ABSTRACT

The three prominent sovereigns of the Three Kingdoms were Cao Cao 曹操, Liu Bei 刘备 and Sun Quan 孙权. They were the rulers of Wei 魏, Shu 蜀 and Wu 吴 respectively.

During the end of the chaotic period of eastern Han, the imperial government became weak and incompetent, there were many warlords trying to annex territories. Cao Cao, Liu Bei and Sun Quan evolved among the warlords and established the situation of the Three Kingdoms gradually. The success was owned to their leadership qualities and the style of ruling the countries. The purpose of this honours thesis is to examine the leadership qualities of the three leaders. The thesis focuses on the strategies they used to build their empires, management skills, the art of utilizing their subordinates’ talents and diplomatic skills. It is interesting to find out the strengths and weaknesses in their style of leadership as it can be used for reference in today’s world. The last part of this thesis also discusses the artistic image of these three leaders.

The Three Kingdoms was based on the historical facts from San-kuo-chih 三国志 compiled by Ch’en Shou 陈寿 (233-297). The author of the novel, Luo Guanzhong 罗贯中, did not follow the historical facts exactly for the sake of artistic creation. In the novel, he purposely drew attention to the conflicts between Shu and Wei, letting Liu Bei play centrestage as a popular humanitarian. And at the same time, Cao Cao is characterized as a arch-careerist. As for Sun Quan, his leadership role becomes prominent in the later part of the novel when he collaborates with Liu Bei. As a result, the artistic image of Sun Quan is inferior than the artistic image of Cao Cao and Liu Bei. Moreover, the artistic images of Cao Cao and Liu Bei show complex characteristics under different circumstances. Overall, the artistic image of Cao Cao is the most out-standing one.