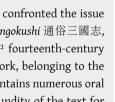# Translating oral effects in East Asia: an Edo period version of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*

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Abstract: This paper investigates how Konan Bunzan 湖南文山 confronted the issue of oral effects in the seventeenth-century translation *Tsūzoku sangokushi* 通俗三國志, a widely-read Japanese serialization of Luo Guanzhong's 羅貫中 fourteenth-century *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Despite being a famed written work, belonging to the 'Four classic Chinese novels' (*si da qishu* 四大奇書), Luo's novel contains numerous oral elements which emulate domestic storytelling culture. The fecundity of the text for orality studies is thus apparent. In examining how the oral effects in Luo's text were changed in translation into Japanese, I first use Idema's model of the six markers of 'the storyteller's manner' to evaluate how oral effects are mostly lost in translation, paying attention to certain aspects which are omitted over others. Second, I prove that certain oral elements, such as the inclusion of poems in parallel prose into the narrative, undergo less significant changes. Finally, I assess the usefulness of Idema's framework beyond its original Sinological context, evaluating its applicability to *Tsūzoku sangokushi.*

Keywords: Romance of the Three Kingdoms, literary translation, Ming vernacular fiction, secondary orality, oral effects, Chinese-Japanese translation

Introduction

In western scholarship, orality and its relationship with written texts are strongly associated with disciplines like Classics and Biblical Studies, with many of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks for addressing these topics emerging from these academic fields. Japanologists have also engaged with these issues in relation to pre-modern and early modern textual genres. Scholarship regarding oral elements discernible in Japanese written texts has primarily focused on oral residues.[1] This paper shall instead focus on oral effects, examining how Ming (1368–1644) Chinese vernacular fiction changes in translation into Japanese.[2]

Whilst numerous previous studies have investigated orality, few outside of the field of Sinology have explicitly discussed oral effects in relation to East Asian literature. Discussions of oral effects of Japanese translation of Ming vernacular fiction are rarely subject to thorough analysis. The prevailing scholarly consensus is that oral effects in Ming vernacular fiction are lost in translation into Japanese. I problematize this approach, arguing that by breaking down oral effects into further categories, detailed information regarding the nature of the omission of these features is provided. Additionally, this paper illustrates that certain oral effects are not entirely removed. To this end, Idema's (1974: 70) model of 'the storyteller's manner' is applied. I repurpose the model to show a systematic overview of the Japanese translations of the Ming vernacular fiction it was designed to analyze. I will also reflect upon how useful Idema's framework is for understanding these texts. My analysis centres around Konan Bunzan's 湖南文山 seventeenth-century *Popularized romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Tsūzoku sangokushi* 通俗三國志), an Edo period (1603–1867) translation of Luo Guanzhong's 羅貫中 sixteenth-century *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguozhi tongsu yanyi* 三國志通俗演義).[3] Bunzan's translation was not only the first complete Japanese translation of a work of Ming vernacular fiction, but also played a pivotal role in the devel-

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[1]   In particular, the *heikyoku* 平曲 genre, a tradition of blind monks performing *Heike monogatari* 平家物語 (*The tale of Heike*) narratives, has been extensively studied in relation to oral residues. Many approaches have been taken to understand the oral quality of *heikyoku*, such as the application of the Parry-Lord oral-formulaic theory (Butler 1966). Komoda 薦田 (2008) draws attention to how Yamamoto's 山本 (1988) application of Parry-Lord theory to the genres of *sekkyō-bushi* 説経節 (sutra ballads) and *goze uta* 瞽女唄 (blind woman songs) was also highly influential on later *heikyoku* research.

[2]   It is crucial to distinguish the notions of 'oral residues' and 'oral effects', which both fall under the broader categorization of 'oral elements'. 'Oral residues' denotes expressions indicative of analphabetic thought, patterns of thinking that preceded a writing system, in addition to spoken culture visible within a written text. They can be considered unintentional manifestations of the oral. By contrast, 'oral effect' refers to anything that is written to mimic speech, such as dialogue and conversational elements. Since the emulation of oral storytelling was a common device in Ming vernacular literature, oral effect is the subject of the present study.

