Enemy Officer Defeated:

The *Dynasty Warriors* Series within the Spheres of Three Kingdoms and Videogames

Celeste Rain Johnson

Richmond, Virginia

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Department of East Asian Literatures and Languages

University of Virginia

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Introduction

The Three Kingdoms (*Sanguo* 三國) period in Chinese history spans roughly from the death of Han Emperor Ling in 189 CE to the brief reunification of China under the Jin in 280 CE. The events of this period alone have provided inspiration for over a thousand years of adaptations in forms ranging from classical poetry to videogames, the latter being the point of entry for this work. However, even the subcategory of a subcategory that is Three Kingdoms videogames is far too broad for a work of this scope. It would require encompassing games from simulation, action, and role-playing games across platforms from PC to console to mobile phones. For that reason, the purpose of this essay will be to analyze only a single series of Three Kingdoms games, that of the long-running action series *Dynasty Warriors* (DW), which spans from 1997 to the present, with its most recent entry released in 2018.

I will address this series within three contexts over the course of this work. First, it is necessary to address how the series exists within the context of a smaller section of modern Three Kingdoms culture. It also exists within a greater chronology and current landscape of media adaptations of the period. This section will take a decidedly broad view to define and cultivate a surface-level understanding of the tradition of adaptations in which the games fit, without specific or detailed attention to content or analysis. The second section will feature a more in-depth look into a singular case study of the how series function within the category of Three Kingdoms culture in which it has been situated. This portion will examine historical and contemporary representations of the Three Kingdoms figure Xiahou Dun 夏侯惇 (d. 220 CE). It will elucidate the manner in which the *Dynasty Warriors* series manipulates existing figures and narratives to create its own adaptations without completely eschewing past depictions. Finally,

the third section will be devoted, after the series has been firmly situated within the context of Three Kingdoms, to exploring how it functions, exists, and interacts with and within the greater world of videogames. This section will provide a history of the series, an attempt to understand it within the confines of established video games, genres, and an overview of gameplay functions and features.

Chapter 1: Three Kingdoms

The core narrative of Three Kingdoms media spans the time period during which the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) slowly collapsed and was replaced by three separate kingdoms, until the reunification of the central plains by the Jin. The historical narrative is primarily concerned with rise to power and conflicts between the titular Three Kingdoms: Cao Wei 曹魏, Shu Han 蜀漢, and Sun Wu 孫武. The story typically begins prior to the formation of any of the kingdoms during the Han's decline. The most famous Three Kingdoms narrative, the century novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義), begins with the Yellow Turban Uprising (*Huangjin qiyi* 黃巾起義) in 184 CE, five years prior to the death of Han Emperor Ling 漢靈帝 (156–189 CE). Due to the participation of each of the respective kingdom's first leaders in the effort to quell the uprising, it is an understandably functional starting point for the narrative in most of its iterations.[1] These leaders, at the point of the Yellow Turban Uprising, are Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220 CE) of Cao Wei, Liu Bei 劉備 (161–223 CE) of Shu Han, and Sun Jian 孫堅 (155–191 CE).   The latter was the father of the founder of Sun Wu, Sun Quan 孫權 (182–252 CE). All of these men constitute main characters within various

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[1] Hereafter, to avoid confusion with the videogame series of the same name, the Ming novel will be referred to by its pinyin romanization or SGYY.

versions of the narrative. Following the Yellow Turban Uprising, the chronology of the story will typically continue through the eradication of any smaller warlord territories, until only the three remain with their own conflicts. It will then end with the brief reunification of the Central Plains (*zhongyuan* 中原) under Cao Wei's successor, the Jin 晉 (266–420 CE) in 280 CE.

"Three Kingdoms culture" is a translation of the Chinese term *sanguo wenhua* 三國文化. The term is extensive in meaning and relatively underutilized in English-language Three Kingdoms studies.[2] For the sake of this essay, the term will be used extensively and as such will be defined according to Shen Bojun's 沈伯俊 three-factor definition, with specific emphasis on the third. This definition encompasses: (1) the written histories of the Three Kingdoms period, Jian'an 建安 era poetry, and surviving or referenced music and visual art; (2) the various historical disciplines of the Three Kingdoms period including politics, the military, and the economy; (3) and most central to this work, adaptations and derivatives from the Three Kingdoms histories into cultural and literary works, notably *Sanguo Yanyi*. These adaptations also vary in the incorporation of regional and folk narratives and religious traditions.[3] Though the term was coined in 1990 by Yang Jianwen 楊建文, it is Shen's definition that has been the most widely accepted and utilized.[4] Due to its simplicity and all-encompassing nature, Three Kingdoms Culture will be used as the predominant means of referring to the mass body of Three Kingdoms works and the historical legacy from which they stem as discussed in this paper.

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[2] As the introduction to the volume *Three Kingdoms and Chinese Culture* states it is a "phrase that encompasses a wide range of meanings requiring more elucidation for a Western audience," but as the volume does not provide an alternate term, it seems best to invest a small amount of space to defining it. Kimberly Besio and Constantine Tung, "Introduction," in *Three Kingdoms and Chinese Culture*, ed. Besio and Tung (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), xvii.

[3] Shen Bojun 沈伯俊, *"Sanguo Wenhua" Gainian Chutan* "三國文化"概念初探 ["Three Kingdoms Culture" Primary Exploration of the Concept] *Zhonghua Wenhua Luntan* 中華文化論壇 3 (1994): 98–101.

[4] Guo Defei 郭的非, *"Sanguo Wenhua" Gainian Yanjiu de Huigu yu Sikao* "三國文化"感念研究的回顧與思考 [Retrospect and Reflection of Studies into the Concept of "Three Kingdoms Culture"] *Hubei wenli xueyuan xuebao* 湖北文理學院學報 39.6 (2018): 5–10.

The earliest examples of Three Kingdoms culture come from the period itself and those immediately following it. The main example and the root of all future adaptations is *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo zhi* 三國志), a dynastic history of the period compiled by Chen Shou 陳壽 (233–297 CE) in the 3rd century. This text was drastically expanded upon in 429 CE by Pei Songzhi 裴松之(372–451 CE), who incorporated a multitude of other, now-lost sources and expounded on Chen's original text. Many of these additions feature far more anecdotal details of the period. Beyond this core text, other histories and historical compilations of the surrounding periods also bear direct relation to Three Kingdoms events and figures. These include Fan Ye's (范曄) the *Book of the Later Han* (*Houhan shu* 後漢書), Fang Xuanling's (房玄齡) *Book of Jin* (*Jin shu* 晉書), and the early historical compilation, Liu Yiqing's (劉義慶) *A New Account of Tales of the World* (*Shishuo xinyu* 世説新語.)[5]

Beyond historical writing, other pieces of Three Kingdoms period Three Kingdoms culture can be found in Jian'an poetry as well as in court, military, and political documentation. There are also less-than-official historical texts such as the "Biography of Cao the Trickster"

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[5] While there are no existing complete English translations, partial translations can be found in various locations. Sections of the *Houhan shu* (HHS) are available in Rafe de Crespigny, *Portents of Protest* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1976) which includes the biography of astrologer Xiang Kai 襄楷, Hans H. Frankel, "Cai Yan and the Poems Attributed to Her," in *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, and Reviews* 5.1–2 (1983): 133-156.) which features translated sections of Cai Yan's 蔡琰 HHS biography, Howard L. Goodman, *Ts'ao P'i Transcendent: Political Culture and Dynasty-Founding in China at the End of the Han* (Seattle: Scripta Serica, 1998) which includes translations from the HHS Records section pertaining to the dynastic succession between Han and Wei, and Nancy Lee Swann, "Biography of Empress Teng: A Translation from the Annals of the Later Han Dynasty," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* 51.2 (1931): 138-159. Translated excerpts from the SGZ can be found in Robert Joe Cutter and William Gorden Crowell, *Empresses and Consorts* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999) which is entirely comprised of translations of SGZ women's biographies, Rafe de Crespigny, *Imperial Warlord: A Biography of Cao Cao 155-220 AD* (Leiden: Brill, 2010) features SGZ translations smattered throughout, most notably on pages 183-201, as well as a few substantial HHS translations on pages 129-133, a last relevant substantial source for translations of both the HHS and the SGZ is Carl Leban, "Ts'ao Ts'ao and the Rise of Wei: The Early Years," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1971) notably on pages 156-174 for SGZ translations and 115-116 for HHS. *Shishuo Xinyu* is translated completely in Liu Yiqing, *A New Account of Tales of the World,* trans. Richard B. Mather (Ann Arbor: The Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002). Partial translations from the *Cao Man Zhuan* can be found in Paul William Kroll, "Portraits of Ts'ao Ts'ao: Literary Studies on the Man and the Myth," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1976), 271-280.

(*Cao Man Zhuan* 曹瞞傳). Many of these works, particularly those composed by figures that would become main characters within the Three Kingdoms narrative, such as Cao Cao or his sons, have been integrated into specific anecdotes of later Three Kingdoms narratives. The works themselves take on a double life as both Three Kingdoms period literary culture, as well as iconic facets of Three Kingdoms fiction.

Following the Three Kingdoms historical period and those immediately succeeding it, the next substantial surviving instance of Three Kingdoms Culture appears in the form of Tang poetry. The Battle of Chibi occurred in 210 CE and was, in short, a clash of the titans between the allied kingdoms of Wu and Shu and the massive Wei, which resulted in the defeat of Wei and the solidification of the kingdoms' respective territories. The battle was the central theme of Three Kingdoms Culture during the Tang, and the representations of it, which tended to favor Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181–234 CE) and Zhou Yu 周瑜 (175–210 CE) of Shu and Wu as heroes, are what Xiaofei Tian dubs "the southern turn in the ninth century."[6] While a definitive location of the historical battle remains unknown, it was an effort of the northern kingdom of Wei to invade and conquer the kingdoms south of the Yangtze. For the intents and purposes of Tang poets, this location was considered to be Huangzhou.[7] This first dramatic turn, moving from the official historical favoritism shown to Wei as the legitimate successor to the Han to a literary favoritism of the victors of Chibi, is a template for what would become a vital facet of all subsequent Three Kingdoms culture, namely, the shifting spotlight of glorification and heroization.

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[6] Xiaofei Tian, *The Halberd at Red Cliff: Jian'an and the Three Kingdoms* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018), 288.
[7] Ibid, 290.

The Song Dynasty oversaw the next visible shift in Three Kingdoms culture. Anne E. McLaren cites Sima Guang's 司馬光 (1019–1086) 11th century *Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance* (*Zizhi Tongjian* 資治通鑒) as the beginning of the literati effort to legitimize Liu Bei's Shu Han as the true successor of the Han dynasty.[8] By association, this also legitimized Liu Bei and his brothers as not only the popular heroes of the era, but the historically appointed heroes. Though Sima Guang did not directly denounce Wei's legitimacy or drastically alter Chen Shou's formatting of the SGZ, McLaren considers his decision to refer to the kingdom of Shu Han only as Han and his incorporation of Pei Songzhi's commentary into the main body of the text as "unintentionally paving the way for the radically revisionist texts that followed."[9] By the end of the Song, with the publication of Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130–1200) *Summary Outline of the Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance* (*Zizhi tongjian gangmu* 資治通鑒綱目) and the rise of neo-Confucianism, the legitimacy of Liu Bei and Shu Han as the Han heir and heroes of the Three Kingdoms was promulgated and conventionally accepted, as it would remain for the following nine hundred years.

Three Kingdoms culture in late Imperial China was present in an increasing multitude of mediums creating a lineage of the transmediality found in modern Three Kingdoms Culture. *Zaju* 雜劇 ("variety play") dramas performing standalone moments from the story cycle were numerous along with the proliferation of mass-produced prints depicting the same moments to be sold as souvenirs and records of stories and dramas.[10] The 13th century, *Records of the Three*

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[8] Translations of relevant sections from the *Zizhi tongjian* can be found in Rafe de Crespigny, *Last of the Han*, (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1966) and Achilles Fang, *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms (220-265) Chapters 69-78 from the Tzŭ Chih T'ung Chien* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).

[9] Anne E. McLaren, "History Repackaged in the Age of Print: The *Sanguozhi* and *Sanguo Yanyi*" in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 69.2 (2006): 295.

[10] Catherine Pagani, "The Theme of *Three Kingdoms* in Chinese Popular Woodblock Prints," in *Three Kingdoms and Chinese Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 104.

Kingdoms in Plain Language (*Sanguo zhi pinghua* 三國志平話) provided an early outline of the conventional complete Three Kingdoms narrative along with illustrations and topics theorized to have been used as a prompt book for storytellers.[11] *The Story of Hua Guan Suo* (*Hua Guan Suo zhuan* 花関索傳)* was a 15th century printed chantefable featuring prose and verse narratives as well as illustrations. Repackagings and new commentaries of the SGZ and other relevant histories were released in multitudes. These created a complex web of Three Kingdoms sources and finally, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* the novel appeared in completion and soon attracted commentaries of its own.

Included as one of the Four Great Ming Novels, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* has become the gold standard in Three Kingdoms culture, despite its own murky origins. Not only is Luo Guanzhong's 羅貫中 identity and authorship contested, his source material is, as well. As Anne E. McLaren points out, because of the variety and quantity of print version of the SGZ available in the late Yuan and early Ming periods, it is hard to know from what variant of the SGZ his novel was adapted.[12] What this essentially boils down to, is whether Luo or the author, had access to the Chen and Pei version of the text in its original format, or if he was limited to reprints which featured substantial differences in both format and content. The intended use of source material has also been questioned, with a general traditional consensus of the text's intention to provide prosaic narration of the SGZ.[13] Or, as Andrew Plaks proposes as an "ironic revisioning of source material."[14]

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[11] Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West, "Introduction" in *Records of the Three Kingdoms in Plain Language* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2016), xxi.
[12] McLaren, "History Repackaged in the Age of Print," 298.
[13] Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang, "Introduction," in *History and Legend: Ideas and Images in the Ming Historical Novels* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 3.
[14] Andrew Plaks, "*San-kuo Chih Yen-I:* Limitations of Valor," in *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 361.

Nonetheless, over time the SGYY has served to be a concise, merited, and singular representation of Three Kingdoms. This perceived singularity, though, has also proved to be a means of further muddying the waters of subsequent adaptations and productions. The dilemma created, then, is that of determining whether any given Three Kingdoms cultural product is an adaptation of the SGZ (history) or the SGYY (historical fiction.)

It is the themes of righteousness, ambition, and the unceasing progression of time alongside the grandiose characterizations of the novels' heroes present within the SGYY narration that have persisted as core facets of all later Three Kingdoms culture. Another key facet of Three Kingdoms culture solidified by the SGYY, whether established by it or not, is what Junhao Hong calls the "romantic style and legendary color of the original novel."[15] Besides this stylistic flair and the above narrative themes, the SGYY also provided standardized versions of famed scenes, limiting the variety seen across previous narratives.

