



# A Study of the Overseas Dissemination and Audience Reception of English Translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in the Digital Media Era

Ruihao Tan, Chenxi Meng, Jiawen He, Juan Wang<sup>#</sup> 

Department of English, Yangtze University Jingzhou, Hubei, P.R.China (434023).

#Corresponding author

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Juan Wang  / [0009-0007-1443-5311](https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1443-5311)

## ABSTRACT

In the digital media era, overseas dissemination and audience reception of English translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* have taken on new characteristics. Drawing on reader reviews from Amazon and Goodreads, this study employs of KH Coder-based text mining, including high-frequency word, co-occurrence network, cluster, and sentiment analyses, to investigate how digital platforms shape readers' engagement with the text. Findings indicate that transmedia entry points (e.g., video games, films), digital paratexts, and online reader interactions constitute a cyclical dissemination pathway of "gaming interest—digital reviews— in-depth reading." Overseas readers generally hold positive attitudes toward the novel's epic narrative, complex characterization and philosophical depth, while citing cultural distance, character overload, abridgment, and textual quality as major challenges. The study concludes that digital media not only expand the reach of translations but also create participatory spaces where audiences actively negotiate cultural meanings, offering practical implications for the international dissemination of Chinese classics.

**Keywords:** Romance of The Three Kingdoms, Overseas Dissemination, Reader Reviews, Sentiment Analysis.

### 1. Introduction

The translation and international dissemination of Chinese classical literature constitute a vital component of China's efforts to enhance its international communication capacity, project its cultural image, and promote intercultural dialogue and mutual learning among civilizations. They also play a significant role in strengthening China's cultural soft power. As one of the most representative classics of traditional Chinese literature, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* embodies core cultural values such as benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and integrity. Over the past two centuries, its English translations have circulated extensively overseas, giving rise to a diversified dissemination landscape characterized by the coexistence of multiple translated versions. Nevertheless, in the context of digital media reshaping the global ecology of cultural communication, insufficient scholarly attention has been paid to the contemporary dissemination mechanisms and audience reception of the English translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

Existing studies have largely concentrated on textual comparison, translation strategies, and historical reviews of overseas dissemination, whereas empirical research based on audience engagement and feedback in digital environments remains limited. To address this gap, the present study draws upon reader reviews collected from major overseas digital reading platforms and employs text-mining methods to investigate the dissemination characteristics and audience reception patterns of the English translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in the digital media era. In this study, the "digital media era" refers to the contemporary period marked by the dominance of online reading platforms, user-generated content, and transmedia storytelling. These digital features have fundamentally reshaped the overseas dissemination and reception of English translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, transforming classical literature from a print-based artifact into a dynamic, participatory, and cross-media experience.

By examining how international readers perceive and engage with the translated texts, this study seeks to provide empirical evidence and practical insights for advancing the global

dissemination and effective reception of Chinese classical literature. This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the core concerns of overseas readers when engaging with English translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* on digital platforms?
2. How do digital media (e.g., online platforms, user-generated content) and transmedia adaptations (e.g., video games, films) shape readers' pathways to the original text?
3. What is the overall sentiment distribution among overseas readers, and what factors influence positive, neutral, and negative evaluations?

## **2. Literature Review**

Existing domestic scholarship has primarily focused on several areas, including the compilation and documentation of translation materials (Zheng, 2012; Wang, 2017), comparative analyses of different translated editions (Dong, 2016; Zhu, 2017), studies of the history of English translation (Guo, 2016; Xu, 2023b), translator-centered research (Xu, 2020; Li & Gao, 2021), and investigations into the dissemination history of the work (Wang, 2015; Xu, 2017). However, issues such as audience reception in the context of digital media and transmedia dissemination pathways remain largely unexplored. This research gap limits the ability of existing studies to address the practical challenges associated with the international dissemination of Chinese classics in the new media era and highlights the need for a more audience-oriented and digitally informed research agenda.