[3]   The title 'Romance of the Three Kingdoms' was popularized in English-language discourse due to Brewitt-Taylor's (1925) translation. Whilst rightful debate exists regarding the suitability of the 'romance' translation, this paper nevertheless uses the title to avoid ambiguity.

opment of succeeding native genres. This paper systematizes the oral effects of this vital text in the Japanese literary canon.

Studies into the orality of Japanese translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*

Questions of orality in Japanese translations of Ming vernacular fiction have been explored throughout the years. In one of the most important works on Ming vernacular fiction in Japan, Ogawa Tamaki 小川環樹 (1968: 169) acknowledges the oral dimension of *Tsūzoku sangokushi*, analyzing Bunzan's translation *vis-à-vis* the inclusion of the tale of Guan Suo 關索, a remnant from the oral genre of *pinghua* 平話 (plain tales). However, Ogawa utilized this oral element to identify the manuscript upon which Bunzan's translation is based. The orality of the text has thus been used solely as a tool for textual comparison, as opposed to an avenue for exploring how oral elements changed via translation. Other Japanological research discusses Bunzan's translation and orality but is not concerned with oral effects. For example, Nagao Naoshige 長尾直茂 (1998), an authoritative voice on Japanese reception of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, is preoccupied with Bunzan's difficulty regarding vernacular Chinese forms, noting proficiency with certain grammatical elements such as particles. The derivation of vernacular Chinese from spoken forms shows the significant value of Nagao's work in relation to orality studies. However, the discussion of oral effects, the main form of orality discernible in Bunzan's *Tsūzoku sangokushi*, is not touched upon. Both Ogawa and Nagao have inspired this paper through their structured and detailed analyses of Bunzan's translation. Their approaches of prioritizing systematization and thoroughness will be applied to present the oral effects of Bunzan's translation in a structured manner. It is also worth noting that some Japanologists have discussed the loss of features that would be categorized as oral effects within Idema's (1974) framework of 'the storyteller's manner', such as Zakou Jun 雜喉潤 (2002), Qiu Ling 邱岭 and Wu Fangling 吴芳龄 (2006), and Matthew Fraleigh (2022). Before unpacking the contributions of these scholars further, it is important to introduce the Sinological concept of 'the storyteller's manner' and gauge its suitability for the Japanese context.

Idema's model of 'the storyteller's manner'

In Chinese studies, the oral dimension of Ming vernacular fiction has been discussed extensively. It is therefore reasonable that Sinological approaches can be used to help explore Bunzan's translation with regard to oral effects. For this study, Idema's (1974: 70) concept of 'the storyteller's manner' will be utilized. The model provides a useful method with which to understand the oral nature of Ming vernacular fiction because it contains a clear categorization of six types of oral effect, all of which are discernible in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Its organized and clear nature will help to create a similarly comprehensive overview of *Tsūzoku sangokushi*, first identifying different types of oral effects and then examining how oral effects have changed from the source text through translation. Furthermore, due to the division of oral effects into multiple types within the framework, a more detailed view of them is presented than in most Japanese scholarship on the topic. Throughout early modern Japan, many Chinese-language texts were received and translated. Therefore, it is vital that we understand the nuances of how these oral elements were received in detail to explain how they were transformed in translation.[4]