Despite the longstanding portrayal of Shu Han and its founders as not only the heroes of the era, but the legitimate successors to the Han dynasty, substantial efforts to re-present the narrative were made during the 1950s and 60s. Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978) sought through the publication of a series of essays to repackage Cao Cao as the true hero of the Three Kingdoms by means of assigning him the position of "progressive for his time."[16] While this did little to change the conventions of popular cultural representation, it did serve to underline the disparities between history and conventional knowledge established by centuries of Shu Han supremacy. Moreover, Guo's work provides an example of variance in thought amongst Three

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[15] Junhao Hong, "*Three Kingdoms* the Novel to *Three Kingdoms* the Television Series," in *Three Kingdoms and Chinese Culture*, ed. Besio and Tung, 129.

[16] Kuo Mo-jo [Guo Moruo], "A Reappraisal of the Case of Ts'ao Ts'ao," in *Chinese Studies in History and Philosophy: A Journal of Translations* 1.4 (1968): 11.

Kingdoms cultural participants within China prior to the 21st century, something frequently considered a phenomenon of the internationalization of Three Kingdoms products.

Contemporary Three Kingdoms culture comes in the form of a plethora of popular culture productions including films, television dramas, animations, comics, merchandise, and videogames. The content and relation to Three Kingdoms source materials varies between each piece of media, but a trend can be seen in the division between works that uphold the narrative structure and framing of the SGYY and works that deviate from this structure. In his article on Japanese-produced Three Kingdoms culture, Ng dubs these categories respectively "historical fiction," "historical imagination," with a third category of "*kuso*," products only tangentially related to Three Kingdoms.[17] While these distinctions hold value as a simplistic means of dividing and categorizing the massive quantities of contemporary Three Kingdoms productions, I would argue that the distinction is less a matter of historical adherence than an adherence to established Three Kingdoms structural conventions, many of which are spun from the SGYY and its precursors.

For instance, the 2010 television drama *Three Kingdoms*, a remake of the 1994 adaptation of the SGYY, bears clear distinctions from the 2017 drama, *The Advisor's Alliance* (大军师司马懿之军事联盟). Both are Three Kingdoms adaptations. The former is what one would consider an orthodox retelling of the Three Kingdoms narrative upholding the principle points congruous with the SGYY. The latter, a drama centered around the life and rise of Wei advisor Sima Yi 司馬懿 (179–251 CE), takes no greater historical liberties than *Three Kingdoms*, but deviates entirely from the broad spanning framework and focuses instead on a

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[17] Benjamin Wai-Ming Ng, "The Adaptation of Chinese History into Japanese Popular Culture," in *Manga and the Representation of Japanese History*, ed. Roman Rosenbaum (London: Routledge, 2013), 244.

sole character. It is in this shift of focus, from traditional protagonists to Sima Yi, and scope, from the era to Sima's mid to late life, that defines the current landscape of Three Kingdoms media products. Some, like *Three Kingdoms*, or the 2009 animation of the same title, provide a sweeping and conventional epic and others, like *The Advisor's Alliance* provide insular narratives revolving around specific characters, families, or factions to varying degrees of fiction.

Film, television, and comics are of close relation to the dramas and illustrated texts of the past and the transition and adaptation between mediums is smooth. Other Three Kingdoms cultural products such as board games, videogames, and even untethered merchandise are not as simplistically tied to past traditions, yet maintain just as much, if not more, of a presence in the contemporary media landscape of Three Kingdoms. In the case of games, both physical and digital, they are not only transmedia presentations, but interactive ones that allow the consumer (player) some modicum of control over their own Three Kingdoms retelling. The game producer Koei is a monolith in this field, responsible for two long-running Three Kingdoms series, the historical simulation and strategy series, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and the hack-and-slash action adventure series, *Dynasty Warriors*. The latter is the most successful and recognizable Three Kingdoms franchise in the current landscape, possessing not only video game series, but a media mix that includes merchandise such as action figures and branded playing cards, a live action film, a manga, a theater production, and inhouse cosplay competitions. Despite this substantial cultural impact, however, Three Kingdoms videogames, particularly the *Dynasty Warriors* series, have been substantially understudied as both continuations of a nearly two-thousand-year-old culture and as members of the highly-populated field of historically-themed videogames.

This absence of scholarship seems to stem, in part, from the aforementioned tremendous variety and quantity of modern Three Kingdoms materials and further, a difficulty in selecting what is and is not worthy of study. The first such issue being that of country of origin. In his article, Ng presents what he dubs "Japanese version of the Three Kingdoms Culture."[18] He defines this as works created in Japan and influenced by historically Japanese interpretations of Three Kingdoms texts. He utilizes what he refers to as a "balanced view of history" in contrast to the Chinese "school of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*."[19] The "school of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*" emphasizes the legitimacy of Liu Bei's Shu Han through his ancestral connection to the Han dynasty and heroizes his tripartite brotherhood and brothers themselves as emblematic of virtue. On the other hand, this "Japanese version of Three Kingdoms culture" features more diversity in narrative structure and possesses a tendency to elevate Cao Wei as heroes or anti-heroes. This dichotomization, I would argue, fails to account for the evolution of the Three Kingdoms story-cycle within China, before and after the normalization of the Shu Han narration and even the variation within that "school." Moreover, it fails to account for the success of contemporary Japanese Three Kingdoms materials, globally.

The power and influence of the Internet, particularly in video gaming spheres, allows for the rapid distribution of works both legally and illegally, officially and unofficially across the world. These works are then integrated into various regional cultural landscapes and respective fandoms are cultivated. Because of this, I would also argue that Ng's classification of "Japanese Three Kingdoms culture" is somewhat unstable. While the products themselves are created and

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[18] Ng, "The Adaptation of Chinese History into Japanese Popular Culture," 234.
[19] Ibid, 237.

produced in Japan, Three Kingdoms media is inherently Chinese in content and through international distribution are received and supported by fans in both Japan, China, and beyond.

In an article on the means of acquisition and prevalence of Japanese console games in mainland China during the years of the console ban, Sara X.T. Liao discusses the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* strategy series as a predominant example of Japanese popular culture's ability to "support local demands from transnational cultural exchanges" successfully.[20] Through interviews with Chinese gamers, she points to the acceptance and incorporation of these games into the Chinese Three Kingdoms sphere. This popularity and desire for Japanese produced content is encompassed in a brief anecdote from Liao's article: "The well-known Japanese game publisher Koei's *Sangokushi 12* [*Romance of the Three Kingdoms 12*] was officially released on April 20, 2012 in Japan. The next day, one of the Chinese game portals, Youxia.com, had posted a free downloadable game with a Chinese language patch."[21] This acceptance is only reiterated by Taiwanese gamers, interviewed by Chi-Ying Chen, who give statements such as "I am especially fond of games produced by Koei and Square Enix, including *Final Fantasy, Dynasty Warriors* and *Nobunaga's Ambition*," as well as "Somehow, I feel the Japanese are good at adapting history for media content."[22]

The matter of international consumption and acceptance of these pieces of "Japanese Three Kingdoms culture" should serve to deemphasize the differences between any geographically oriented variant of Three Kingdoms culture. As Hongmei Sun states in regard to contemporary adaptations and evolutions of (another classic Ming novel with rich sources in

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[20] Sara X. T. Liao, "Japanese Console Games Popularization in China: Governance, Copycats, and Gamers*,*" *Games and Culture* 11.3 (2011): 282.
[21] Ibid, 287.
[22] Chi-Ying Chen, "Is the Video Game a Cultural Vehicle?" *Games and Culture* 8.6 (2013): 421.

Chinese history and lore,) *Journey to the West,* "it is ultimately the authors' and compilers'

choices and readers' acceptance that constitutes the original story."[23] In short, acceptance of

these "choices" establishes them as part of the main canon, or in this case, culture. Adherence to

and replication of successful and accepted portrayals can be seen in the global incorporation of

Japanese created content into a more general Three Kingdoms culture.

Beyond acceptance of the media as a product, on the level of content, after even a brief

summary of historical trends, it should be difficult to draw any definitive lines between

variations of Three Kingdoms culture. In supposed contrast to this Chinese "school of *Romance*

of the Three Kingdoms," Ng is indirectly referencing what, in another article on the strategy

game series, Kwon calls "the increasing tendency of modern Japanese and Korean *Three*

Kingdoms revisions to set Cao Cao as the real hero or the main protagonist instead of Liu Bei."[24]

While associating this dichotomy with Japanese and Korean Three Kingdoms products is

applicable in many cases, it ignores the tradition of perspective shifts present in historical and

contemporary Chinese Three Kingdoms culture as seen above in the historical shifts in popular

focus and recent works such as Guo Moruo's Cao Cao revisionism.

Though Ng's "Japanese versions of Three Kingdoms culture" and its media began in

Japan, it is because of its international success and the historical variation of Chinese Three

Kingdoms Culture that it cannot be presently classified as anything distinctly Japanese. What the

dominance of this presentation of the Three Kingdoms narrative establishes is its normalization

as a primary Three Kingdoms school for a global audience. Rather than such a nationalizing

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[23] Hongmei Sun, *Transforming Monkey* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 30.
[24] Hyuk-Chan Kwon, "Historical Novel Revived: The Heyday of *Romance of the Three* Kingdoms Role-Playing Games," in *Playing with the Past*, ed. Matthew Willhelm Kapell and Andrew B.R. Elliott (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 125.

name for this modern element of Three Kingdoms culture, a proposed alternative would be to define it by what Ng considers the Japanese take on history to be, that is, "balanced."[25] A modern school of "Three Kingdoms culture would then, instead of aligning with national origins of product in a globalized world, align with presentations to create a balanced Three Kingdoms Culture. This new version of Three Kingdoms culture would account for the prevalence of all media produced internationally that breaks from the dogma of the Shu-Han "school." This balanced school of Three Kingdoms Culture is not so universally balanced, but rather optionally balanced. It attempts to provide a piece of media to satiate each perspective and historical vantage point, rather than a monolithic singular narrative.

A final point to consider in the discussion of understanding contemporary Three Kingdoms culture and the diversity and saturation of its products is to consider McLaren's assessment of the multitude of Three Kingdoms cultural media present in the Ming dynasty. McLaren writes that the different formats present during the period are best considered "multiple narratives" for different readerships rather than a singular narrative with variations.[26] She cites a myriad of these readerships defined by purpose such as popular and literati readership, as well as more utilitarian forms providing military readings and commentary on everyday life pulled from the themes of Three Kingdoms.[27]

Though the differences between contemporary Three Kingdoms products vary greatly from those of the Ming, it is possible to apply the same constructs of understanding. For example, rather than attempt to stratify Three Kingdoms media in accordance with fidelity to

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[25] Ng, "The Adaptation of Chinese History into Japanese Popular Culture," 238.
[26] Anne E. McLaren, "Ming Audiences and Vernacular Hermeneutics: The Uses of 'Romance of the Three Kingdoms'" in *T'oung Pao*, 2nd ser., 81.1–3 (1995): 56.
[27] Ibid, 64–66.

history or the SGYY or by means of geographic origin and preferences of protagonists, it would perhaps be better to understand contemporary Three Kingdoms products as "multiple narratives" aimed at different, though somewhat overlapping, audiences. For example, the aforementioned *Three Kingdoms* television series might constitute a narrative aimed towards an audience with a desire to consume an adaptation of the SGYY, character specific series might find an audience in those wishing for a more focused narrative, and the semi-interactive retelling of the narrative found in DW games can be construed as a narrative aimed at those desiring some modicum of control over their own Three Kingdoms narrative. Though these are only three examples, hopefully they may serve to illuminate a non-hierarchical means of appraising the contemporary landscape of Three Kingdoms adaptations.

Chapter 2: Three Kingdoms in *Dynasty Warriors*

Three Kingdoms culture has proliferated throughout the centuries by means of the ability to constantly re-present the basic information provided in the *Sanguo zhi*. This re-presentation comes, in its simplest form, as adaptation of the material to other mediums. The movement of the spotlight of heroism between the kingdoms and various figures is one means of re-presentation that can account for large scale trends of Three Kingdoms media across time, as exemplified by the brief timeline provided in the previous section. When adhering to only the main narrative events of the greater narrative, however even presentation shifts can become stale. For a series as long running as DW, with the constant hinderance of centering its narrative around a fixed and well-known narrative such as Three Kingdoms, it may find itself in search of new means of re-presentation, incorporating the aforementioned mode of focus shifts but expanding in scope. Rather than to merely attempt to re-present factions or existing story nodes, it is possible to begin the effort of re-presentation with a focus on characters and events of lesser importance.

In DW and other modern Three Kingdoms adaptations, stories that are but brief mentions in the

SGZ, are modified, embellished, and exaggerated. Upon inclusion in successive pieces of Three

Kingdoms media, they are then proliferated and accepted into greater Three Kingdoms culture.

These processes are extremely important to understand in order to fully integrate modern

Three Kingdoms media and in this specific instance, the *Dynasty Warriors* series, into Three

Kingdoms culture. By firmly rooting themselves in previous works, these modifications can to

be accepted and logically assimilated into Three Kingdoms media by its consumers. It is because

of this variation, that the matter of what is and what is not canon to Three Kingdoms is

exceptionally difficult, if not impossible, to pin down. It could be said that canon is that which is

presented as historic fact in Chen Shou's *Sanguo zhi*. But would this canon include Pei Songzhi's

commentary? Or perhaps, in terms of literature, would canon constitute the narrative as it is

presented by the *Sanguo yanyi*? Or, on a broader-scale, is canon even relevant to a discussion of

Three Kingdoms media products, at all? The answer is, on some level, yes. Without some

semblance of a basic canon, the manipulation and re-presentation of material has no sense of

even a fuzzy boundary. Rather, canon in the case of Three Kingdoms, as will be discussed

below, must be approached with the intention of cultivating not a clear-cut canon from which all

derivitives stem, but at least drawing a fuzzy boundary as to what is and is not typical from

Three Kingdoms media.

Because the primary objective of this piece is to analyze the *Dynasty Warriors* video

game series, and because that series pulls from a myriad of other preexisting pieces of Three

Kingdoms culture, it is impossible to qualify its canon as belonging definitively to any one

canon. That said, neither the series, nor any other work of Three Kingdoms cultural material

produced in the last thousand years is a newly created piece of intellectual property. They are all

essentially reworkings of historical figures and events into derivative works of varying literary esteem. Because of the contemporary nature of the derivative work being analyzed here, to understand the canonical standards to which it is held, it is perhaps necessary to look at the predominant form of contemporary derivative works, fanfiction. After all, considering the authors of any of the aforementioned potential original sources of Three Kingdoms are long dead, official canonization of any work is impossible and thus renders any work not directly adapting the SGYY or another specific text as essentially identical to fanfiction, albeit with greater merit or production value.