In recent years, overseas scholarship has increasingly examined the empowering role of digital platforms in the transnational dissemination of non-Western literature. Existing studies suggest that user interaction and algorithmic recommendation mechanisms on digital review platforms, such as Goodreads, can effectively reduce barriers to understanding culturally distant texts. Meanwhile, cross-media circulation involving literature, film, television, and digital games has been identified as a key mechanism for stimulating audience engagement and enhancing cultural accessibility (Hutchings, 2022; Lee, 2023). Nevertheless, research specifically focusing on the digital dissemination and reception of Chinese classical literature remains limited.

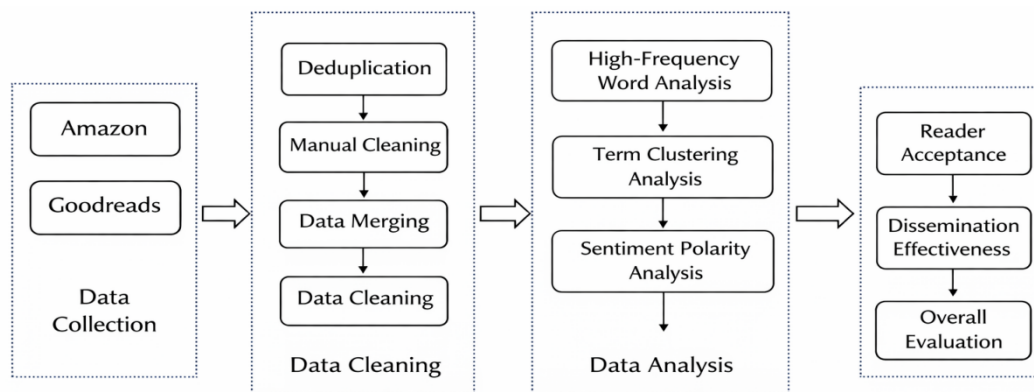
Beyond existing research on translation and dissemination histories, recent scholarship on digital media and audience behavior provides a broader theoretical framework for understanding the reception of translated classics in the digital age. From a media ecology perspective, digital platforms such as Goodreads and Amazon have been characterized as spaces of “participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2006, p.3), where readers are no longer passive consumers but active producers of meaning through ratings, reviews, and discussions. This participatory dynamic aligns with Ong’s (1982) notion of “secondary orality,” in which digital interfaces reintroduce conversational, interactive, and community-driven features into text-based communication. In the context of literary reception, studies have shown that Goodreads functions as an affective and evaluative site where readers negotiate cultural distance, share reading strategies, and collectively construct interpretations of foreign texts (Driscoll & Rehberg Sedo, 2019). Furthermore, transmedia storytelling (Jenkins, 2006, pp.95-96) has been identified as a key mechanism for stimulating audience interest in classical narratives—exposure to film adaptations, video games, or online discussions often precedes and motivates engagement with source texts, effectively lowering

cultural barriers and creating multiple entry points for readers. Taken together, these theoretical perspectives underscore the need to examine the overseas dissemination of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* not as a linear, print-based process but as a dynamic, participatory, and transmedia phenomenon—a perspective that remains underexplored in existing Chinese scholarship.

### 3. Research Design

#### 3.1 Research Framework

This study collects reader review data on the English translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* from Amazon and Goodreads through the Octoparse web-scraping tool. The collected data are subsequently analyzed using KH Coder, with a focus on high-frequency word analysis, semantic network mapping, and sentiment polarity analysis. By integrating quantitative text-mining methods with audience reception analysis, this study aims to comprehensively evaluate the overseas dissemination and reception of the English translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. The overall research framework is illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Research Framework for Reader Reviews of English Translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*

#### 3.2 Data Collection and Cleaning

This study employed Octopus Collector to retrieve reader reviews of English translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* from the Amazon and Goodreads platforms. The dataset included reviews for translated editions with no fewer than 50 reviewers, covering 12 translations produced by four major translators (see Table 1). After data-cleaning procedures, including the removal of duplicate entries and non-English reviews, a total of 1,288 valid reviews were retained for analysis. The final corpus contained 142,987 tokens and 14,991 word types, comprising 2,590 paragraphs in total (see Table 2).