Prior to using Idema's framework, one needs to understand the emergence of the concept of 'the storyteller's manner' as an oral effect, and to contextualize his work in the Sinological discourse. In writings of the May-Fourth cultural movement 五四運動, which began in 1919, texts belonging to the genres of *huaben* 話本 (vernacular novellas), *pinghua*, and some *xiaoshuo* 小說 (sometimes translated as 'novels') were considered to possess traits of residual orality (Breuer 2001: 21).[5] Since then, these features began to be interpreted as a type of literary effect in Chinese pre-modern literary theory. Western scholars have engaged with this concept since at least the 1950s, when Birch (1955: 351) wrote of the 'valuable literary function' of 'storyteller's phrases' in relation to *huaben*, and Hsia, in his seminal monograph on Ming and Qing *xiaoshuo*, referred to the concept of 'the storyteller's mode of narration' (1968: 17).[6] The works of Idema and Hanan in the 1970s, with their respective theories of 'the storytellers' manner' and the 'simulacrum' of the oral storyteller, were instrumental in concretizing this idea of a storyteller's voice as a stylistic device within western scholarship (Hanan 1977: 87). Idema's field-defining study (1974) outlined the main characteristics of a 'storyteller's manner', which is the constructed voice of the Chinese storyteller in Ming vernacular fiction. The six features of the storyteller's manner are outlined by Idema as

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[4]   This framework is born from the mind of a western scholar, and problems can arise from viewing East Asia through a foreign lens. Whilst Idema's model is useful, I proceed mindfully on that basis. To write this article, research by East Asian scholars has been consulted thoroughly in an attempt to mitigate this potential pitfall.

[5]   I have chosen to uphold the translation of 'novel', following the precedent set by scholars such as Hsia (1968). For discourse surrounding the appropriateness of this translation see Ge (1997: 194). The May-Fourth movement was spearheaded by writers such as Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936); see Lu Hsun (1959) for his comments on *pinghua* and *huaben*.

[6]   In Hsia's study, the term encompassed the episodic structure of the vernacular novel, in addition to suspense-building tag-expressions.

follows:

1. 'Sessions' (回 ch: *hui*, jp: *kai*): a unit of textual segmentation meant to evoke the breaks in a storyteller's performance.
2. Notes of suspense: the practice of ending each 'session' on a cliffhanger and tag-expression to encourage further reading/listening of the book/story.
3. Recurrent use of phrases.
4. Inclusions of poems and descriptive pieces in parallel prose into the narrative.
5. The occasional passages in which the author in the guise of a professional storyteller addresses the public directly, to give a moral verdict.
6. Episodic structure of the novel as a whole.

Since the publication of Idema's book, this concept has featured in many studies with scholars continuing to engage with variations of the framework (e.g., Porter 1989: 132; McLaren 1998: 261–278; Børdahl 2003: 65–112; Børdahl 2013). This paper continues this tradition of research by applying 'the storyteller's manner' to *Tsūzoku sangokushi.*

'The storyteller's manner' and Japanological research

Considering Idema's concept of 'the storyteller's manner' and its position in Chinese Studies, we can use this lens to understand Japanological research about translations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms.* Zakou acknowledges the removal of suspense-building tag-expressions at the end of each chapter, which is the second marker of the storyteller's manner in Idema's framework. Zakou (2002: 83) discusses these expressions as a talking point to attract the intended readership of the translation. His argument is that the intended audience of samurai and wealthy townspeople would not have understood these 'notes of suspense', due to the lack of familiarity with vernacular forms, and that this feature was subsequently omitted in translation. Qiu and Wu (2006) similarly briefly touched upon the removal of these tag-expressions but did not devote space to reflecting on the removal of this feature beyond it representing the removal of vestiges of 説唱 *shuochang* (storytelling and singing). Recently, Fraleigh discussed the removal of notes of suspense and certain poems, the latter being the fourth marker within Idema's framework. Fraleigh agrees with Zakou that prospective readers would not have been familiar with these vernacular elements (2022: 74). These analyses are all valuable and insightful; however, in terms of orality studies, they fall short of discussing all oral effects visible in the translation. This paper expands upon these studies, addressing overlooked features of the storyteller's manner and re-framing this prior research to conform to Idema's more sophisticated analytical

framework. The model helps us to break down the broad field of orality into a catalogue of oral effects with which to explore *Tsūzoku sangokushi*. By using it, one can understand how consistently certain markers of 'the storyteller's manner' are removed. Furthermore, the extent to which certain features are omitted over others will be analyzed. Examining the fourth marker leads to discussions of how poetry is retained, evincing how the omission of oral effects is not as systematic as first thought. Idema's framework therefore provokes deeper reflection on the text and the reason for these differences. Given the importance of Bunzan's *Tsūzoku sangokushi*, a comprehensive analysis of this text is overdue.