According to the third point in Wang Zheng's threefold definition of fanfiction, for the work to be considered as such by its audience, it must adhere strictly to the standards of the existing works.[28] The term in the Chinese fanfiction world for this is *liaokao* 镣铐, meaning "shackles" and implicating the constraint and boundary that canon creates, though for the sake of this work, it will be referred to by the English fanfiction term of canon. Wang provides an example for her argument that is exceptionally beneficial to our purposes here. In explaining the functionality of *liaokao*, she cites an example of a Three Kingdoms fanfiction narration of the night after the Battle of Changban from the perspective of Zhao Yun 趙雲 (d. 229 CE).[29] While the scene itself is not something included in any previous text, it follows existing dialogues and characterizations of both Zhao Yun and Zhang Fei as established in the SGYY.[30] It is this

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[28] Wang Zheng 王錚, *Tongren de shijie* 同人的世界 [The World of Fanfiction] (Beijing: Xinhua Chubanshe, 2008), 4.

[29] The Battle of Changban historically occurred 208 when Cao Cao moved to invade Jing Province, held then by Liu Bei. It is famous in Three Kingdoms Culture for two instances. The first is that of Liu Bei's general Zhao Yun saving and then continuing to fight while shielding Liu Bei's infant son and the second is Zhang Fei singularly barricading Changban Bridge to allow for Zhao Yun and the infant's escape.

[30] Wang Zheng, *Tongren de shijie*, 5.

adherence and "loyalty" to the characters original and "typical" personalities that makes it an acceptable work of fanfiction.[31]

In the case of DW, while it pulls from a variety of Three Kingdoms source material far outside of the realm of the SGYY, I would argue that its adherence to these basic characterizations and depictions of events with adherence to previous standardizations is the closest thing available to canon. While other facets of Zhang Fei's personality and biography vary across texts, in the majority of popular Three Kingdoms adaptations, these three things remain true. Zhang Fei serves Liu Bei, he is third and youngest of three oath brothers (comprised of Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zhang Fei), and he is portrayed as exceptionally brave, if to the point of detriment. The same can easily be said for other characters. Cao Cao, whether portrayed as a villain or hero, he is always cunning and ambitious, takes possession of the Emperor following the defeat of Dong Zhuo 董卓 (d.192 CE), and loses the Battle of Chibi. In all variations of the narrative, including DW, these things hold true. For this reason, while it is impossible to create a singular and definitive Three Kingdoms canon on which DW and other modern works are based upon, it is at the very least possible to understand a sparse framework of existing standards. If something deviates too far from any of these very basic canonical attributes, it typically does not maintain any long-term favorability within contemporary Three Kingdoms culture.

For example, in another Three Kingdoms game, *Kessen II*, Diaochan 貂蟬 is not a part of the famous love triangle between Dong Zhuo, Lü Bu 呂布 (161–99 CE), and her. Instead she is the wife of Liu Bei. Drastic deviations such as these render the work difficult to incorporate into

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[31] Ibid.

existing Three Kingdoms culture. Further, it has not managed to establish itself in the contemporary Three Kingdoms fandoms in the way that DW has.

Though canon within Three Kingdoms is loose, it can be seen, as in the case of *Kessen II,* that there are certain points at which the narrative is rendered unrecognizable. Narratively, these points are deviations from the general chronology of events or the drastic alteration of key figures. There are certain broad and thematic elements such as heroism, loyalty, ambition, fraternity, or fame that, by modelling an attempted narrative addition around, can be smoothly incorporated and accepted even with great fictional liberties. The three aforementioned facets of (1) utilizing existing Three Kingdoms media, (2) conforming to basic canon and chronology, and (3) incorporating Three Kingdoms values and a contextual worldview can thus increase the ease of acceptance for a new Three Kingdoms modification.

For the sake of this essay, the specific case of DW producer and fan-favorite character Cao Wei general Xiahou Dun, will be analyzed in accordance with these three facets. Xiahou Dun provides an interesting and broadly encompassing point of analyses for several reasons. The first, most simplistically, is his wild success as a character in the Dynasty Warriors franchise, consistently ranking within the top ten characters on fan-polls run by the games' publisher, Koei. These rankings represent a successful effort to heroize a character who in history is fairly unremarkable. The second point of interest is the process by which this heroization occurs. Similar to the manner in which traditional Three Kingdoms culture transformed Guan Yu from Shu Han general with a career marked by highs and lows to Lord Guan, God of War, despite "scant historical evidence" of his life, in general.[32] This is just one of the connections between

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[32] Barend J. Ter Haar, *Guan Yu: The Religious Aftermath of a Failed Hero* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2.

Xiahou Dun and Guan Yu, more concrete examples of which are provided later in relation to the rivalry between the two warriors within the narratives of *Dynasty Warriors* games. This rivalry and his connections to Guan Yu comprise the third point. Finally, to expand beyond the singular character, the games utilize both Xiahou Dun and his cousin Xiahou Yuan 夏侯淵 (d. 219 CE) to create a tripartite brotherhood between the two and Cao Cao, mirroring the famous brotherhood of Liu, Guan, and Zhang. Though Xiahou Dun compromises only one character in the hundreds present in the rosters of both Three Kingdoms culture and DW, the multitude of ways in which the games make use of his character may serve as a starting point to understand the interaction between games and past and present Three Kingdoms culture.

One of the most famous myths of Three Kingdoms culture is that of the sworn brotherhood between Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zhang Fei. It appears within the Yuan *Records of the Three Kingdoms in Plain Language,* the chantefable *The Story of Hua Guan Suo,* as well as the *zaju*, *The Peach Garden Oath.* C.T. Hsia, in the section of his critiques of classical Chinese literature that discusses the SGYY, states that despite the novel's author or compilers' emphasis on history over fiction, the story was something that, because of its popularity and ubiquity, could not be removed from a Three Kingdoms narrative.[33] Whether the inclusion of the story, in a work filled with many fictional anecdotes, was as begrudging as Hsia implies, his acquiescence to the necessity of its inclusion certainly highlights the centrality of the episode. In her work on Chinese historical novels, Shelley Hsueh-Lun Chang emphasizes the oath as "so well entrenched in the popular mind that it has become a source of inspiration for popular heroism." [34]

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[33] C.T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 40.
[34] Chang, *History and Legend*, 106.

It is worth noting that the event does not appear in Chen Shou's history, with only the analogy within Guan Yu's biography of the three men "acting as brothers" to serve as the myth's origin.[35] Nevertheless, it is the popular version, though rife with variations, that has persisted and transcended to the point of being nothing short of iconic. In a short summation, the three men, whose exact statuses and professions vary across retellings, meet together, usually in a peach orchard, and swear upon animal sacrifices to live and die as brothers, despite a lack of blood relation. Chang also writes that the oath has "two objectives," the first is "to serve the country," and the second is "to die together." It is this oath and the upholding of it, that the text regards as "the noblest among all human relations," and from this importance, "views the relationship between friends as more important than the relationship between sovereign and subject."[36]

If Chang is correct in her reading of the text, and I believe in the case of the SGYY she is, the exceptional moral righteousness of the oath and the men who uphold it creates a drastic disparity between them and any other character. Even their own allies, obvious heroes of the text, such as Zhuge Liang and Zhao Yun, may become as integrated into the martial and governing spheres of Liu Bei's regime as possible, but are unable to transcend the hierarchy of "sovereign and subject." Because of its entrenchment in popular Three Kingdoms culture, this disparity is hard to overcome, even in works centered around other characters. In the DW series, which strives to present a *yanyi*-esque representation of each in-game faction, the branch of the game which recounts the narrative of Shu naturally follows quite closely with the SGYY. What this culminates in, is a disparity in existing narratives and heroism. In the case of Wu, the righteousness of the characters stems from a devotion not to oath-brothers, but to the central Sun

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[35] Chen Shou, *Sanguo zhi,* 36.4-6.
[36] Chang, *History and Legend,* 106.

family and ancestral land. This is thematically replicated in the game's version of the Jin narrative, emphasizing a bond amongst the founding Sima family. Wei, however, despite the presence of many of Cao Cao's Cao-named cousins and relatives, lacks a central family large enough to create a core roster of characters or a righteous bond between characters that is, in any way, capable of rivalling that of the three brothers.

Within the SGYY and most Three Kingdoms cultural products, the only central figures of Wei are Cao Cao, himself, and his son and successor, Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226 CE). In Cao Cao's attention to seeking out, recruiting, and collecting talented officers to serve under him, there is far more variation amongst participating officers of Wei in any given battle or conflict than in any other faction. For the format of a video game, in which providing the player with a relatively consistent cast of playable characters is vital, this creates a difference between the playable Wei game route and that of the others. The games' solution to this has been to select two Wei officers with a tentative blood relation to Cao Cao and craft something replicant of a bond of brotherhood, or at the very least, a friendship that transcends rank. The chosen officers were Xiahou Dun and Xiahou Yuan, cousins of Cao Cao. The games elevate and present them along with Cao Cao as key figures in the founding of Wei and stable playable characters within the games. Of the two elevated heroes, despite having far less existing history than Xiahou Yuan, it is Xiahou Dun who has received the most attention from the games.

In 2012, a journalist from *Ready-Up*, a gaming news website, interviewed Akihiro Suzuki, the series' producer at the annual Tokyo Game Show. The journalist asks Suzuki if he feels "attached to any specific character." Suzuki answers, "Any time anyone asks this I've

always answered that it's Xiahou Dun."[37] TV Tropes, a fan produced online database of tropes

appearing in media from the titular television to fanfiction, goes so far as to consider Xiahou

Dun a "base-breaking character," within the *Dynasty Warriors* series and fanbase. The website

defines this trope as "A character in a series who is loved by one section of the fanbase, and

hated by the rest."[38] This has been achieved by the spotlighting of Dun and his incorporation into

the front and center of the in-game Wei narrative despite his mundane historical presence, all

likely due to the acknowledged favoritism of the games' producer. However, Suzuki is not the

only person to form an attachment to the character, as the very definition of the "base breaking

character" implies, there is a substantial fanbase for him, as well that appears regularly during

the series' character polls.

The *Dynasty Warriors* series, via Koei Tecmo's news site, GAMECITY, began a

tradition of online character popularity polls after the series' 7th installment and has since run for

four mainline games, one of which catered specifically to western audiences, run directly by

Koei's western branches. The top ranked characters in each poll have been drastically different

with the number one ranking in DW7 going to new character, Wang Yuanji 王元姬 (217–68

CE), Zhao Yun in DW8 and Guo Jia 郭嘉 (170–207 CE) in DW8XL. Other polls such as the one

run for DW8 and the DW9 western poll have divided results into categories, demarcated in the

case of the former by character roles such as "siblings," "friends," "bosses," and "female," and in

the latter according to their kingdom affiliations. Interestingly, aside from Zhao Yun, who was

made the series' poster boy for the 8th iteration, none of the core heroes of the SGYY have

[37] "Akihiro Suzuki on the Dynasty Warriors Series," *Ready-Up*, October 5, 2012. http://ready-up.net/2012/10/05/akihiro-suzuki-on-the-dynasty-warrior-series/.
[38] "Base-Breaking Character," *TV Tropes,* last updated June 7, 2018. https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/BaseBreakingCharacter.

appeared in the top ten of any of the single category polls and few have made it into the divided ones. Further, each poll shows a decent amount of fluctuation between favorites, and a clear bias towards the more beautified and youthfully designed characters, except for one case. Xiahou Dun has, despite being but a minor and sometimes derided character in greater Three Kingdoms culture, maintained a position within the top ten characters on every poll taken. On the DW7 poll, he ranked 2nd,[39] 7th in DW7XL,[40] 9th in DW8XL,[41] 10th amongst "bosses" of DW8,[42] and 1st in the Wei category of the DW9 poll.[43]

Within the games, Xiahou Dun has, from the first iteration onward, been available from the start. Typically, upon starting the game, there are a handful of characters made initially playable per faction. In early games, from DW1 through DW4, there were three, conveniently allowing for the typical heroic trifecta of Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zhang Fei. What this amounted to for the other factions, however, was the selection of three corresponding characters to present to the player. These fluctuated throughout the first few games, with Dun remaining as an initial character in all of them, and by DW4, the most popular of the early releases, the initial characters were the three brothers of Shu, Huang Gai, Sun Shangxiang, and Sun Jian of Wu, and Cao Cao, Xiahou Dun, and Xiahou Yuan of Wei. While the narrative of Wu presented in the game has always been one focused more around family and the preservation of the south and as such less interested in representing the notions of conquest found in the narratives of Shu and Wei. The

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[39] GAMECITY, "Dynasty Warriors 7 Character Popularity Poll." http://www.gamecity.ne.jp/smusou6/enquete/.
[40] GAMECITY, "Dynasty Warriors 7 Xtreme Legends Character Popularity Poll." http://www.gamecity.ne.jp/smusou/vote/.
[41] GAMECITY, "Dynasty Warriors 8 Xtreme Legends Character Popularity Poll." http://www.gamecity.ne.jp/smusou7/charavote/.
[42] GAMECITY, "Dynasty Warriors 8 Who Wants to be? Popularity Poll." http://www.gamecity.ne.jp/smusou7/enquete/.
[43] Koei Techmo America Twitter. twitter.com/KoeiTecmoUS/status/901519368915267585.

establishment of Cao Cao and the two Xiahou as parallel to the three brothers is something that

would remain a staple of the games' narrative through to the most recent releases.

In *Dynasty Warriors 7*, when the player selects the gameplay route of the Shu faction, the

opening cutscene depicts a group of peasants under attack by the Yellow Turban forces. They

plead for aid with passing Imperial troops and are mocked and denigrated. Immediately after, the

peasants are attacked by said Yellow Turbans. Within seconds, the attackers are sliced away by

the out-of-nowhere appearance of Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zhang Fei. Liu Bei tells the peasants to

"leave everything to us," and the player is thrust into combat against the Yellow Turban forces.

Though earlier games, such as DW4, often began with the famous Peach Garden Oath, DW7 still

provides an immediate and unequivocal introduction to the three brothers as a united team of

heroes. Obviously, this is far from an unorthodox representation of the three figures in Three

Kingdoms works. If the player chooses the Wei faction's route, they are given a similarly

structured cutscene. Cao Cao, Xiahou Yuan, and Xiahou Dun sit on horseback at the sight of the

same Yellow Turbans conflict, however, instead of being tasked with saving peasants, the three

are tasked with saving their own men. At first, the conversation is between Cao Cao and Xiahou

Yuan. Cao Cao waxes strategic about narrow passes and battle formations and Xiahou Yuan

presents a far more jovial demeanor, concerned with "getting to rescue them [their troops]."