**Table 1.** Rating Data for English Translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* on Amazon (as of December 29, 2023)

No.	Translator	Title of Translation	Publisher	Amazon Ratings (Score)	Goodreads Ratings (Score)
1	Martin Palmer	<i>The Romance of the Three Kingdoms</i>	Penguin Classics	573 (4.6)	5503 (4.37)
2	Moss Roberts	<i>Three Kingdoms</i> (4 Volumes)	Foreign Languages Press	557 (4.5)	5503 (4.37)
3	Yu Sumei	<i>The Three Kingdoms</i> (Volume 1 The Sacred Oath)	Tuttle	277 (4.6)	398 (4.09)
4	Moss Roberts	<i>Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel</i> (Abridged Edition)	University of California Press	260 (4.5)	5503 (4.37)
5	Moss Roberts	<i>Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel, Part 1</i>	University of California Press	260 (4.5)	179 (4.25)
6	Yu Sumei	<i>The Three Kingdoms</i> (Volume 2 The Sleeping Dragon)	Tuttle	145 (4.8)	204 (4.41)
7	Yu Sumei	<i>The Three Kingdoms</i> (Volume 3 Welcome the Tiger)	Tuttle	136 (4.8)	224 (4.29)
8	C.H. Brewitt-Taylor	<i>Romance of the Three Kingdoms</i> (Volume 1)	Tuttle Publishing	123 (4.5)	2131 (4.29)
9	C.H. Brewitt-Taylor	<i>Romance of the Three Kingdoms</i>	Kiddle Edition	119 (4.3)	5503 (4.37)
10	C.H. Brewitt-Taylor	<i>Romance of the Three Kingdoms</i> (with footnotes and maps)	Kiddle Edition	97 (4.4)	5503 (4.37)
11	Moss Roberts	<i>Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel, Part 2</i>	University of California Press	78 (4.7)	126 (4.27)
12	C.H. Brewitt-Taylor	<i>Romance of the Three Kingdoms</i> (volume 2)	Tuttle Publishing	71 (4.5)	1110 (4.37)

**Table 2.** Statistical Summary of Review Data for Different Translators of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*

Translator	Number of Reviews	Tokens	Types
Martin Palmer	461	71,224	10,871
Moss Roberts	441	23,105	4,562
Yu Sumei	148	21,836	4,851
C. H. Brewitt-Taylor	257	30,453	5,881
Total	1309	146,618	26,165

### 3.3 Analytical Tools and Dimensions

To address the three research questions outlined in the introduction, this study employs a mixed-method analytical framework using the open-source text mining software KH Coder. The alignment between analytical techniques and research questions is summarized in Table 3 below.

**Table 3.** Research Questions and Corresponding Analytical Methods

Research Question	Analytical Method	Output
RQ1: Core concerns of readers	High-frequency word analysis	Ranked list of salient keywords
RQ2: Pathways shaped by digital/transmedia media	Co-occurrence network + clustering analysis	Thematic clusters + inter-cluster relationships
RQ3: Sentiment distribution + influencing factors	VADER sentiment analysis + KWIC contextual analysis	Proportion (positive/neutral/negative) + contextualized factors

## 4. Research Findings

### 4.1 Core Focuses of Readers on Digital Platforms

High-frequency word analysis (Table 3) shows that among the top 30 keywords in reader reviews, in addition to terms identifying the translation itself (e.g., book, Three Kingdom, translation), readers' core concerns can be grouped into three main categories:

**Narrative and characters:** The terms story (558 occurrences), character (457 occurrences), and battle (254 occurrences) constitute the core cluster. Notably, Cao (Cao Cao) is the only character name appearing among the high-frequency terms, indicating readers' strong attention to complex character construction.

**Reading experience:** Terms such as read (400 occurrences), like (349 occurrences), and time (328 occurrences) reflect readers' direct perceptions of reading difficulty and time investment.

**Translation attributes:** The term version (implicitly reflected in the clustering analysis) and note (as a form of paratextual element) emerge as important extensions of readers' discussions regarding the translated text.