Romance of the Three Kingdoms

Before analyzing the specificities of *Tsūzoku sangokushi*, a short overview of its source text is warranted to illustrate the novel's broad cultural impact and, for the purposes of this present discussion, its relevance to orality studies. Luo Guanzhong's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is one of the most famous novels in East Asia. It belongs to the category of the 'Four classic Chinese novels' 四大奇書 (ch: *si da qishu*, jp: *shidaikisho*).[7] The lengthy text (made up of 240 'sessions', a type of textual unit discussed in section one) has great historical and cultural significance, inspiring numerous translations within and beyond the Sinosphere.[8] The novel is set in the Three Kingdoms period 三國時代 (AD 22–280), one of the most sanguinary epochs of Chinese history, and Luo's writing was heavily informed by texts from the annalistic historical canon, such as Chen Shou's 陳壽 *Sanguozhi* 三國志 (*Records of the Three Kingdoms*) and Pei Songzhi's 裴松之 annotations to it, entitled *Sanguozhi zhu* 三國志注 (*Annotations to Records of the Three Kingdoms*).[9] Whilst the novel's setting and influences are historical, it also contains many fictional elements: Qing scholar Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738–1801) notably described the novel as 'seven parts fact and three parts fiction' 七分實事, 三分虛構 (Zhang 1986). This greatly fictionalized account of the events of the Three Kingdoms period would go on to influence all subsequent discussions of the era, both in China and neighbouring countries.

Of particular significance is the oral dimension of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. First, Luo's novel drew influence from antecedent oral texts, namely *Sanguozhi pinghua* 三國志

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[7] The categorisation 'Four classic Chinese novels' commonly refers to *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Water margin* 水滸傳 (ch: *Shuihu zhuan*, jp: *Suikoden*), *Journey to the west* 西遊記 (ch: *Xiyou ji*, jp: *Saiyūki*) and *Plum in the golden vase* 金瓶梅 (ch: *Jin ping mei*, jp: *Kinpeibai*). For further background information about groupings of vernacular novels see Plaks (1987: 3–5).

[8] This paper uses the term 'Sinosphere' while acknowledging its flaws. For discussions of the pros and cons of each variant of this term within English-language discourse (e.g., 'Sinographic sphere', 'East Asian cultural sphere') see Kornicki (2018): 15–20.

[9] These histories themselves cited many other sources which have since been lost; Chen Shou 陳壽 and Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (n.d.).

平話 (*Plain tales of the Three Kingdoms*). Sinologists have long discussed this aspect of the text *vis-à-vis* Guan Suo narratives, with debate arising over their status as vestiges of orality (McLaren 1981; West 1993). These narratives have been written about extensively in the Japanese context, particularly by Ogawa (1968). Second, the connection between the language of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and the language spoken at the time of its composition has implications for orality. The novel is not written in a pure vernacular form, but rather it 'employs a linguistic medium that mingles *baihua* 白話 and simple *wenyan* 文言' (jp: *hakuwa*, *bungen*) (Ge 1997: 3).[10] The vernacular elements of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* are fewer than in other texts within the traditional Japanese grouping of *Chūgoku kōshi shōsetsu* 中国講史小説 (Chinese historical novel), such as *Water margin* 水滸傳 (ch: *Shuihu zhuan*, jp: *Suikoden*) (Tokuda 1987: 15).[11] The novel was thus less representative of the spoken language of the time, rendering this connection a less important avenue of enquiry. However, its fewer vernacular elements would have made it an excellent text for translation, which has great implications for the selection and accessibility of the text (Nagao 1991: 39). Third, the novel's popularity also inspired later works of storytellers (Li Fuqing 1997: 177), that is, it was not only orally influenced, but also played a significant role in the development of succeeding oral works. Finally, orality is also present through the utilization of the 'storyteller's manner' device, a framework which helps us to understand oral effects in the novel. Considering all these factors, the novel is a rich ground for examination of orality.