Xiahou Dun enters midway through the scene, denigrates the two for talking too much, ushers

Yuan on using his personal name, and rushes into battle, leaving Cao Cao to comment on his

"impressiveness."

The scene serves to establish three things in the very first moment of introduction to the

Wei faction's main characters and narrative. Firstly, though they are not portrayed quite as

concerned with the peasant plights as Liu Bei and company, their own benevolence is shown in

the form of concern for their own troops. Secondly, despite being the "lord" character of the faction, when in the company of Xiahou Dun and Yuan, Cao Cao banters with them like peers, creating a tripartite friendship reminiscent of the brotherhood. Even in this brief cutscene, simplified and tropish personality types are established for each member of the small pseudo-brotherhood. Cao Cao is strategic, serious, and concerned with the state of his army, a fairly standard representation of the character as a whole. Xiahou Yuan is boisterous and casually spoken, a comedic element amongst the group. Xiahou Dun in both action and presentation resembles the nearly standardized trope of the stoic, taciturn, and revered videogame swordsman. Thirdly, perhaps because of or for the sake of cementing the character's adaptation into this trope, the scene revolves entirely around him, placing Xiahou Dun as a central, if not the central, figure of the Wei narrative. In terms of in-game presentation, this inequity between the three is the only thing that differentiates the Wei trio from the Shu brotherhood, in which, at least initially, the spotlight is divided evenly.

Though the parallels between the introductory cutscenes in DW7 is perhaps the most stark and interesting example of the place of Xiahou Dun within the games' narrative, there are a handful of other noteworthy examples. The opening cutscene of DW4 is very similar to that of DW7 with a representation of Cao Cao and the two Xiahous as initial and vital characters. In this game, rather than utilizing the English word "cousin," Yuan addresses Dun as "brother." The focus of this scene, however, is Cao Cao. His characterization in DW4 shows a more traditional concern with "quelling chaos" and the achievement of fame rather than his troops' wellbeing. DW8 opens with the three again, this time with the Xiahou cousins rescuing Cao Cao from an onslaught of Dong Zhuo's troops and chiding him for provoking them, retaining the atmosphere of peerage between them. DW9's Wei narrative works to downgrade Xiahou Yuan, framing only

Cao Cao and Xiahou Dun as similarly ranked friends, presenting Yuan alongside Cao Ren 曹仁 (168–223 CE). Arguably, considering Dun's historical status as Cao Cao's personal friend, and Yuan's lack thereof, this is perhaps an attempt to reground the narrative in historical presentations.

If the idea of Wei trio paralleling the Shu brotherhood is to be upheld, then as the leader, Cao Cao is the obvious counterpart to Liu Bei, and from his stout, battle hungry, and jovial demeanor, Xiahou Yuan is framed as the counterpart to Zhang Fei, leaving Xiahou Dun and Guan Yu. As will be discussed later, the pairing of these two men in combat within Three Kingdoms originates much further in the historical timeline of Three Kingdoms narratives. In summation, it can be said that in most of Three Kingdoms culture, Dun was typically shown as a comedic foil of Guan Yu, unable ever to be seen as, even in his most favorable portrayals, a legitimate competitor for Lord Guan. Nonetheless, this history creates something of a precedent for one of the main rivalries present in DW games, that of Xiahou Dun and Guan Yu.

In DW7, when the trio encounters him at the Battle of Sishui Gate, watching as Guan engages with Dong Zhuo's general Hua Xiong, a generic NPC within the game, Cao Cao remarks, "magnificent. I am impressed." Beside him, Xiahou Dun replies, "Hmph. We don't need him," rushes forward, kills Hua Xiong's 華雄 (d.191 CE) final accompaniment from beside Guan Yu and rushes past him through the gate. Later, when fighting against Lü Bu at Xiapi, the enmity is again emphasized by Dun's specific instruction to "not fall behind Guan Yu." In DW5 and DW6, which took a more character centered narrative framing, allowing the player to select a character's story rather than a faction's, the feud was even more integral, becoming a central point in Xiahou Dun's narrative in each game. For example, DW5 features a scene in which

Xiahou Dun and Guan Yu spar for Cao Cao's amusement, only to have Cao Cao remark that "it almost looks as if you really wanted to kill Guan Yu."

Though the *Dynasty Warriors* series is known for its aesthetic stylization of historical characters, presenting military officers as slim, hair-gelled young men in anachronistic attire. In the case of characters with historically established and iconographic appearances, the game has adhered to those standards. Guan Yu stands far taller than any other character in the game, and he maintains his long, straight beard. Zhang Fei is always portrayed as wide, muscular, and wildly-bearded without any attempts to beautify him or Guan. In turn, neither of these characters, despite their previous status as primary heroes of Three Kingdoms, have achieved much in the way of DW fan favoritism. Favorites are typically chosen from the extremely fashionable and in many cases sexualized characters that adhere to existing tropes of video game characters. Because of the lack of detailed physical descriptions of anyone beside the story's major characters within the SGYY or any other Three Kingdoms narrative, the majority of the character roster was redesigned according to these principals. Those who are not beautified, are typically deformed to become inhuman muscle men, as in the case of Dian Wei 典韋 (d. 197 CE) or disguised caricatures like Pang Tong 龐統 (179–214 CE) and Wei Yan 魏延 (d. 234 CE). Xiahou Dun and Xiahou Yuan were both spared either of these treatments and have made it through every iteration of the game with a design similar to that of Guan and Zhang or Cao Cao, himself. That is, a design resembling a fantastical and gamified version of a middle-aged military commander wielding an impossibly large sword.

After a brief analysis of Xiahou Dun's depiction within the series, it is now necessary to approach his depictions within history, allowing the connections between the two to be retroactively drawn. It is generally accepted that Cao Cao's father, Cao Song 曹嵩 (d. 193CE),

was adopted into the Cao family from the Xiahou family.[44] Cao Song was most likely a nephew

of his adoptive father Cao Teng 曹騰 (d.160 CE), a eunuch during the reign of Han Emperor

Ling. For this reason, Cao Cao's two Xiahou Generals, Dun and Yuan, are typically referred to

as his cousins, a moniker that the DW series makes particular use of. Because of this assumptive

relation, within the SGZ, the biographies of notable Xiahou and Cao relatives are placed together

in a single chapter that includes eight biographies. Of them, Xiahou Dun is first. However, it is

far from the longest. It accounts for a few details of his life, his received accolades, and a lengthy

anecdote regarding his capture during battle, a particularly non-heroic moment.

> When Cao Cao went on a campaign against Tao Qian, he left Dun to guard Puyang. Zhang Miao rebelled and received Lü Bu. Cao Cao's family was in Juancheng, and Dun used a light chariot force to go and attend to them. He followed in pursuit with Lü Bu and met to do battle. Bu turned back and thereupon entered Puyang, where he sent a raid to obtain Dun's army's supply wagon. He dispatched a general to falsely surrender and altogether carried out his plan, capturing Dun to request treasure and money. Amongst Dun's army there was shock and fear. Dun's General, Han Hao, then led his own army to Dun's camp and called together all of the army's officials and all were in support. In each division, there was no movement and all camps then settled.

> 太祖征陶謙，留惇守濮陽。張邈叛，迎呂布，太祖家在鄄城，惇輕車往赴，適與布會，交戰。布退還，遂入濮陽，襲得惇軍輜重。遣將偽降，共執持惇，責以寶貨，惇軍中震恐。惇將韓浩乃勒兵屯惇營門，召軍吏諸將，皆案甲當部不得動，諸營乃定.

> Thereupon, he went to the place at which Dun was held and shouted at those who held him hostage, saying: "You sort of terrible traitors, then dare hold by force a great general, and still desire to expect to live? Moreover, I have received orders to send forces to attack the traitors. Could it really be that by means of the reason of one general, I would yet release you?"

> 遂詣惇所，叱持質者曰：「汝等凶逆，乃敢執劫大將軍，復欲望生邪！且吾受命討賊，寧能以一將軍之故，而縱汝乎」

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[44] For a detailed discussion of the connection between the Cao and Xiahou families, see Rafe de Crespigny, *Imperial Warlord: A Biography of Cao Cao, 155-220 AD),* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 19-23.

For this reason, he cried and said to Dun: "How can I bear upholding the national law?"

因涕泣謂惇曰：「當奈國法何！」
He urgently called together his soldiers to attack those who were holding Dun hostage. The hostage-takers were filled with profound fear, bowed, and said: "I only wish to beg for the ability to leave here and nothing more."

促召兵擊持質者。持質者惶遽叩头，言「我但欲乞資用去耳！」

Hao upheld his responsibility and beheaded them all. Dun was then freed and Cao Cao heard of what had happened. He spoke to Hao and said: "Sir, this is able to be held as a standard for all the ages." Thereupon, to manifest order, Cao Cao already had the corpses of those who had held Dun hostage placed side by side and struck their corpses as a warning to not ever take hostages.

浩數責，皆斬之。惇既免，太祖聞之，謂浩曰：「卿此可爲萬世法。」乃著令，自今已後有持質者，皆當并擊，勿顧質.

Due to this, those who seized and held people hostage thereupon stopped.[45]

由是劫質者遂絕.

This anecdote, regarding Dun's capture and subsequent release after the intercession of his subordinate, Han Hao 韓浩 (dates unknown), is the lengthiest of his biography. Further, Han Hao's importance within it, earns him his own biography sub-categorized under Dun's within the SGZ. What is most interesting about it, however, is quite obviously the unimpressive and unheroic nature of being held hostage and rescued by one's subordinate. It is essentially a story of bumbling failure on Dun's part, showing him not only suffering a defeat by capture, but falling for Lü Bu's ruse, as well. It is likely that the image of Dun as a dumb and clownish general that is proliferated in late imperial Three Kingdoms dramas is drawn from this story. It is also noteworthy that such an anecdote was included in what is otherwise a generally favorable

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[45] SGZ, 9.5-15.

biography of a man who was clearly favored by Cao Cao and his successors as by all

considerations, it is more a story about Han Hao's successes than Dun's.

> Cao Cao personally returned to Xuzhou and Dun led a campaign against Lü Bu. A stray arrow appeared and wounded his left eye.

> 太祖自徐州還，惇從征呂布，爲流矢所中，傷左目。

> *The Account of Wei says: When Xiahou Yuan and Xiahou Dun together acted as generals, those amongst the army called Dun the Blind Xiahou. Dun hated this and every time he saw himself in the mirror, became enraged and each time struck the mirror into the ground.[46]*

> 《魏略》曰：時夏侯淵與惇俱爲將軍，軍中號惇爲盲夏侯。惇惡之，每照鏡恚怒，輒撲鏡於地

It is this story of Xiahou Dun's wounded eye that has become his most iconic moment.

This was solidified by its inclusion and dramatization in the SGYY. Like the Han Hao story

before it, it is not particularly impressive in any way. It is only in its re-presentation that it

becomes impressive. Rather, it is a simple recounting of an in-battle injury made a bit more

depressing by Pei Songzhi's annotation from the *Synoptic History of Wei* (*Wei lüe* 魏略) that

incorporates the after-effects of such an injury on both Dun's status and self-esteem. This

annotation and its strangely personal nature is useful in creating an angst-ridden anti-hero who

fits easily into the contemporary re-branding of Cao Cao and by association, his followers.

Further, the scene, as standardized in the SGYY, has been present in every generation of DW

games, including as a bizarre and somewhat terrifying hidden cutscene in the fighting game,

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[46] SGZ, 9.18-20.

DW1. Because of this, it is one of the most iconic Three Kingdoms moments within the game series.

He received the position of administrator of Chenliu and Jiyin as well as the Jianwu General and the Marquis of Gao'an.

復領陳留、濟陰太守，加建武將軍，封高安鄉侯。

At the time of a large draught, when locusts rose, Dun thereupon broke off Taishou river to create a pond. He himself carried dirt, personally. He commanded officers and men to encourage the cultivation of rice paddies. People came to depend on these benefits.

時大旱，蝗蟲起，惇乃斷太壽水作陂，身自負土，率將士勸種稻，民賴其利.

He was then appointed Magistrate of Henan. When Cao Cao pacified Hebei, he acted as General of the Rear.

轉領河南尹。太祖平河北，爲大將軍後拒.

After the defeat of Ye, he was made General of Fubo and made to be Magistrate of Henan. He was made to undertake affairs by means of his advantages and was not hindered by the administrative system.

鄴破，遷伏波將軍，領尹如故，使得以便宜從事，不拘科制.

In the twelfth year of Jian'an, it is recorded that Dun around that time accomplished a meritorious deed and his fiefdom was increased by one thousand and eight hundred households, and combined with the previous, brought the total to two thousand and five hundred households.

建安十二年，錄惇前後功，增封邑千八百戶，并前二千五百戶

During the twenty-first year, he was sent on an expedition against Sun Quan in addition. He was sent to command twenty-six armies and remain at Juchao.

二十一年，從征孫權還，使惇都督二十六軍，留居巢

Cao Cao bestowed upon him a troupe of famous female performers and said: "Wei Rong by means of the achievement of the pacification of the Rong, still received only the pleasure of metal and stone, much less than you deserve General!"

賜伎樂名倡，令曰：「魏絳以和戎之功，猶受金石之樂，況將軍乎！」

During the twenty fourth year, when Cao Cao's armies were attacking Lü Bu in Mobei, he summoned Dun often to ride with him in the same carriage, personally visited him as a close relative, and allowed him to come in and out of his personal rooms. Of all the generals, none were treated comparably.

二十四年，太祖軍擊破呂布軍於摩陂，召惇常與同載，特見親重，出入臥內，諸將莫得比也。

The Book of Wei says: At the time all generals received Wei offices and symbols, Dun alone received a Han office. Thereupon, he [felt] highly neglected and personally pled that it was not suitable not to follow the customs of appointments.

Cao Cao said: "I have heard that the greatest superiors learn from their ministers, the next befriend their ministers. Those that are ministers are people of treasured virtue. Wei is of small scale, but can its ministers not sufficiently feel injustice from their ruler?"

Dun firmly requested, and thereupon was conferred the Wei title of General of the Front.

魏書曰：時諸將皆受魏官號，惇獨漢官，乃上疏自陳不當不臣之禮。太祖曰：「吾聞太上師臣，其次友臣。夫臣者，貴德之人也，區　`區之魏，而臣足以屈君乎？」惇固請，乃拜爲前將軍。

He oversaw all armies to Shouchun, and then moved to camp at Shaoling.

督諸軍還壽春，徙屯召陵.

When Emperor Wen was already established as King, he appointed Dun to be General-in-Chief and a few months later, he died.