**Table 3:** List of High-Frequency Words in Reader Reviews of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*

No.	Keyword	Frequency	Ranking	Keyword	Frequency
1	a/an	1892	16	who	330
2	it	1316	17	time	328
3	as	812	18	some	307
4	book	877	19	can	300
5	was	727	20	be	288
6	three	622	21	which	285
7	kingdom	572	22	cao	283
8	chinese	562	23	have	277
9	story	558	24	many	277
10	character	457	25	be	276
11	read (noun)	400	26	name	265
12	translation	389	27	their	264
13	so	379	28	battle	254
14	there	370	29	more	250
15	like (verb)	349	30	one	249

Using the KWIC (Key Word in Context) function of KH Coder, and incorporating contextual analysis, it can be observed that expressions closely associated with story include phrases such as “really enjoying the epic story,” “this historically loved story,” and “immerse in the story.” These co-occurrences indicate that readers generally hold a positive evaluation of the narrative of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. However, given the large number of characters in the novel, readers also report certain difficulties in following the narrative progression. Comments related to character primarily include expressions such as “hard to keep track of all the characters” and “too many characters.” In addition, readers frequently express preferences for specific figures—some favor Lü Bu, others Guan Yu, and others Zhao Yun. There are also remarks noting the relatively limited presence of female characters in the novel.

Interestingly, the only character appearing among the high-frequency keywords is “Cao Cao.” This is not due to any statistical inflation caused by the phonetic overlap of the Chinese characters “Cao” and “Cao” in pinyin. Contextual examination shows that KH Coder primarily captures occurrences of “Cao” as a standalone token, while the surname “Cao” is not separately included in the high-frequency list. This suggests that readers pay particular attention to the controversial figure of Cao Cao. One review notes: “I really wanted to hate him but sometimes I couldn't help but be in awe of him. I loved him, then hated him, then loved him again... it was just a rollercoaster.” A close reading of the reviews further indicates that readers generally acknowledge Cao Cao's political acumen, military strategy, and pragmatic disposition, while also engaging with representative anecdotes associated with him, such as “Using a ruse to calm the troops,” “Cao Cao massacres the Lü family,” and “Cao Cao spares Guan Yu.” As a war-oriented historical novel, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* also features “battle” among the high-frequency terms. Words associated with “battle” include “historic,” “epic,” “righteous,” “history-shaking,” and “bloody,” reflecting readers' strong engagement with the novel's depictions of warfare.

Overall, high-frequency word analysis indicates that readers primarily focus on the narrative content, character construction, and depictions of warfare in the novel. A further clustering analysis of lexical items enables a more fine-grained understanding of the thematic dimensions present in reader reviews.

#### 4.2 Analysis of Dissemination Pathways in the Context of Digital Media

The co-occurrence network of high-frequency words provides a comprehensive overview of the areas that attract readers' attention. Using KH Coder, a clustering map of high-frequency words was generated (Figure 2), in which different thematic clusters are represented by distinct colors. A total of eight clusters were identified. Furthermore, the Key Word in Context (KWIC) concordance function in KH Coder was employed to examine the lexical items within each cluster. By analyzing these words in their respective contexts, the thematic categories of the clusters were identified and summarized, as presented in Table 4.