Tsūzoku sangokushi

Printed books, including translations, were not readily available until the Edo period. Before then, dissimination of texts was limited to manuscripts distributed amongst scholars and Buddhist texts at temples. This great increase in publishing rates led to increased literacy amongst people of all social classes and genders. Important Chinese philosophical texts were, for the first time in Japanese history, readily available and accessible to new audiences. Other genres, such as historical fiction, saw unprecedented demand, and a burgeoning readership for the *tsūzoku* genre 通俗 (popularized tales) emerged. Vernacular Chinese fiction began to occupy a more central position in the Edo literary system (Even-Zohar 1990: 14). Moreover, the Edo period was multilingual, and many translators worked

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[10] The oral feature known as 'vernacular speech' 白話 (ch: *baihua*, jp: *hakuwa*) would have been discernible within the speech of the characters in the novel. Fraleigh (2022) has paid heed to this aspect in his recent study of *Tsūzoku sangokushi* and acknowledges the difficulties Japanese translators would have encountered with these elements.

[11] With the release of Hedberg's *The Japanese discovery of Chinese fiction: the* Water margin *and the making of a national canon* (2019), debates surrounding Japanese translations of *Water margin* have been cemented in English-language scholarship. The exciting implications of Hedberg's study in relation to oral effects warrants further enquiry, perhaps as comparanda with *Tsūzoku sangokushi*.

with multiple languages, including different registers of Chinese and Japanese (Clements 2015).

When Konan Bunzan's 湖南文山 *Tsūzoku sangokushi* 通俗三國志 (*Popularized romance of the Three Kingdoms*) was published from 1689–91, it broke new ground, becoming the first of the two bestselling versions of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in the Japanese tradition.[12] The earliest known record of a copy of the novel in Japan was noted by the famous Sinologist Nakamura Yukihiko 中村幸彦 (1968), who identified a 1604 listing of the text 通俗三國志 in the personal reading records of Hayashi Razan 林羅山. However, it was not until the serialization of *Tsūzoku sangokushi*, the earliest complete translation of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* into Japanese, that the novel became familiar to Japanese audiences.[13] Republished with hiragana glosses and illustrations as *Ehon tsūzoku sangokushi* 繪本通俗三國志 (Illustrated Romance of the Three Kingdoms) (Ikeda Tōri 1836–1841), the accessibility of the text increased and its popularity grew further. Bunzan's translation was a bestseller that was reprinted several times throughout the Edo and succeeding Meiji period (1868–1912). The text was highly influential, causing a revival of interest in Three Kingdoms narratives and their subsequent permeation into native genres such as *eiribon* 絵入り本 (Ueda 2006: 8–20), *jōruri* 浄瑠璃 (Torii 1998), and *sharebon* 洒落本.[14]

Due to the significance of Bunzan's translation in the Japanese literary canon, key issues of authorial identity and its source text have been discussed extensively by Japanese scholars. These issues are essential context to understanding the text prior to examining its oral dimension. First, 'Konan Bunzan' is thought to be a pseudonym of two monastic brothers based at Tenryūji 天龍寺, Gitetsu 義轍 and his younger brother Getsudō 月堂: the former is not a courtesy name, whilst the latter is (see a quotation from *Taikan zuihitsu* 大観随筆 by Tanaka Taikan 田中大観 in Fraleigh 2022: 65). Tokuda (1987) argues that these two brothers could be Kian 徼庵 and Shōhō 章峯, the translators responsible for *Kanso gundan* 漢楚軍談, another vernacular novel. Tokuda identifies Shōhō as the main translator of *Tsūzoku sangokushi* due to his preference towards shortening passages in translation. Irrespective of the true identities of the translators, the text is identifiable as a co-translation. Tokuda comments on the influence of two people co-translating the text, stating that the styles of the translators eschew difference. However, he does not draw attention to the role co-translation would play in how oral effects change. As Cordingley and Frigau Manning