文帝即王位，拜惇大將軍，數月薨。

Dun although travelling with an army, personally welcomed teachers and received their instruction. His nature was clean and frugal, and he had excess wealth and distributed it by dividing it. When not sufficiently funded, he took funds from office and did not by rule produce funds from trade. He was posthumously called the Marquis of Zhong. This title was inherited by his son, Chong. The Emperor pursued and considered Dun's successes and desired to make his sons and grandsons lords. He added to Dun's territory one thousand households and gave Dun's seven sons and two grandsons each the title of Marquis of Guannei.[47]

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[47] SGZ, 9.21–35.

惇雖在軍旅，親迎師受業。性清儉，有餘財輒以分施，不足資之於官，不治
產業。諡曰忠侯。子充嗣。帝追思惇功，欲使子孫畢侯，分惇邑千户，賜惇
七子二孫爵皆關内侯。

The rest of the biography, as translated, is extremely favorable, showing Dun as a successful and respected civic leader, scholar, and personal friend of Cao Cao. Of particular importance to the expanding legend of his character are his friendship with his lord and these scholarly tendencies. With regards to the depth of his relationship with Cao Cao, it provides a direct example of a general with a close personal bond with their commander far more detailed than even that of the famous oath brothers. It is from this connection, that the dynamic of pseudo-oath brotherhood that is heavily implicit in DW's narrative of Cao Cao, Xiahou Dun, and even Xiahou Yuan is as valid as that of Liu Bei and Guan Yu. Further, it elucidates the true importance of Dun to Cao Cao and the state of Cao Wei as perhaps not the most successful military leader, but an honored, and respected friend or companion of Cao Cao. Dun's frequently acknowledged historical mediocrity seems immediately understandable in this context. Thus, this earliest representation of Xiahou Dun presents a man with failures and successes, neither of which were great enough to earn him a reputation as an eternal loser or hero, but who was clearly well-liked by his peers.

Outside of his official biography, there is little cultural mention of Xiahou Dun until the Yuan dynasty. This is likely due partially to a general dearth of surviving early Three Kingdoms cultural resources, as well as the emphasis on the Battle of Chibi, which was interested predominately in Wei and Cao Cao as poetic losers, and was a battle in which Dun did not participate. However, with the rise of a Shu-Han focus and the heroization of the three brothers, Cao Cao and his associated camp became the primary antagonists of the narrative and with that, though negative, were afforded much more presence. Xiahou Dun is present in a handful of

plays, the *Sanguo pinghua*, and of course, the *Sanguo yanyi*. His presentation varies in each, though he remains a background figure in Cao Cao's camp throughout them all. The most drastic presentation, however, is that of a buffoonish weakling in the Guan Yu and Zhang Fei centered plays. This depiction is likely tied to the worse moments of his biography, particularly his capture and injury.

Zhuge Liang Burns the Stores at Bowang (*Zhuge Liang Bowang shaotun* 諸葛亮博望 燒 屯) positions Xiahou Dun again oppositional to both Liu Bei and his brothers, as well as to Zhuge Liang and as a henchman of sorts to Cao Cao, himself. He is presented in this *zaju* as far less comically moronic than in others, as will be discussed subsequently, but as simply an easily defeated minion, referred to as "that blind hero Xiahou Dun."[48] He loses "millions" of troops to Zhuge Liang and is still defended and employed by Cao Cao, a fact that is somewhat reminiscent of the favor shown to him within the SGZ.

In other plays, Dun appears as a relatively neutral character. In *Rude Zhang Fei Causes an Uproar in the Pomegranate Garden* (*Mang Zhang Fei da nao shiliu yuan* 莽張飛大鬧石榴 園) he appears to be running errands for Cao Cao, speaking with a cook about the preparation and food requirements for an upcoming feast.[49] Following this vignette, he remains in the play as simply an enemy of the three brothers and the target of Zhang Fei's present rage, who sings "if I see that Xiahou Dun, I will take my tiger-eye steel whip and bring it down across his head."[50]

In *Guan Yunchang's Righteous and Brave Refusal of Gold* (*Guan Yunchang yiyong cijin* 關雲長義勇辭金) an early fifteenth century play by Zhu Youdun 朱有燉 (1379–1439), Xiahou

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[48] Anonymous, *Zhuge Liang Burns the Stores at Bowang* in *Battles, Betrayals, and Brotherhoods,* trans. Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 2012), 213
[49] Kimberly Ann Besio, "The Disposition of Defiance: Zhang Fei as a Comic Hero of Yuan *Zaju"* (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1992), 226.
[50] Ibid, 143

Dun is a bumbling henchman of Cao Cao with surprising self-awareness, in a clown role

opposite Guan Yu, during Guan Yu's tenure serving Cao Cao. Upon entering the stage, Dun

recites the following:

> Arranging troops and disposing formations, I've never been victorious;
> When in a face-off with opposing fortifications, I'm scared witless.
> If some enemy wants to know my name and surname,
> I am that
> Xiahou Dun who fears the blade and runs from arrows.

> I am Xiahou Dun, and I serve under the banners of Lord Cao as the Might-
> Establishing General. When joining the battle in the campaign against Xuzhou,
> my left eye was done blinded by Lü Bu's arrow. When I joined the battle while
> defending Puyang, my left leg was done crippled by Zhang Liao's lance. So,
> when I now go into battle, my greatest fear is to be "done."[51]

This monologue immediately follows Guan Yu's own self-introduction which, as the

play's lead, is contrasted with Dun's, by its boastful and glorifying nature.

> Relying on my
> Merit in supporting and upholding the altars of the state,
> A magnanimity that holds within it the whole universe,
> This one heart of mine is clear as the sky, bright as the sun.
> I am different from those
> Recalcitrant warlords and crafty braves, all black-hearted!
> I only want to
> Establish merit and honor; strictly adhere to the norms of the court;
> Maintain loyalty and virtue so green staves can transmit my fame.
> As the manliest of men, my authority and my courage are unyielding.
> For the moment I am
> Temporarily staying here at Xuchang,
> And my mood and feelings are muted by unhappiness,
> Consumed by fear that,
> Trapped in the dust, my Ganjian will get rusty.[52]

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[51] Zhu Youdun, *Guan Yunchang's Righteous and Brave Refusal of Gold* in *Battles, Betrayals, and Brotherhoods,* trans. Idema and West, 123.
[52] Ibid, 122.

Because this play takes place during the period of time during which Guan Yu serves Cao Cao, it places Dun and Yu not as enemies, but as allies, however still without providing any heroization of Dun, himself. As such, unlike the previously mentioned dramas in which Dun is a minor antagonist, this grudging alliance serves to create an early example of the rivalry between the men that is later depicted in the DW series and exacerbated by fan productions. Guan Yu is, in this case as in DW, "the manliest of men." Unlike in the games, however, Xiahou Dun is not his competitor in machismo, but a self-admitted loser suffering not only from his optical injury, but another leg-wound that appears only within this text. Later in the text, Guan is sent into a rage at the sight of Dun's disgraceful loss against Yan Liang 顏良 (d. 200CE). In essence, Guan Yu is offended by Xiahou Dun's weaknesses, and eventually, Dun, himself, realizes the magnificence of Guan Yu.

Throughout these depictions it can be seen that in the wealth of Three Kingdoms themed plays, though Xiahou Dun is not a leading figure, he is perpetually present as Cao Cao's go-to general. Though these representations are by no means heroic and in most cases fairly unfavorable, they do show Dun as a prominent supporting character within this sphere of Three Kingdoms culture even amidst the present Shu Han bias. Particularly, they depict him as a prominent supporting character with close ties to Cao Cao, providing an example of a continuous character thread from the relationship depicted in the SGZ, to these *zaju*, to DW.

Xiahou Dun's appearances within *Records of the Three Kingdoms in Plain Language* serve as something of a middle ground between the perpetual loser of the plays, and the brief heroics of the SGYY and later popular culture. Though his losses against Guan Yu during his departure from Cao Cao's camp are still present, they are softened from the utter defeat present

in the dramas to a "sound defeat" following "thirty rounds of battle."[53] His first appearance and

most important to the DW presentation of the character, however, is prior to during the recovery

of Xiaopei from Lü Bu, and provides an early example of his most famous moment, his eye

injury. This version is dramatized as it would be in all proceeding retellings of it, taking what

was, in the SGZ, "a wounded eye," and transforming it into the following:

> "After only a few rounds, Lü Bu feigned defeat, and when Xiahou Dun hotly
> pursued him, Lü Bu released an arrow that struck Xiahou Dun right in his left eye.
> Xiahou Dun dropped from his horse and pulled out the arrow. Xiahou said, "This
> eye is the seed of my father and the blood of my mother: it cannot be discarded!"
> Holding his eye in his mouth, he mounted up and continued the fight. Lü Bu said,
> "This is no ordinary man!" Lü Bu was utterly defeated."[54]

In this scene, Dun is said to have merely held the eye within his mouth, likely preserving

it until it could be more properly disposed of following battle. While his commentary remains

more or less the same, a statement of Confucian devotion to the preservation of the body in

honor of one's parents, the SGYY changes one thing. That change is made quite clear from the

heading given to the section in which it appears, "Xiahou Dun Plucks Out and Swallow His

Wounded Eye."[55] The consumption of the eye becomes the central moment of Dun's mythos in

modern popular representations and is equally highlighted by the manner of presentation given to

it by the formatting of the SGYY. Likely from this instance, he is cited in Mao Zonggang's 毛宗

崗 (1632–1709 CE) introduction to the text as one who fights so "bravely when they find

themselves endangered that no one can withstand them," which serves to further assure Dun's

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[53] Anonymous, *Records of the Three Kingdoms in Plain Language,* trans. Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 2016), 62.
[54] Ibid, 38.
[55] Luo Guanzhong, *Three Kingdoms*, trans. Moss Roberts (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 141.

status as, at least something of a hero within the SGYY and its time.[56] Though he is given much more a role within the SGYY than in prior texts, only this action receives a designated heading, and even a poem of commemoration at the end of the section.

It is worth noting, as well, that in the SGYY version of Dun's other most relevant appearance in the standard chronologized narrative of the Three Kingdoms, his defeat by Guan Yu upon Guan's departure from Cao's camp, he is not defeated by Guan, at all. Instead, they are stopped from fighting, by Cao Cao's orders.[57] What this culminates in is something of equality between the men and their abilities. Dun's insistence, in the scene, on holding Guan responsible for killing Cao's men during his flight, is also a rare personification of morality in the character. Or, contrastingly, a sense of petty antagonism towards Guan, to be further extrapolated and amplified in their portrayal within DW as bickering rivals.

Following the SGYY, Dun's portrayal as a lesser ranked hero of the Three Kingdoms has been, for the most part, upheld in subsequently produced pieces of Three Kingdoms culture. In direct adaptations of the SGYY, such as the 1994 *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and the 2010 *Three Kingdoms*, he receives little more attention than in the Ming novel. In the 2010 iteration of the series, a remake of the 1994 version, Dun receives no starring moments, at all and even the eye scene is cut. That is not to say it was entirely lost to modern popular culture outside of the video game world, for the scene received a chapter of its own in the Hong Kong Three Kingdoms *manhua Ravages of Time* (*Huofeng liaoyuan* 火鳳燎原) and the Japanese manga *Beyond the Heavens* (*Sōten kōro* 蒼天航路). The scene and the character also feature

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[56] "Mao Tsung-kang on the *San-kuo Yen-I*," trans. David T. Roy, in *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, ed. David L. Rolston (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990): 159.)

[57] Luo Guanzhong, *Three Kingdoms*, 460.

prominently in the animated adaptation of the latter, as well as the 2009 *Three Kingdoms* animation. From these omissions and inclusions in modern popular culture, Xiahou Dun can come to be seen, moderately, as a staple more of Three Kingdoms adaptations than specifically SGYY adaptations.

By comparing and contrasting the Xiahou Dun of history with the Xiahou Dun of the *Dynasty Warriors* franchise, the ways in which SGZ history and later popular works can be amplified and minimized in accordance with the targeted narrative of a modern work is visible on a multitude of points. The brief mention of Dun's eye injury in the SGZ has spawned hours of cutscenes, fanfictions, and online discussions of "the coolest moments in Three Kingdoms," while his paragraphs of capture and rescue have yet to be incorporated in any of the character's myths. Even Han Hao, himself, has yet to join the ranks of playable characters. Further, what was formerly a comedic and somewhat one-sided rivalry between Xiahou Dun and Guan Yu has become a set of parallel characters. The parallel has then expanded to include Xiahou Yuan in the formation of not only a singular rivalry, but a tripartite one between the three brothers, as well. This is but one small instance of these gradual evolutions of Three Kingdoms narratives and the processes at play within them. The glorification of a favorite character, the amplification of their most heroic qualities from history or fiction, and the reduction of their worst moments are repeated in all narrative re-presentations within most modern Three Kingdoms material and the *Dynasty Warriors* series, as a whole.

Chapter 3: Dynasty Warriors in the Videogame World

Japanese game developer Koei first entered the genre of historical simulation in 1983 with *Nobunaga's Ambition* (NA), a strategy game in which the player is tasked with dominating Warring States-era Japan, replicating the goal of uniting shogun Oda Nobunaga. In 1985, Koei expanded further into the genre by releasing another menu and statistic-heavy strategy game, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (ROTK) for the dominant console of the era, the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES).[58] Naturally, rather than conquering feudal Japan, the aim of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was uniting China after the collapse of the Han Dynasty. Both *Nobunaga's Ambition* and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* have had long-term success with the most recent entries in each series releasing in 2017 and 2020 respectively.

Due to the nature of the games both *Nobunaga's Ambition* and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms,* from their earliest iterations to the most recent, have continued to rely on a simulative style of gameplay. The player selects certain conditions from a series of increasingly complex menus and watches the results of these selections unfold in game-time. Later games have allowed for the addition of a strategic turn-based or real-time battle system to interrupt this simulative gameplay flow. During these battles, the player controls (by means of a detailed menu system) the actions of each of their deployed commanders on a battlefield rendered around them. Though there is great variation in later Koei historical fiction titles, these two core strategic series share nearly identical gameplay and mechanics, merely applied to different settings, scenarios, and characters. For this reason, it is easily possible to discuss them both

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[58] In Japanese and Chinese the game is titled, not as Romance of the Three Kingdoms, like the Ming novel, but as 三國志, thus framing it as a derivative of the dynasty history rather than the later fiction. That being said, there is much of the fiction of Three Kingdoms culture present in the series. Regardless, the series' original title makes the both scholarly and player tendency to categorize the RotK series as of greater historical merit than DW clear.

simultaneously from a gameplay perspective. Both series are notable for having been successful

enough to survive over thirty years on a consistent release schedule. With the success of both of

these East Asian historical titles, Koei solidified its position as a go-to developer for a small

corner of the already niche genre of historical simulation videogames. To solidify this position

and aided by the game-changing ability of Sony's PlayStation released in 1994, Koei began to

expand from these menu-based strategic games to more action-oriented titles, still focused on

Warring States Japan and Three Kingdoms China.