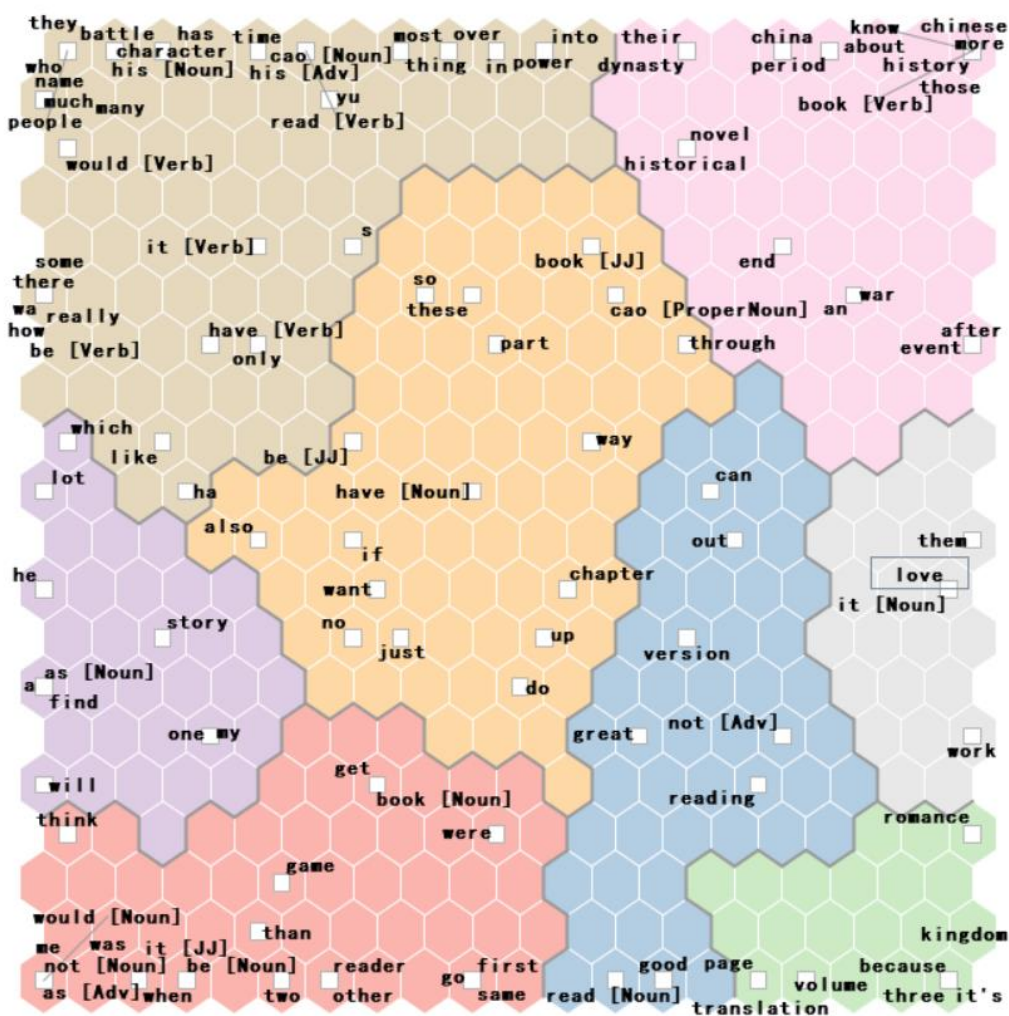


Figure 2. Cluster Map of High-Frequency Words in Overseas Readers' Reviews of English Translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*

**Table 4.** Major Areas of Concern among Overseas Readers of English Translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*

No.	Cluster Theme	High-Frequency Keywords
Cluster 1	Character Names	many/character/name/people/battle/power
Cluster 2	Historical Background	history/historical novel/china/period/dynasty
Cluster 3	Reading Experience	through/way/these/book/also/do/so
Cluster 4	Story Plot	my/find/one/will/as/which/story/lot/a
Cluster 5	Video Games and Film Adaptations	game/first/book/were/was/think/other
Cluster 6	Edition Comparison	version/great/good/out/can/reading/read
Cluster 7	Translation Quality	translation/page/because/three/volume/romance
Cluster 8	Reader Recommendations	work/love/it/them

Based on the eight thematic clusters generated by KH Coder, readers' reviews of English translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* exhibit a structural pattern centered on "reading experience," with related concerns radiating outward to encompass characters, plot, historical background, media entry points, edition selection, translation quality, and reader recommendations. These concerns are not distributed across the clusters in isolation; rather, they form a coherent cognitive progression organized around the act of reading itself. Readers typically enter the world of the Three Kingdoms through cross-media exposure, overcome cognitive barriers such as unfamiliar character names, engage in in-depth reading, and ultimately reproduce cultural recognition through recommendation and word-of-mouth dissemination. Within this overall framework, Cluster 5 ("Video Games and Film Adaptations"), Cluster 1 ("Character Names"), and Cluster 8 ("Reader Recommendations") constitute three critical nodes in the process of cross-cultural dissemination, collectively outlining a typical pathway from initial exposure to cultural identification.