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[12] The other famous version was written by Yoshikawa Eiji 吉川英治 and was serialized during the Asia-Pacific War (Yoshikawa 1989). Yoshikawa's novel, while more popular in present-day Japan, does not receive the same amount of scholarly attention. For information about the distinctiveness of Yoshikawa's *Sangokushi*, see Hakamada 袴田 (2013). For the wider context of wartime Japanese editions of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms,* see Hakozaki 箱崎 (2012).

[13] *Tsūzoku sangokushi* is the second extant complete translation into a foreign language, after the Manchu *Ilan gurun-i bithe* published in 1650. For more information about this translation, see Gimm (2013: 110–13).

[14] Some examples of parodies based on the novel include *Tsūjin sangokushi* 通人三極志 (1780) and *Fūzoku onna sangokushi* 風俗女三国志 (1824) (Kin 2010: 280). Nakagawa 中川 (1994) discusses the *sharebon Sangokushi* 讃極史 (a homonym of 三国志) in depth (see Chiyōka sōan shujin n.d.).

(2016) point out, 'much work remains to be done in detailing the qualitative differences in a collaboratively authored text', raising numerous questions into how such a process affects translation. These observations also prove true in the case of *Tsūzoku sangokushi*, in which it is challenging to assess the role of the two translators, particularly in relation to an aspect as specific as oral effects. In this paper, the translators shall be referred to jointly as 'Konan Bunzan'.

The Bunzan translation is based on the source text *Li Zhuowu's Criticism of the Three Kingdoms* 李卓吾先生批評三國志 (hereafter *Li's Three Kingdoms*).[15] First proposed as a hypothesis by the Meiji Sinologist Kōda Rohan 幸田露伴, this relationship was proved by Ogawa (1968), based on a distinctive orthographic error specific to the source text edition that was carried over into the translated text. Other significant scholars of Ming vernacular fiction, such as Nagao (1997, 1998), have since agreed with this. Finally, it is important to note that Li's manuscript differs from the most famous version of the novel, which is a Qing (1644–1912) era recension of Luo's novel by Mao Lun 毛綸 and Mao Zonggang 毛宗崗.[16]

Tsūzoku sangokushi and Idema's model of 'the storyteller's manner'

1. Sessions

To explore oral effects in *Tsūzoku sangokushi*, let us first turn to Idema's first marker of the storyteller's manner, the use of 'sessions' 回 (ch: *hui*, jp: *kai*). Whilst the term is used to denote a unit of textual demarcation in Ming vernacular fiction which is smaller than 'volume' 卷 (ch: *juan*, jp: *kan*), its origins are rooted in the oral performance tradition. Sessions (sometimes translated as 'chapters' in English-language discourse) originally denoted a break in storytelling episodes where the reciter would pause to receive money (Idema 1974: 70). As a written rhetorical device, sessions consciously emulate these breaks

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[15] There are two important considerations to be made concerning Li Zhuowu's edition of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and Japan, which fall beyond the remit of this present study, but nevertheless require acknowledgement. First, Tokuda (2001) argued that *Li's Three Kingdoms* inspired a Japanese text prior to Konan Bunzan's translation, Nakae Tōju's 中江藤樹 Ijinshō 為人鈔 (1828). This has implications for the reception of the text in Japan. Second, it has been hypothesized by Nagao (1993) that Li Zhuowu's edition entered Japan via Korea. Interactions with Korean texts mentioned within the article, such as Ryu Seong-ryong 柳成龍 (1633), could have had an impact on the oral effects within the translation. These two areas warrant further investigation.