In 1997, *Dynasty Warriors* was released for the PlayStation. The game's Japanese title

was *Sangoku musou* 三國無双.[59] Despite the titular Three Kingdoms emphasis, it included

Warring States characters Oda Nobunaga and Hideyoshi Toyotomi alongside Three Kingdoms

characters in predominately Three Kingdoms settings. The placement of said characters within

classic Three Kingdoms settings such as Chang Ban Bridge or Hulao Gate, needless to say,

sacrificed much of the historical integrity of the two strategic series, culminating in essentially a

crossover between them. Unlike ROTK and NA, however, *Dynasty Warriors* was not a strategic

simulation game and rather a weapons-based, one-on-one fighting game much like the more

successful *Soul Caliber* series. The game was well received, but ultimately unable to stand out

amongst the plethora of now-classic fighting games released in the 1990s.[60]

Even with this oversaturation, the series was continued, but revamped entirely to become,

in Japanese, *Shin Sangoku musou* 真三國無双.[61] Confusingly, in English localization, rather

than amending the title into something along the lines of "True Dynasty Warriors," the title

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[59] In Chinese releases, both *Sangoku musou* and *Shin Sangoku musou* utilize the same characters as the Japanese versions and become *Sanguo wushuang* and *Zhen Sanguo wushuang*.

[60] *Game Informer*, "It's Historically Accurate!" October 21, 1997. Joe Fielder, "Dynasty Warriors Review," *Gamespot,* April 28, 2000. https://www.gamespot.com/reviews/dynasty-warriors-review/1900-2547380/.

[61] In Chinese releases, both *Sangoku musou* and *Shin Sangoku musou* utilize the same characters as the Japanese versions and become *Sanguo wushuang* and *Zhen Sanguo wushuang*.

Dynasty Warriors from the fighting game was retained with the new release being labelled as the second in the series. This has created a long-term disparity between English-speaking fans and Japanese and Chinese fans in which the Asian releases are one number behind the English versions. For example, in its Japanese or Chinese releases, the most recent *Dynasty Warriors* is 8, while the same game's Western release dubbed it *Dynasty Warriors 9.* Nonetheless, the new series, which for the purposes of this thesis maintain the standard, albeit confusing, English title structure will be referred to as *Dynasty Warriors* (DW), though typically only in consideration of entries 2 and onward.

Dynasty Warriors 2, released in 2000 during the first year of PlayStation 2's (PS2) lifespan, was the first entry into this "true" variant of the series. Since then, it has run simultaneous to *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* until the present day with the most recent entry, *Dynasty Warriors 9,* releasing in 2018. The new format of the game retained some of the elements of its fighter-style parent, such as a wide and unlockable character roster, elaborate background stages, and corresponding musical themes. It removed all traces of its Warring States sister series and revamped the playstyle from a one-on-one fighter to a one-on-a-million style. The elements of the fighting genre that did manage to survive were amplified. The character roster, one of the most identifiable facets of a fighting game, has multiplied with every release of the series starting with 28 characters in DW2 and most recently reaching 90 playable characters in DW9. The quantity and variety of characters has always been a staple of the series and is something important enough to warrant greater discussion at length to follow.

Rather than choosing one character and then opposing another singular playable character controlled either by the game itself or a friend with another controller as in the DW fighting game, in this hack-and-slash style, the player chooses a single playable character, equips them

with weapons and varying other gear, and heads out into an expansive ancient Chinese battlefield to fight against thousands of weak, peasant soldier units, middle difficulty commanders, and eventually, one or two generals, chosen according to the stage, from the available roster of playable characters. [62] These changes proved successful. DW2 received enough sales and positive feedback to preserve the series long enough to usher in the first wave of the series' peak success brought by DW3 and DW4, in 2001 and 2003 respectively, also released on PS2, the dominant home console.

Starting with DW3, each series entry took on a more generational release pattern beginning with the core game and then two related expansions, *Xtreme Legends* and *Empires*. Each expansion utilized the same models and engine of the core game but added additional content. *Xtreme Legends* (XL, for example DW3XL) typically added two or three new playable characters and a handful of new stages that included not only physical gameplay stages, but surrounding narratives usually detailing minor Three Kingdoms anecdotes excluded from the core game. The *Empires* (E, for example, DW3E) expansion took the stages and characters from the core game and allowed the player to choose either a playable character or create a custom character to then create a fully customized Three Kingdoms narrative. This would be reminiscent to the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* series with the action-oriented gameplay of DW. These expansions were released for every series entry until the most recent, DW9, where they seem to have ceased, in lieu of downloadable content updates to the core title. Further, there have been an ever-increasing number of spinoffs released in simultaneity with the core series, including the *Samurai Warriors* series which combined the hack-and-slash gameplay style with the narrative

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[62] A "playable character" within DW is easily distinguishable from a non-playable character (NPC) in that only playable characters receive individualized character designs, whereas NPCs, even when bearing the names of historical figures, share three or four standard appearances.

and characters of Koei's other main historical period, Warring States Japan. This series also received, for its first two core releases, its own variant of XL and E expansions.

During PS2's lifespan, 2000–2006, Koei released 31 historically themed games focusing entirely on the Three Kingdoms and Warring States periods, ten of which were of the DW franchise including the core games DW2-DW5 and their respective expansion packs. The following generation of consoles, from 2006–13, saw the release of the series on both PS3, as well as the dominant home console of the era the Xbox 360, and covered DW6 through DW8 including two expansions for each, totaling 9 DW releases. DW8, along with its expansions was then ported to the PlayStation 4, Xbox One, and Nintendo Switch in the following generation, from 2013 to the present, along with DW9 (another series oddball) also saw a release on the PS4 and Xbox One, with no expansions yet announced or released, thus only totaling 4 games at the twilight of the current generation.

The drastic reduction in quantity released follows with the trends of series' popularity. The series has had two surges in popularity, firstly with the release of DW4 in 2004 that continued into DW5 and again in 2011 with DW7, continuing into DW8.[63] For this reason, the discussions of gameplay will center predominately around DW4 and DW8, with occasional references to other successful titles in the series. In discussing success, it is also worthwhile to briefly mention the series most poorly received entries, 6 and 9, both of which attempted to change the established, monotonous, and button-mashing combat functions. This was the only major alteration in DW6 and as such it manages to still be a viable and series-conforming representation of the Three Kingdoms. DW9, however, not only shifts the combat style but the

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[63] Though definitive sales figures for videogames are always difficult to procure, games journalist Daniel Ahmad, known at the time by the username ZhugeEx, compiled a report on available *Dynasty Warriors* sales data in 2013. Though a bit dated, now, it provides a decent overview of the series' high and low points from a sales perspective with DW4 selling over 2.2 million units worldwide and DW7, at the time of the posting, over 1 million.

presentation of the games' entire world and associated narrative by reframing it in the style of an open world game. Though the details of how this served to effectively remove the narratological emphasis present in the series' other entries will not be included here, it is at least worth mentioning if only to explain my decision to use anything but the series' most recent entry for the focal point of this essay. To amend this and to provide something close to an up to date picture of the series, I will, as stated, utilize DW8 and the modern screenshotting amenities of the PlayStation 4 for most of this discussion.

English language localization has been consistent for not only each core game but for the two expansions through the present. Each core entry and the *Xtreme Legends* expansion have been fully dubbed by established voice actors. Until DW6, however, this production value was hidden beneath the glaring pronunciation errors present in the English language dubs. An infamous example being, the consistent pronunciation, from DW2-DW6 of Cao Cao, as "Cow-cow." That said, it is notable in that, even without proper pronunciation, the series' localization has always retained the original Chinese names of characters and locations making the cultural root of the series unavoidable to even the most gameplay-oriented players.

Romance of the Three Kingdoms and *Dynasty Warriors* are not the only Three Kingdoms related games Koei has produced. The aforementioned *Kessen II* was a strategy game featuring a Three Kingdoms setting, and a largely fictious plot. *Dynasty Tactics*, which received two releases, was a strategy role-playing game, removing the historical simulation and management elements of ROTK and emphasizing strategic, turn-based combat with character designs resembling three dimensional renders of the realistically styled ROTK portraits. The *Warriors Orochi* series serves as a crossover between DW and the Warring States series, *Samurai Warriors*, utilizing the most recent character designs from each and placing them in an entirely

fantastical feudalistic demon realm. *Youkai Sangokushi* is the most recent addition and features the characters and world of Three Kingdoms transformed by the colorful, cartoonish aesthetics of the *Youkai Watch* series, though it did not receive any official localizations outside of Japan.

Outside of Three Kingdoms culture, these games belong to another continuum, as well. That of the representation of history in not only contemporary media but more specifically videogames. There is such a multitude of historically themed games available that they are oft referred to as a genre unto themselves by popular game publications. Classifying videogame genres, however, leads one immediately into the crossroads of ludology and narratology in that to define a game as a historical game above all else, defines it solely on the content of its narrative. The gameplay is not, in any way, historical. Rather, it seems fitting to position place a given game into a narratological genre, in this case, that of historical representation, and a ludic genre, that of a gameplay style, such as hack-and-slash, first person shooter, role-playing, etc. At present, in order to cultivate a greater understanding of the series as it exists as a piece of contemporary media and the tradition of Three Kingdoms culture, it is worth examining the scholarship devoted to and prevalence of "historical games" and how the series negates such categorization.

The representation of history in videogames is a well-addressed areas of game studies, with two published volumes on the subject and numerous articles, most of which discuss in repetition a handful of historically oriented titles and series, such as *Assassin's Creed*, *Medal of Honor*, *Sid Meier's Civilization*, and *Total War*. Some of the series, particularly *Assassin's Creed* and its various iterations, attempts to deal in ancient societies, but in large part the periods covered in these games are substantially more recent, emphasizing medieval Europe and the World Wars of the 20th century. They also vary across gameplay genres from simulation to first

person shooters. While there has been, as stated, substantial study devoted to these games and their representation of history, it has typically come from two different perspectives. Firstly, these games have been studies with the utilitarian intention of assessing their educational or simulative viability and secondly, other scholars have focused more theoretically on understanding how videogames are able to incorporate historical narratives and representations for the sake of understanding videogames narratives themselves.

Perhaps because of the lack of a better category, Three Kingdoms games have typically been analyzed within these frameworks and as "historical games." Ng's chapter attempts to rank the various Three Kingdoms franchises in accordance with their attention to the SGZ, and Kwon discusses them as a means of stirring interest in the history. Other works that passingly mention the franchises, citing them as examples, such as Liao's and Chen's works, make use of surveyed responses from players who consider the games as means of intaking historical information in a popular format. While each of these works possesses an interesting perspective for approaching the series, ultimately categorizing either the DW or ROTK games as "historical," as they so often are, fails to account for the mythic, literary, and cultural history of ahistorical content within the games and within Three Kingdoms media past and present.

The hack-and-slash gameplay genre, though difficult to define as many game genres are, is typically ascribed to single-player action games that emphasize weapons-based combat with a variety of enemies structured into levels and stages. *Dynasty Warriors* is considered a quintessential example of such a game. To discuss the genre best, however, it is perhaps wise to explore a few other members of it. Another well-known hack-and-slash game is the *Devil May Cry* series in which the player controls the singular protagonist Dante and wielding a myriad of weapons, predominately a variety of swords and guns, defeats monstrous and demonic entities

spread throughout individually loaded stages.[64] At the end of each stage, depending on the skill with which the player manipulated the game's controls and combat system, they are assigned a letter grade and an in-game point bonus. While this feature is not present in all hack-and-slash games and rather is a trademark of *Devil May Cry* and its sister series *Bayonetta*, it is emblematic of something that is typically expected of hack-and-slash games, that is, a certain difficulty and nuance in combat.

Typically, in these series, the character's combat ability is mapped to the buttons of the controller and varies in complexity from the lengthy button and directional combinations required to successfully maneuver a fighting game to a simple attack, charge attack, dodge, and jump. The majority of the games listed above have systems whose complexity sits somewhere in between these two poles. They are also, more often than not, games that are known more for their technical gameplay conventions than for a narrative. At no point in either of these games, however, do the playable characters of Dante or Bayonetta level up. They obtain new weapons, unlock new moves, but ultimately, the player is expected to merely get better at the game. Other franchises considered members of the hack-and-slash genre, are *Onimusha* and *God of War*. While lacking in a direct grading system, they still require the player to develop some mastery of their character's combat ability as the primary goal of the game.

Dynasty Warriors is not one of these games. From DW2 onward, with the aforementioned exceptions of series' irregulars DW6 and 9, the combat sits squarely within the realm of simplicity. There are four main buttons to the right side of a PlayStation 2 controller, the system on which the game was first released, and there are four main actions available to the player with a handful of lesser commands attached to rear buttons. These simple actions can be

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[64] The series received its first iteration in 2001 on the PlayStation 2, with two more on the console, *Devil May Cry 4* on PlayStation 3, and most recently *Devil May Cry 5* on PlayStation 5.

chained together into combinations, but they are far from complex. They consist mostly of pressing the square button (assigned to simple attacks) a handful of times in sequence and perhaps ending with a singular press of the triangle button (assigned to charge attacks). As such, the overwhelming majority of the player's interaction with the series is relegated to the joystick's directional controls and two buttons. Though controllers have changed slightly over time, with the addition of a few more buttons, this button-mapping has remained largely unchanged from PlayStation 2 to PlayStation 4.

While in the aforementioned titles, when facing enemies of any level, there is a substantial risk of in-game death due to variations in enemy movements and power. In the DW series, aside from "bosses" who are identified easily in that they are pulled from the roster of uniquely designed characters, nearly all encounterable enemies behave in a similar, if not identical manner with a power that can be easily outmatched by the player with the utilization of the series' levelling system and weapon upgradability. Because these "bosses" are comprised of playable characters, a player with experience utilizing them in gameplay, is given even more of an advantage. Further, health, the typical in game marker denoting the player's status, while lost by suffering enemy attacks, can also be recovered in large quantity multiple times within a single stage by an action as simple as smashing open a clay pot in a standard and expected location. At the same time, the maximum capacity of one's health can be expanded drastically by levelling a character up. As such, for a player familiar with the very basic conventions of action games that the series utilizes, it is very difficult to lose.

The existence of these more complex hack-and-slash series has not been mentioned solely for the sake of establishing a strawman but rather to set up an existing conventional dichotomy that exists within the genre and to highlight the DW series' unconventionality.