The dissemination process begins with Cluster 5. A substantial proportion do not encounter the novel for the first time through its English translations; instead, they develop a preliminary understanding of the Three Kingdoms narrative through media products such as *Dynasty Warriors* and *Red Cliff*. The character-unlocking mechanisms of video games transform hundreds of historical figures into interactive and memorable personas, while the visual narratives of films embed highly dramatic events—such as the Battle of Red Cliffs and the Southern Campaigns—into audiences' cognitive frameworks. Such transmedia storytelling not only lowers the threshold for engaging with the original text but also stimulates readers' intrinsic motivation to revisit the source material and explore its historical background and character relationships in greater depth. The transition from player or viewer to reader positions Cluster 5 as the primary driving force within the broader dissemination chain.

The intermediary stage of this pathway is represented by Cluster 1. Character names

constitute one of the most widely acknowledged obstacles for Western readers. Similar-sounding names, such as Liu Zhang and Zhang Lu or Yuan Shu and Yuan Shao, frequently generate confusion, while the complex naming system involving courtesy names, titles, official positions, and geographical designations further increases the cognitive burden. Nevertheless, the reviews suggest that readers who successfully overcome this challenge generally experience a process of transformation from confusion to assisted comprehension and ultimately to aesthetic appreciation. By relying on supplementary resources such as character lists, alliance charts, and SparkNotes, readers gradually construct coherent relational networks among the characters. This enhanced understanding enables them to compare figures such as Cao Cao, Zhuge Liang, and Lü Bu with heroes of the Western epic tradition, including Achilles and Odysseus, thereby appreciating the nuanced characterization of individuals who are neither wholly virtuous nor entirely villainous. In this sense, character names evolve from a source of cognitive difficulty into objects of literary appreciation. This transformation represents one of the most theoretically illuminating dimensions of cross-cultural literary reception.

The endpoint of the pathway, which simultaneously serves as the starting point for a new cycle of dissemination, is embodied in Cluster 8. Readers who complete the novel often demonstrate a strong willingness to recommend it to others. Such recommendations function in two distinct ways. On the one hand, readers lower the psychological barriers for potential audiences through aesthetic endorsements, describing the work as comparable to *The Iliad* or *The Divine Comedy* and emphasizing that its marathon-like length rewards sustained commitment. On the other hand, some readers incorporate the translated text into academic contexts, including thesis writing, classroom instruction, and scholarly research, thereby transitioning from cultural recipients to cultural disseminators. Reader recommendation thus represents not the conclusion of the reading experience but rather the beginning of a new phase of word-of-mouth circulation, forming a self-reinforcing cycle of cross-cultural reception and dissemination.

The progression from Cluster 5 to Cluster 1 and finally to Cluster 8 reveals a dissemination pathway characterized by “transmedia entry—transformation of cognitive barriers—word-of-mouth reproduction.” This pathway demonstrates that the reception of English translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in the Western world is neither a linear nor a purely text-based process. Rather, it constitutes a multidimensional dissemination structure in which multimedia serves as the catalyst, characters function as the primary anchor, and reader recommendations act as the driving force. The cognitive transformation of character names from the “greatest obstacle” to an “object of aesthetic appreciation” represents the most theoretically significant node within this process. Moreover, it offers a valuable practical model for designing effective pathways for the international dissemination of Chinese classical literature.

#### **4.3 Sentiment Analysis of Audience Reception**

Building upon the preceding analyses of high-frequency words and thematic clusters, sentiment analysis of reader reviews provides a further means of examining overseas readers’ attitudes and emotional responses toward English translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* at a macro level. In recent years, translation studies in China have gradually shifted from a translator- and text-centered paradigm toward a greater emphasis on the actual dissemination pathways and reception

of translated works within target-language cultures. This emerging perspective highlights the importance of audience feedback as a key indicator for evaluating the effectiveness of the international dissemination of Chinese classics (Xu, 2020; Li & Gao, 2021). The statistical results reveal a clear evaluative pattern in overseas readers' reviews of English translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Positive sentiment overwhelmingly predominates, while neutral and negative evaluations tend to be concentrated within specific dimensions of the reading experience. This distribution suggests that the translated work has generally achieved a high degree of acceptance among overseas readers, although certain aspects continue to generate divergent responses and pose challenges to cross-cultural reception.