[16] Note that *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 is the name for the famous Qing version of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, created by Mao Zonggang 毛宗崗 (1632–1709), in turn building on the work of his father Mao Lun 毛綸. They edited the text, shrinking its size, changing its ideological aspects, and increasing its readability. Their edition is popular domestically and is also the most familiar in the Anglosphere, with the translations of Brewitt-Taylor (1925), Roberts (1994), and Palmer (2018) being based on it. Contrastingly, Li's edition and Bunzan's subsequent translation are based on the earlier longer text *Sanguozhi tongsu yanyi* 三國志通俗演義.

during performance. Like its source text, *Tsūzoku sangokushi* is divided into these 'sessions'. Fraleigh (2022), discussing the removal of features of vernacular narratives, explored how the 'suspenseful division of chapters' was lost. Fraleigh suggests that the loss of this feature showed how Bunzan prioritized readability as opposed to retaining the vernacularity of the source text. While I agree with this opinion, it is beneficial to draw on the scholarship of Sinologists to review the 'sessions' and 'notes of suspense' separately and in further detail. While in Fraleigh's discussion, vernacularity is the focus, here sessions will be examined as a new avenue to study orality as shown by oral effects. The two main differences between *Li's Three Kingdoms* and *Tsūzoku sangokushi* are (a) the places where the text has been divided into sessions and (b) the use of tag-expressions featuring the term 'session' explicitly.

The difference in the division of the text into 'sessions'

Tsūzoku sangokushi features 240 sessions asssembled in 50 volumes, whilst its source text, *Li's Three Kingdoms*, has 240 sessions in 24 volumes. The number of sessions is retained. However, this is deceptive as a measure of similarity as the sessions conclude and begin in different places in the two texts. Sessions in Bunzan's translation are shown through editorial means, with chapter titles being used to demarcate the session unit. This editorial difference has big implications for the oral dimension of the translation. Using Idema's framework to understand *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, the division into sessions is a type of oral effect, a constructed orality that intends to mimic the divisions of a storyteller's performance. Bunzan's translational choice has removed the simulated divisions of a storyteller's performance from the source text and created new editorial divisions, consequently moving the text further away from oral culture. This change fits Fraleigh's (2022) point that unfamiliar vernacular features are not prioritized in Bunzan's translation. An example of this is the scene in which Chen Gong 陳宮 contemplates slaying Cao Cao 曹操 in his sleep after the unjust murder of Lü Boshe 呂伯奢 and his family (in the first volume of the source text, second volume of the target text). In *Li's Three Kingdoms*, the session concludes with Chen Gong looming over the sleeping Cao Cao's with his sword drawn, leaving readers unsure of what comes next:

> 'I considered Cao Cao a good man, I left my official post to accompany him. However, he has always been a dog with the heart of a wolf. If today I leave here, in the future there will surely be woe', Chen Gong thought to himself. He drew his sword, ready to kill Cao Cao. What will become of his life?
>
> 陳宮尋思。我將謂曹操是好人。棄官跟將他來。原是狼心狗。行之徒。今日留之。必爲後患。扷劍來殺曹操。性命如何。

(*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, tr. Downs)[17]

In *Tsūzoku sangokushi*, the session finishes in a slightly different place:

> 'Despite considering Cao Cao a loyal retainer of heaven at first, leaving my official post to accompany him, he has always been an unfortunate man with the wildness of wolves and tigers. If I don't kill him today, in the future he will surely bring about woes on this world. It would be better to stab him to death now', Chen Gong thought to himself. He drew and readied his sword, 'Reluctantly, it is time for me to make things right in the world after accompanying you. However, it would be ignoble to kill you now.' He then sheathed his sword and in the night, when the dawn had not yet broken, he withdrew with a gallop to Dongjun. Cao Cao awoke from his dreams, he looked around for Chen Gong but could not find him. 'It seems he has abandoned me for my lack of nobility', Cao Cao thought. As night became day, he quickly rode off in pursuit of Chen Gong.