Another emblematic hack-and-slash series is the PC-based series *Diablo*. The controls of *Diablo*

are only barely more complex than those of the DW series. The player's character is armed with

a main weapon and can perform a simple attack with it endlessly or utilize more powerful attacks

that consume the character's limited MP. Though there are many of these powerful attacks

unlocked throughout gameplay, only two can be mapped to the controls at a time, and as such,

this relegates control of the game's combat to three keys on a keyboard. In similar fashion to

DW, the only substantial threat faced by players who have mastered basic gameplay conventions

is stage bosses. Though possessing only three mainline entries, *Diablo* is a successful and, in the

western video-gaming sphere, a far more renowned franchise than DW. It is renowned, however,

not necessarily as a member of the hack-and-slash genre of which its controls and gameplay

obviously belong to, but as an action-RPG.[65]

The video game genre of Role-Playing Games (RPG) is probably one of the widest and

loosest genre definitions that can be applied to a game. However, at the very least, a decidedly

core tenet of it is that throughout the game, the playable characters' abilities and statistics will

grow usually according to a predetermined level system.[66] This system provides for two

predominate styles of gameplay: those that wish to progress through the game as quickly as

possible and thus with minimal character growth, maximizing the game's difficulty, and

secondly, those that choose to take their time undergoing the process of grinding to achieve

disproportionately powerful characters and drastically reduce the difficulty of boss and story

battles.[67] In contrast, in the aforementioned action-oriented hack-and-slash games, the playable

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[65] Douglas Schules, Jon Peterson, and Martin Picard, "Single-Player Computer Role-Playing Games," in *Role-Playing Game Studies: Transmedia Foundations,* eds. Jose P. Zagal and Sebastian Deterding (New York: Routledge, 2018), 111.

[66] Ibid, 109.

[67] Grinding, as defined by Schules et al., is "repetitively performing the same task, such as killing enemies, to improve character development or acquire items." Ibid.

character does not typically grow. They are able to acquire more weapons and more attacks and movements, but their basic statistics do not change overtime. Rather, it is assumed that the player's skill will increase with the difficulty.

While RPGs have been present in video gaming culture from *The Hobbit* to *Breath of Fire*, it was during the reign of the Sony PlayStation (PSX) that they began to take on new life as a massive, cinematic, narrative force. The PlayStation's success in the West brought with it several shifts to typical patterns in video gaming that served to amplify the success of the PSX-era RPG. Firstly, it succeeded as a console marketed not only to children, but to teenagers and adults, allowing the potential pool of players to expand beyond the stereotype of the young and the exceptionally nerdy, thus creating a broader audience of broader interests for games to land in. Secondly, it brought about the golden age of the subgenre of Japanese Role-Playing Games (JRPG). These games differentiated themselves from the previously dominating genres of fighting games, platformers, and action-adventures by placing equal importance on the game's narrative and storytelling as gameplay.[68] In turn, this required something different from the player.

Schumann writes, regarding the player requirements of RPGs, and in turn serving to provide a functional definition of the genre that extends beyond, merely, a levelling system, "RPGs are distinguished by a sophisticated character system and a complex gaming universe, so players must be able to familiarize themselves with complex topics quickly and exercise lots of patience."[69] It could be argued that this description is far more applicable to the genre of JRPGs, but that would be a lengthy digression.It is perhaps more succinct to allow it to broadly

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[68] Ibid.

[69] Christina Schumann and Daniel Schultheiss, "Power and Nerves of Steel or Thrill of Adventure and Patience? An Empirical Study on the Use of Different Video Game Genres," *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds* 1.1 (2009): 42.

encompass RPGs, though with an acute focus on those produced in Japan not only because of

DW's Japanese production, but because during the series' heyday, it was JRPGs that dominated

the global RPG market. Schumann's quote provides an excellent framework for this section's

discussion, and as such will be utilized in dividing the two predominant player requirements of

RPGs: consumption and comprehension of information (for our intents and purposes,

predominately narrative information) and patience.

Patience will be discussed first. In terms of gameplay, rather than emphasize real-time,

action-oriented gameplay, the majority of RPGs, particularly in the eras of the PSX and PS2

were turn-based, requiring the player to memorize not input commands but the strategic value of

each and every action available to every usable character. While a portion of that serves to

illuminate the more functional aspects of information processing required of the RPG-player, it

also is one facet of the requirement of patience. While in traditional turn-based RPGs, patience

comes from sitting back and watching without interaction as the on-screen characters enact the

previously designated command; in DW, patience in combat comes from repetition and

monotony. As described below in detail, the combat system, the main form of interactive

gameplay in the series, is not turn based, but real-time and active. However, it is extremely

simplistic and consists, predominately, of the repetitious mashing of three buttons in order to kill

drab, identical peasant soldiers before reaching, finally, a unique commanding officer and

occasionally being permitted to follow strategic commands in that typically amount to killing

more hordes of identical peasants.

Between these battles, in both DW and the traditional RPG, the player can expect to

remain motionless except for an occasional progressive button press as long non-interactive

cinematic cutscenes run for minutes on end. Since the PSX, every generation of console has

permitted for longer, prettier, and more of these cutscenes. By the PS2 era, elaborate and

intricate narratives expanded beyond the turn-based RPG into more action-oriented playstyles

some which retained other characteristics of the genre and others which disregarded it wholly.

Dynasty Warriors was one such franchises. Patience then comes, obviously, from the willpower

and investment required of the player to make their way through so much homogenous gameplay

and noninteractive narrative.

      If this is the case, however, the most pressing question is, where does this willpower

come from? How is the player's patience rewarded? The answer is with information. Information

that provides the player with a greater and more comprehensive understanding of the world in

which the game takes place, and thus providing them with a greater investment in its gameplay.

The "complex gaming worlds" of Schumann's quote may, more typically, refer to fantastical

worlds filled with monsters, supernatural abilities, and exotic, unnatural landscapes, but in this

case, it refers to the world of Three Kingdoms. Because of the narrative's age and the various

evolutions it has undergone, the world of a popular Three Kingdoms narrative is populated with

equally fantastical elements. Just as a frequent player of RPGs must be familiar enough with

genre conventions to glide easily between series ignoring some of the more standard tutorials,

the player with a preexisting Three Kingdoms knowledge can bypass some of the nuances of the

narration and focus instead on its differentiations and representations. And in reverse, one with

no familiarity with Three Kingdoms, just as one who has never played an RPG before must pay

greater attention to the definitions of HP and MP, must pay greater attention to the very basics of

the narrative.

      Every victory in *Dynasty Warriors* amounts to the same reward: more narrative.

Completing in-battle objectives, the player is rewarded with bonuses comprised of hidden

scenes, hypotheticals, and unlockable characters. Following each battle, they are rewarded with a cutscene, a narration, and even in the heat of battle with conversations between nearby characters. Narrative information is bountiful because it is the main source of player reward. The gameplay is merely a conduit for the narrative, a trivial task being undergone to achieve the ultimate goal of unlocking more elements of the Three Kingdoms narrative.

This is very much the same in many RPGs. To take an example from a classic, in *Final Fantasy VII*, the playable character of Vincent Valentine is wholly optional. To acquire him, one must undergo a series of time-consuming and tedious in-game tasks to be rewarded not only with an additional playable character, in a roster of many. To acquire Vincent Valentine is an act of gameplay that is rewarded solely with a character (an entity of narrative) and his accompanying backstory. This character and this optional bit of narrative, however, was so universally sought out and beloved by the game's players that it later received an entire spin-off game of its own. The point of this anecdote is to provide a glimpse of the ravenous consumption of narrative among RPG players and how understanding the playability and appeal of *Dynasty Warriors* is made a bit easier by viewing it as, at least, a relative of the narrative-heavy RPGs of its era. Thus, we are able to use this understanding of the importance of grandiose RPG narrative and these similarities with DW's narrative, to establish its importance to the game, and by association, its players.

This is not an essay on the ludic implications of the *Dynasty Warriors* game series, as, if it were, it would be an incredibly brief essay. The rules consist essentially of a series of simple input commands and the standard videogame requisite of not allowing one's health points, the standard measure of a playable character's viability, to be reduced to zero. As such, this section, regarding gameplay will follow Jesper Juul's definition of gameplay, as "not the rules

themselves, the game tree, or the game's function, but the way the game is actually played."[70]

Further, as "a consequence of the game's rules and the dispositions of the game's players."[71]

That said, in discussing the manner in which the game reflects its innerworkings (rules) and the

manner in which it reacts to the player, some discussion of the game's basic function is

necessary. As such, in the following section, while there will be discussion of function, it will

hopefully be framed as to make clear how the player is receiving the content as a result of these

functions as well as how that content is presented to them according to their selections and

preferences.

      While the majority of player interaction is a matter of input and action-oriented combat,

the preliminary phases of the game require a handful of choices that amount, effectively, to

selecting the narrative the player wishes to participate in. Though it is a simple selection, the core

interactivity of the series is this initial selection that allows the player to play through what is

essential a reframed romanticization of the various factions of Three Kingdoms period China.

The means by which this romanticization occurs has hopefully been exemplified within the

second chapter of this work and thus the discussion of gameplay to follow is merely to illuminate

the manner in which these created narratives are presented to the player and the means by which

the same player may affect it.

      Like the one-on-one fighting game from which the series arose, upon booting up a title in

the DW franchise, the player is faced with a series of choices. In both DW4 and DW8, the first

choice faced by the player upon starting a "New Game" is what story they wish to play through.

The games feature four or five 'factions' representing the eponymous three kingdoms, a category

dubbed "Other," that consists in large part of Dong Zhuo and Lü Bu's narratives, and starting in

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[70] Jesper Juul, *Half-Real: Videogames Between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 83.
[71] Ibid, 88.

DW7, the Kingdom of Jin. While the greater specificities of each narrative will be discussed

further below, each follows the historical trajectory of each respective Kingdom, ending

typically, at some point prior to their conquest by Jin. Thus, where the ROTK series is known for

allowing the player to completely alter the trajectory of history by uniting China or conquering a

given territory in the name of their chosen leader or even historical subordinate, no such outcome

is possible in DW. The outcomes possible within DW do not stray far from history or

convention. It is the presentation of the chosen kingdom which is altered.

For those who choose to play through the narrative of the Kingdom of Wu, the battles

and plots included from the wealth of content that is Three Kingdoms culture are those in which

Wu played the greatest role. The same is applicable to the other three factions, with starting in

DW7 and DW8, these plots ending with the confrontation of impending defeat by the newly

added Jin faction. In DW7, the average gameplay time for each individual faction is around 12

hours, and thus the game is built not to only be played once along one's chosen path, but for the

player to experience each path providing a more standard completed gameplay time of around

fifty seven hours.[72] This necessitative completionism is interesting because of the way that while

the series individually emphasizes and crafts each faction's narrative, they are also intended to be

consumed sequentially.

After selecting a path, the player then, in the case of faction-based entries, selects a

character. Initially, there are three available in each kingdom, consisting typically of the kingdom

leader and two others. Each playable character features a unique design, typically much more

theatric, garish, and in many cases anachronistic than the non-playable characters that occupy the

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[72] *Dynasty Warriors 7* on the "How Long to Beat" database compiles and averages out gameplay lengths of all styles from 29 players to fifty-seven and a half hours. "Dynasty Warriors 7," How Long to Beat, Last updated February 11, 2020. https://howlongtobeat.com/game?id=3005.

background of the game. In the majority of mainline series entries, each character utilizes a

unique weapon based on equally anachronistic but semi-historic weapons. As such, the choice of

which character to play as, is as much a matter of character and narrative preference as one of

gameplay. Some characters, such as Xu Chu 許褚 (d. 230 CE) of Wei move extremely slowly,

wielding powerful, oversized weapons, whereas others, such as Zhou Tai of Wu 周泰 (d. 223

CE) move extremely quickly, others even use ranged weapons. Each character possesses a

different special "musou" attack. This variation in playstyle for each character is probably one of

the most challenging elements of the series, in that to play with certain characters, one must

master relatively different abilities. Though, in series' entries in which the player may complete

each faction with a singular chosen character, this difficulty can be easily avoided.

While the majority of the series entries begin with the player's selection of a faction, and

then an officer, others begin with the selection of a character. Their in-game loyalties remain

inflexible, but in entries that center around characters rather than factions, the narrative's focus

narrows. Whereas faction-based entries, such as DW4, DW7, or DW8 present sweeping portraits

of the rise and fall of each kingdom, character-based entries present almost chronological

biographic narratives of the chosen character. On one hand, this allows the series' plot to adhere

more closely to history, removing the need for fan-favorite characters to appear in historically

inaccurate battles for the sake of gameplay. On the other, the effort necessary to create an

individualized gameplay route severely limits the potential for character roster growth. For

instance, DW6, the second iteration to utilize the character-centric approach following DW5,

actually reduced the size of the character roster from 48 to 41.

As previously referenced, however, the faction-based system is not flawless, either.

Particularly in the series first few entries, this function created huge break in the game's ability

to present the historical narrative with any semblance of historical or even conventional accuracy. Because the chosen character would be utilized the entirety of the faction's route and the Three Kingdoms narrative is invariably filled with frequent and major character death, after a certain point nearly all routes became wildly inaccurate to the point of altering the core narratives of Three Kingdoms. For example, in the case of Wu again, Sun Jian is considered the kingdom's founder. However, his death is recorded in the SGZ in 191 CE and in SGYY occurs early into the narrative in chapter 7. As such, the majority of the consolidation of the Wu kingdom south of the Yangzi is handled by his son, Sun Ce 孫策 (175–200 CE), who also dies prematurely, positioning his younger brother Sun Quan 孫權 (182–252 CE) as the leader of Wu for the majority of the SGYY and as the first king of Wu in the SGZ. But, in DW4, Sun Jian is an initially available and selectable character, and because of this, his death is completely bypassed in the narrative as to avoid forcing the player to switch playable characters midway through the route. The case is the same if Sun Ce is chosen, initially. This was obviously an issue not only in Wu's route but also in that of Shu, as well, considering the death of Guan Yu and eventually his oath-brothers, as well, far before the conclusion of the narrative.

This break in canonical filiality in earlier games is remedied in later games which, while becoming increasingly stylized, expand the narrative, included characters, and their respective filiality to established Three Kingdoms conventions. The faction-centric narratives of the DW3 and DW4 and the character-centric narratives of DW5 and DW6 were replaced by a new format in DW7 that was present through DW8. This reverts back to the initial format of the player merely choosing an initial faction, and then to select a playable character from three options, varying between each stage, usually with some historical or conventional association to the stage, itself. This format allows for not only the participation of more characters from the ever-

expanding roster, but also the incorporation of a greater theme present in other Three Kingdoms works, the waxing and waning presences of characters through time. The format also serves to remove many of the most blaring inconsistencies between established facets of Three Kingdoms culture and the game's presentation of it. An example is when Sun Shangxiang 孫尚香 (dates unknown)[73] marries Liu Bei prior to the Battle of Chibi, she is no longer playable in the Wu factional route and instead, is present thereafter only in Shu's route. Similarly, when Guan Yu dies at Fan castle, he is canonically dead in the game's narrative as well, and does not appear again as a playable option, despite the story's continuation.