Positive reviews account for 76% of all comments, with evaluative terms such as great, epic, fascinating, love, and masterpiece appearing with high frequency. These expressions primarily reflect readers' strong appreciation of the novel's grand narrative structure, complex characterization, and compelling depictions of warfare. This finding echoes Xu's (2023) study on the dissemination history of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in the English-speaking world, which argues that the work's enduring circulation has been sustained by its exceptional narrative appeal and intellectual depth. More specifically, positive evaluations are concentrated in three major dimensions. First, readers widely acknowledge the epic nature of the novel, regarding its temporal scope, extensive cast of characters, and narrative complexity as comparable to those of Western literary classics such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Such comparisons suggest the active construction of cultural identification through cross-cultural literary reference. Second, the multidimensional portrayal of characters generates sustained emotional engagement. In particular, the tensions embodied by figures such as Cao Cao and Zhuge Liang—between power, loyalty, and human nature—constitute a central focus of reader discussion. Readers not only embrace the morally complex characterization of figures who are neither wholly virtuous nor entirely villainous but also interpret them through the framework of Western epic heroes. Third, many readers connect the political wisdom, leadership strategies, and statecraft presented in the novel to contemporary society, business practices, and even global affairs. This tendency indicates that the translated work has moved beyond a superficial reception as an exotic cultural product and entered a deeper stage of value recognition and meaning reconstruction within the target culture.

Neutral reviews account for 18% of the total comments and are primarily characterized by objective descriptions of reading difficulties. Frequently mentioned issues include the large number of characters, difficulties in distinguishing Chinese names, unfamiliar geographical references, and a perceived distance from the cultural background of the text. These comments are generally expressed in a descriptive rather than evaluative manner and seldom employ explicitly negative language. Rather than questioning the literary value of the novel, they reflect the interpretive barriers commonly encountered in the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese classical literature. Previous studies have noted that cultural distance and narrative complexity often slow the reception of classical works in target-language cultures, but do not necessarily result in negative evaluations (Li & Gao, 2021). Notably, some neutral reviews also describe the strategies readers employ to overcome these obstacles, including the use of character lists, alliance charts, SparkNotes, and other supplementary resources, as well as the acquisition of prior knowledge through video games and film adaptations. This observation suggests that neutral sentiment should

not be viewed as the endpoint of reception but rather as a transitional stage within the broader process of cultural acceptance.

Negative reviews account for only 6% of the corpus and are exclusively directed toward technical issues related to translation editions and publication quality rather than the cultural or literary content of the work itself. Reader complaints primarily concern excessive abridgment leading to narrative discontinuity, insufficient annotations that hinder independent reading, typographical errors in electronic editions, and poor printing or formatting quality in paperback versions. Some readers explicitly note that “abridged editions are frustrating to read” or that “spelling errors in low-cost editions are distracting.” However, criticisms targeting the novel’s plot, characterization, or historical significance are extremely rare. Xu (2023) argues that translation selection, textual abridgment, and publication strategies exert a direct influence on readers’ overall evaluation of classical works. The findings of the present study provide further empirical support for this argument. The fact that negative sentiment is concentrated on the medium of dissemination rather than the cultural content itself suggests that *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* has already established a solid foundation for literary acceptance across cultural boundaries. Current obstacles to reception appear to stem primarily from issues of presentation and dissemination rather than from the work’s intrinsic cultural value.

Overall, the sentiment analysis demonstrates that English translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* have developed a relatively stable foundation of positive emotional identification among overseas readers. The predominance of positive reviews, accounting for 76% of all comments, the frequent comparisons with canonical Western literary works, and readers’ tendency to project the novel’s classical wisdom onto contemporary contexts collectively indicate that the work has entered a stage of value recognition and meaning reproduction within the English-speaking world. Neutral sentiment reflects the genuine challenges associated with cross-cultural reading but does not translate into a rejection of the work itself. Negative sentiment, meanwhile, is directed primarily toward publication quality and translation formats, suggesting that these issues may be mitigated through improved publishing strategies. This overall sentiment structure indicates that English translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* possess favorable conditions for continued international dissemination. The principal barriers to further reception lie in the modes of dissemination and textual presentation rather than in the cultural essence of the work itself.

