of high-status speech through archaism and maintaining the structural integrity of chapter titles and closing verses. This differential treatment suggests an intuitive recognition that certain textual features carry greater cultural-semiotic weight and therefore merit closer reproduction, whilst other features particularly syntactic structures operating below the level of conscious reader attention can be adapted more freely to target-language norms without significant loss of literary value.

These findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the translation history of *Sanguo Yanyi* and, more broadly, of the translational norms governing early Anglophone reception of Chinese classical literature. Brewitt-Taylor's translation, when examined through a descriptive rather than evaluative lens (Toury, 1995), emerges not as a flawed precursor to Roberts's more philologically rigorous version but as a historically specific textual production shaped by the intersecting constraints of its translational moment. As Bassnett (2014) has argued, translations must be understood as products of their cultural and historical context, and Brewitt-Taylor's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* amply illustrates this principle.

Furthermore, the analysis suggests that Venuti's (2008) domestication-foreignisation binary, whilst heuristically valuable, may be insufficiently granular to capture the differentiated strategies employed by translators of culturally and generically complex texts. Brewitt-Taylor's practice demonstrates that domestication and foreignisation can coexist within a single translation, applied selectively according to the perceived function and importance of specific textual

features. This finding aligns with broader critiques within translation studies that have questioned the adequacy of binary frameworks for capturing the nuanced decision-making processes involved in literary translation.

A further reflection concerns the relationship between translational strategy and the translator's biographical and institutional position. Brewitt-Taylor's long residence in China, his official position within the colonial administrative apparatus, and his identity as a British subject translating for a predominantly Anglophone readership all shaped the translational choices documented in this analysis. His translation embodies a particular moment in Sino-British cultural relations, simultaneously transmitting Chinese literary heritage to the Anglophone world and reframing that heritage within British literary conventions. Future research might productively explore these biographical and institutional dimensions in greater depth, situating Brewitt-Taylor's work within the broader history of sinological translation and colonial knowledge production.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided a detailed comparative analysis of a chapter from *Sanguo Yanyi* and its English translation by C.H. Brewitt-Taylor, revealing a translational practice characterised by differentiated strategies rather than uniform adherence to any single translational doctrine. Brewitt-Taylor's approach combines extensive syntactic restructuring and logical explication in narrative prose with selective fidelity to source-text conventions in dialogue, terminology, and formal framing devices. This differentiated strategy reflects both the practical demands of introducing a classical Chinese novel to an early twentieth-century Anglophone readership and the translator's sensitivity to the varying cultural-semiotic weight carried by different textual features.

The study's limitations should be acknowledged. The analysis is confined to a single chapter, and whilst this chapter was selected for its representative quality, a comprehensive characterisation of Brewitt-Taylor's translational practice across the entire one hundred and twenty chapters would require more extensive corpus-based investigation. Additionally, the study does not systematically compare Brewitt-Taylor's strategies with those of Roberts (1991), a comparison that would further illuminate the evolution of translational norms in the Anglophone reception of Chinese classical fiction. The focus on a single translator-text pair also limits the generalisability of the findings to other instances of Chinese-English literary translation, though the analytical framework developed here could readily be applied to such cases.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on the translation history of Chinese literature by offering a methodologically grounded, textually detailed analysis of a historically significant translation. It demonstrates the value of descriptive translation studies approaches in illuminating the complex negotiations between source and target cultures that characterise the translation of classical Chinese narrative. Brewitt-Taylor's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, the product of decades of sinological experience and a pivotal moment in Sino-British cultural exchange, merits continued scholarly attention as both a landmark in the history of Chinese-English literary translation and a revealing case study in the poetics of cross-cultural textual transfer. The study ultimately affirms that translation, particularly of culturally and temporally distant texts, is never a simple transfer of semantic content but always a complex act of cultural mediation shaped by the intersecting demands of source-text fidelity, target-reader accessibility, and the translator's own historically situated judgment.

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