Once the player's allegiances have been made, the chosen character is deposited in the middle of a sprawling battlefield populated by thousands of soldiers and commanders and given the objective of victory. These battle stages are, in being rendered as representations of various locations, similar to the structure of the series' precursor fighting game, as well as, a standard facet of PlayStation era gaming. Games are played through in a series of individually rendered stages, in the case of DW, representing famous Three Kingdoms battles. Though the combat system is simple, with one button controlling basic attacks and another unleashing a more powerful, charged "musou attack," the battles themselves are complex if only in terms of sprawl. The player is provided with a mini-map that advises the location of enemy commanders and a bar showing both sides "morale." When the player routs and defeats an enemy commander, or aids a struggling ally to victory, their morale rises, empowering their allies all across the battlefield, and in effect, strengthening their ability to autonomously eradicate other opponents. In early games, during these battles, there is little directive given and the player is, for the most

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[73] The daughter of Sun Jian, sister to Sun Ce and Sun Quan, historically referred to merely as Lady Sun, but retroactively referred to as Shangxiang.

part, left to their own devices to find the best means of victory, either by methodically defeating

each lesser commander on the battlefield or heading directly to the main enemy commander.

In later entries, particularly DW7 and DW8, more intricate scenarios and objectives are

added to these battle stages requiring the player to defeat particular commanders in a particular

order, approach a given enemy from a particular direction, or even utilize siege weapons such as

ballistae and mounted crossbows. Completing these scenarios as they are presented to the player,

in the midst of battle by the voiced floating heads of one's fellow commanders, typically allows

for a more detailed presentation of the narrative and in DW8 occasionally unlocks playable

"alternate" or "hidden" scenarios. These additional objectives are, however, for the most part

completely optional. The player is also free to disregard any given orders and merely rampage

their way through the battlefield as they did in prior series iterations, and as long as the enemy

commander is defeated, they will be rewarded with "Victory!" Or, if the player allows their

character's health to be reduced to zero, they will be met with "Defeat" and the infamous "Game

Over."

While there is a tremendous amount of narrative story given to the player in a standard

playthrough of the game, there is also content, particularly famous Three Kingdoms moments,

that are meant to be specifically sought out, unlocked or encountered rather than forced upon the

player. Firstly, encountering events, then typically in-battle cutscenes, were most prominent in

DW3-5 during the era of the aforementioned unstructured battle stages. For example, in DW3, to

see Zhang Fei's single-handed barricade of Chang Ban bridge, the player must actively seek out

the bridge on a sprawling battlefield to trigger the associated cutscene. It can easily be missed or

purposefully avoided by a player choosing to avoid the bridge and move straight for the enemy's

main camp. Another example is encountering Zhuge Liang's stone sentinel maze, only

encounterable if the player has chosen the faction of Wu and located the unmarked maze in the battlefield.

In later games, this system develops further becoming unlockable rather than encounterable. DW7 and 8 feature unlockable stages that represent both famous scenes that were otherwise absent from the main narratives as well as alternate and completely noncanonical variations of the story, comprising the aforementioned categories of "hidden" and "alternate" narrative scenes. The Battle of Xiapi stage and the process to unlock it in DW8 provides an example of both. To unlock the stage, the player must complete the specific tasks denoted in the stage prior. This act alone provides a means of rewarding the player for abiding the explicitly presented in-battle conditions. This differs from the freeform structure of the earlier games in which cutscenes and narrative rewards are to be encountered either at random or with a preexisting knowledge of famous Three Kingdoms moments. These conditions themselves are to task the player with completing noncanonical tasks such as, in this case, preventing the deaths of both Cao Cao's son, Cao Ang 曹昂 (177–97 CE), and Wei officer, Dian Wei in the previous stage presenting Cao Cao's loss against Zhang Xiu 張繡 (d. 207 CE). Completing these tasks thus alters the entire remaining portion of the Wei route by retaining Dian Wei as a playable character, despite his historical demise. In the DW8 variation of the Battle of Xiapi, only unlocked by completing the aforementioned noncanonical conditions, is not in its own noncanonical, but rather is the only means of viewing this game's iteration of Xiahou Dun's eye loss.

Finally, as long as the player achieves their victory in both mainline and supplemental battles, they will be typically presented with a post-battle cutscene. This cutscene will illuminate the following narratological events, and then, utilizing the time it takes for the game system to

load the next stage of gameplay, a disembodied voice will narrate further plot details, particularly the greater context of what is occurring in the other two kingdoms. Once the load is complete, the player will be faced, usually, with another cutscene introducing the next battle, and then, once again, the pre-battle preparation menu, requiring them to select a character, equip their weapons and continue into yet another massively rendered battlefield. This constitutes the core gameplay cycle of set-up cutscene to preparation to combat to concluding cutscene to loading/narration and back to set-up cutscene.

Because each route within the games is presented not as narrative nodes in a greater Three Kingdoms story cycle, but as a complete narrative, in and of themselves, conveying contextual information to the player is one of the series' primary focuses. This contextual information is typically of the kind that be can be avoided, skipped, or ignored if the player already has some familiarity with the Three Kingdoms world, or if they are solely interested in the games for gameplay's sake. Outside of information cinematically presented to the player in the form of cutscenes and in-battle dialogues, there are two other important means by which the game elucidates the Three Kingdoms narrative, both of which amount to an act of tremendous info-dumping.

As mentioned briefly above, after every battle-stage the technical limitations of the game require a period of loading. Many games use this time to provide the player with small tidbits of information either regarding gameplay or inworld trivia or, in the case of *Dynasty Warriors*, to provide a narration of peripheral events. These loading sequences have been more or less the same in structure since DW2 and typically consist of presenting the player with a map of the Central Plains and showing the strategic movements of either the chosen faction, or the others, with an explanation provided either by voice over or merely captioned across the screen. Either

way, it is a tremendous amount of information presented to the player at once and typically, the

complete script for the loading sequence substantially outlasts the technical process of loading,

itself, allowing the player to skip over huge chunks of information once loading is complete. A

small section of an example being the following introduction to the initial Yellow Turban battles

within DW7XL:

> During the Later Han, the signs of impending rebellion were everywhere.
> Corruption within the Imperial Court had thrown the land into chaos and caused
> the people to suffer greatly. In this time of uncertainty, the people found
> themselves yearning for change. Zhang Jiao, the leader of a religious sect known
> as the Way of Peace, fanned the flames of rebellion and formed an army. This
> uprising would later come to be known as the Yellow Turban Rebellion. The
> threat of the Yellow Turbans loomed like a dark cloud over the Han. Sensing their
> impending doom, the Imperial Court raised the call for troops across the land.

A second means of exposition is the inclusion of in-game encyclopedias. In DW, the

encyclopedia consists of five sections: history, officers, battles, glossary, and timeline. History

provides multi-factional and fairly accurate retellings of larger narrative arcs such as the Yellow

Turban Rebellion, Cao Cao's Rise in the Central Plains, or the Pacification of Nanzhong. The

battles tab functions much the same but explains individual conflicts small and large from a

historical and unbiased perspective. The function of timeline is self-explanatory as is that of the

glossary, which serves to define some of the potentially esoteric Chinese historical terminology

necessary to fully understand both the game and Three Kingdoms. This includes concepts

interestingly irrelevant to the game itself, such as Cao Zhi's "Poem of Seven Steps."

Officers is the most interesting and relevant section of the encyclopedia to this essay. On

one hand, the section serves, as one might expect, as a biographical reference for the games

expansive roster of characters. On another, however, it provides detailed information regarding

even the most minor of named officers in the game. For instance, in DW8, Bai Rao is the second

alphabetical figure listed in the officer's encyclopedia and is described as "a leader of the

Heishan bandits. He, along with Yu Du and Sui Gu, led an invasion force in the tens and thousands against Wei but [is] eventually defeated by Cao Cao at Puyang." Needless to say, the Heishan bandits have not yet been made a central narrative theme in a DW game and as such, Bai Rao is hardly a character one would expect a player to come looking for further information on, particularly considering that encountering him in battle would amount to little more than a nametag floating above a generic low-ranking officer. Nonetheless, at the very least, Bai Rao is a historically viable minor character. Others, such as Ahui Nan, "a retainer of Meng Huo and Lord of the 3rd Cave," are explicitly denoted to be "fictional" characters, in this case created for the Zhuge Liang southern expedition portion of the SSGYY. That said, the encyclopedia is quite loose with its demarcation of the "fictional," for in the case of other characters, particularly those that have received individual designs and the status of playable, such as Guan Suo and his wife Bao Sanniang. Neither figure can be historically validated and predominately appear in their own Three Kingdoms narrative node amongst the greater story cycle, but their historicity is still given the benefit of the doubt by the game, itself. Because of this, it is perhaps best to take the encyclopedia of DW not as a hard and fast historical resource, but as a composite reference of Three Kingdoms culture.

Kwon, in discussing the manner in which Three Kingdoms based games are consumed by players and fans, states that "one first develops his or her interest in the work by reading the novel, and his/her escalated interest in the work leads him/her to explore *Three Kingdoms* in other formats and in various other revisions, or vice versa."[74] While the entire quote serves to illuminate the process of expanding Three Kingdoms consumption, it is the "vice versa" process, wherein the player first consumes the narrative as a video game and then expands beyond them

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[74] Hyuk-Chan Kwon, "Historical Novel Revived," 125.

to not only other modern adaptations, but historical ones, and then raw history, itself. After all, as Jinhee Kim writes in "no invention has transformed the demographics of Three Kingdoms readership more than videogames."[75] In this order, Kwon later states that "such tendencies often escalate to the point where the reader develops a preference for revisions that are based strictly on historical facts rather than on the traditional novel.[76]" It is these in game encyclopedias that provide an easy, built-in introduction into the greater world of Three Kingdoms media for those beginning with a DW or ROTK game. They are by no means comprehensive, but as examples cited above should highlight, they are a means of at least making the player aware of the expansive narrative world.

One of the most iconic facets of the *Dynasty Warriors* series is the massive roster of playable characters and the series' ability to incorporate each of those characters, at least once, into the center of the narrative and by association, the gameplay. Between this feature, the series' unusual blend between action and narrative, and its ability to incorporate a tremendous wealth of optional information, the games' format has become something of a success. Even after the zenith of DW's popularity, these features have allowed the format to be successful in creating spin-offs from massive franchises. *Dragon Quest, the Legend of Zelda,* and *Fire Emblem* have all received "warriors" spin-offs, in which characters from each respective series are grouped together in a massive roster for the player to select and button-mash their way through usually lighter narratives related to the worlds of the core titles. Outside of videogames, manga *Fist of the North Star*, *Berserk*, *One Piece, Attack on Titan* and *Arslan* have all received "warriors" games, transposing the simplistic, action-oriented gameplay over the characters and worlds of

[75] Jinhee Kim, "The Reception and the Place of *Three Kingdoms* in South Korea," in *Three Kingdoms and Chinese Culture*, ed. Besio and Tung, 145.
[76] Hyuk-Chan Kwon, "Historical Novel Revived," 125.

each title. Many of these spin-offs have become successful in their own right, with *Dragon Quest Heroes* receiving a full sequel and *Hyrule Warriors* and *Fire Emblem Warriors* receiving new downloadable content years after release.

What the success of these games and the success of the developers to transpose a single format across so many different works shows is that though the combination of simplicity, action, and narrative found in DW is unorthodox, it serves a specific function and fills a particular niche. This niche is that of officially produced fanservice. For instance, in the case of the long-running, strategic JRPG series, *Fire Emblem*, each game or series of games (usually containing two or three correlated titles) takes place in its own, standalone world with no connection to any previous. *Dragon Quest* is much the same. Though initially a niche title with sporadic and rare official localizations outside of Japan, since the release of *Fire Emblem Awakening* in 2013, the series has had a resurgence and international popularity with the rise of a huge fan community of content creators and consumers. Because of this newfound following, the series was a prime target for a "warriors" variant allowing the series to semi-canonically allow previously unrelated characters to fight against or alongside each other in a way much the same as they would in "alternate universe" fanfictions.

Obviously, within the DW series, all characters, even those who may or may not historically have come into direct contact with each other, existed over a small period of time within a confined and singular world. It is then, not the Three Kingdoms narrative that provides the game format with long-term success, but the ease with which other, equally expansive worlds can be inserted into it. Though the characters of *Fire Emblem* may each come from separate, unconnected worlds, there are as many, if not more of them. Each comes with as much lore as any Three Kingdoms character and with their own share of iconic and lesser-known heroes

leading to the necessity of massive in-game encyclopedias, character rosters, and locales. Though typically derided as "simplistic," "repetitive," and "button-mashing," it is perhaps the format created by the DW games that provides the most long-term potential for maintained success.

Conclusion

This essay began with an overarching look into the definitions and history of Three Kingdoms culture from the historical period to the contemporary era with an aim of exemplifying the multiplicity and adaptability of Three Kingdoms narratives. This sweeping summation allowed for the subject matter, the *Dynasty Warriors* series, to be situated within this continuum of works past and present. After surveying such materials, the case of Xiahou Dun's transformation from mediocre officer of the Three Kingdoms to *Dynasty Warriors* leading man, was provided with the intention of illuminating exactly how the videogame series interacts with past pieces of Three Kingdoms culture to produce a new, yet not unconventional product. Further, the example provided offers a representation that is both grounded in source material, but largely accepted as a newly iconic Three Kingdoms character and associated moments. Finally, the third section of this work explored the means by which the series functions not merely as a narrative, but as games. This was done with an emphasis on the manner in which the simplistic gameplay and emphasis on narrative and content causes the series to exist between conventional gameplay genres. Despite this uncategorizable nature, the format of the series, specifically the ability to overload the games with characters and information, has proven successful in not only the representation of Three Kingdoms narratives, but many others as well.

By approaching the subject from these three vantage points, namely, the historical context of Three Kingdoms culture, textual interactions and representations, and as functional videogames, it is my hope to provide a comprehensive understanding of the *Dynasty Warriors* series. That said, it is quite obvious that in attempting to provide this understanding, the analysis has leaned closely to the direction of narrative and content. The reasons for this lean, however, should be apparent from the appraisal of the games' functionality and ultimate emphasis on

narrative and content above all else. Ultimately, the series is both a commercially and narratologically successful continuation of Three Kingdoms adaptations. Rather than allowing for a completely personalized interactive formatting, it allows the player to refocus the heroic, flamboyant, and sweeping narrative style of the *Sanguo yanyi* around whichever kingdom or character one finds themselves drawn to. This refocus is done, however, in all cases, with an awareness of existing Three Kingdoms materials that cultivates a sense of hereditary legitimacy within the stylized and contemporary presentation.

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