## 5. Discussion and Implications

As defined in the introduction, the digital media era is characterized by online platforms, user-generated content, and transmedia storytelling. The findings of this study empirically demonstrate how each of these features operates in the overseas reception of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. This study confirms that digital media have become the primary arena for the overseas dissemination of English translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. On the one hand, transmedia integration has disrupted the traditional linear model of “text-to-reader” dissemination, giving rise to a cyclical pathway characterized by “gaming interest → digital reviews → in-depth reading.” On the other hand, digital paratexts and lightweight media formats have effectively reduced cultural distance, enabling classical literature to reach audiences at multiple levels of engagement. These findings resonate with international scholarship emphasizing the role of digital media in

facilitating the global circulation of non-Western literature and provide a new perspective for understanding the international dissemination of Chinese classical works. Based on the findings presented above, this study proposes the following three targeted strategies for enhancing the overseas dissemination of Chinese classics.

First, it is essential to develop a transmedia dissemination matrix and promote an IP-oriented communication model. The findings indicate that Cluster 5 (“Video Games and Film Adaptations”) serves as the primary point of entry through which many Western readers encounter the Three Kingdoms narrative. Media products such as *Dynasty Warriors* and *Red Cliff* effectively lower the barriers to engagement and stimulate readers’ interest in returning to the original text. Accordingly, digital games, short-form videos, film and television adaptations, and other transmedia content should be positioned as key gateways for international dissemination. By integrating these media forms with overseas digital reading platforms and social media networks, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* can be transformed from a static literary text into an immersive, experiential, and expandable intellectual property ecosystem. The traffic-generating effect of transmedia storytelling enables audiences to develop preliminary familiarity with the narrative through entertainment-oriented encounters, thereby facilitating a gradual transition toward sustained and in-depth reading.

Second, greater emphasis should be placed on the development of digital paratextual services that provide interactive support for cultural blind spots. Comments associated with Cluster 1 (“Character Names”) reveal that Western readers’ principal difficulties stem from identifying characters, understanding geographical references, and navigating the complex systems of official titles and naming conventions. Readers who successfully overcome these challenges typically rely on supplementary resources such as character lists, alliance charts, and SparkNotes. To address these issues, digital reading platforms and e-book interfaces should incorporate interactive paratextual tools, including character relationship maps, historical timelines, and dynamic geographical maps. In addition, commonly confused elements—such as similar-sounding names (e.g., Liu Zhang and Zhang Lu) or the distinction between courtesy names and personal names—could be supported through pop-up annotations, pronunciation guides, and interactive explanatory functions. By embedding such resources directly within the reading environment rather than relegating them to external platforms such as SparkNotes or CliffsNotes, cognitive support can be integrated into the reading process itself, transforming potential obstacles into opportunities for enhanced engagement and understanding.

Third, translation provision should be optimized through a stratified product system tailored to the needs of diverse readerships. Clusters 6 (“Edition Comparison”) and 8 (“Reader Recommendations”) jointly demonstrate that different reader groups exhibit distinct expectations regarding translated editions. Academic readers tend to value complete and unabridged translations that preserve the full scope of the original text, whereas general readers often prefer more accessible, affordable, and portable abridged editions. Younger audiences and commuters, meanwhile, frequently rely on lightweight formats such as audiobooks and graphic adaptations. Consequently, the traditional assumption that a single translation can satisfy all readerships should be replaced with a differentiated product strategy. Comprehensive translations, exemplified by the

unabridged version produced by Moss Roberts, should be positioned for scholarly research and intensive reading, retaining extensive annotations, appendices, and historical references. Condensed editions, modeled on abridged adaptations, may serve as the basis for introductory products such as audiobooks, reducing narrative density and linguistic complexity for new readers. At the same time, graphic novel adaptations, young-adult editions, and other lightweight formats should be further developed to provide appropriate entry points for audiences with varying levels of cultural knowledge and reading motivation. Such stratified provision should not be viewed as fragmenting the classical text; rather, it represents a recognition of audience heterogeneity and a strategic response to the diverse needs of contemporary global readers.

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