> 陣宮心に思ひけるは、我はじめ曹操を天下の忠臣ばるち見て、官を葉て伴ひ來りしに、元來この人も狼虎の野心を挾む不當人なり、今日もし殺さずんば、後には必ず天下の禍を成ん、不ㇾ如いま刺殺んとて、劍を拔て立よりけるが、いや々我伴ひ來れるは天下を正さん爲なり、今これをを殺すは不義なるべしとて、又劍を鞘に收め、夜いまだ明ざるに馬を飛して東郡に落ゆきけり。曹操夢さめて陣宮を尋ねれども見えざりしかば、扨は我不義を疾で捨たるならんとて、急に打乘り、夜を日に繼で陣宮へ馳てゆく。

(*Tsūzoku sangokushi*, tr. Downs)[18]

As we can see, the session in Bunzan's translation ends on the resolution of a cliffhanger (see section 2 for a discussion of notes of suspense). These different segmentations of the text indicate that it was adapted to match new divisions preferred by Japanese culture. Børdahl (2003: 73) argues that the transference of Ming vernacular fiction from the oral to the printed medium resulted in divisions that differed from natural storytelling breaks. Through the additional transference of translation into Japanese, the divisions are removed one step further from storytelling conventions.

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[17] *Li's Three Kingdoms* (Jiusitang ed.): *juan* 3, *hui* 4, 9–10.
[18] Konan Bunzan (1912: 1.106–7).

Explicit references to the 'session' unit

In addition to the sessions concluding in different places, as shown by the editorial markers in *Tsūzoku sangokushi*, all explicit references to the unit of 'session' are also missing. As Zakou (2002), Qiu and Wu (2006), and Fraleigh (2022) have pointed out, vernacular features would not have been understandable to readers, and therefore they have been *deliberately* removed. By contrast, in *Li's Three Kingdoms*, the session unit is explicitly mentioned 187 times in the tag-expressions that conclude each chapter.[19] Most of these tag-expressions are orthographic variations of the expression *qie ting xia hui fenjie* 且聽下回分解 (listen on to the next session to find out), also used throughout *Journey to the West* 西遊記 (Plaks 1987: 220). Moreover, the collocation *xia hui* 下回 (next session) is present in all these session-referencing tag-expressions.

> **Tab. 1:**   Tag-expressions mentioning session by frequency.[20]

Tag-expressions mentioning 'session'	Frequency
Listen to the next session to find out 且聽下回分解	162
See in the next session 下回便見	23
Listen to the next session to find out 且聽下回便見	1
Listen to the next session to find out the resolution 且聽下回如何分解	1

Let us take the endings from one session of the novel to illustrate this. The session is called 'Sun Ce kills the immortal Yu Ji' (孫策殺于吉仙人) in Bunzan's translation and is known as 'Sun Ce angrily kills heavenly immortal Yu' (孫策怒斬于神仙) in the source text:

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[19] The other session-concluding tag-expressions also fulfil the purpose of constructing suspense and emulating the storyteller's manner but do not contain the explicit reference to 'session'.

[20] Orthographic variations, such as *hui* (回/囬) and *ting* (聽/聼/听), have been grouped together. For this paper, the decision was made to differentiate the tag-expressions to show the variety present in the text. Whilst the 'listen to the next *session* to find out' is the predominant set phrase, the use of multiple different expressions perhaps resembles natural speech more closely, given that it would be unnatural to repeat the same phrase in every session. Additionally, the second section of the 75th session is not included in the data set because it is absent in both the Jiusitang 九思堂 and Lüyintang 綠蔭堂 (*Li's Sanguozhi* n.d.; *Li's Three Kingdoms* (Lüyintang ed.) n.d.) blockprint editions consulted for this paper.

That night was windy and rainy. By dawn, there was no sight of Yu Ji's body. The soldiers entrusted with watching the body told Sun Ce, who was so angry he called for their deaths. Suddenly, there were clouds in front of the main hall. It was Yu Ji walking. Sun Ce grabbed his sword to kill him, but suddenly fainted. What will become of his life? Listen to the next *session* to find out.

是夜風雨交作。及曉不見于吉屍首。遂報與孫策。策怒。欲殺守屍軍士。忽見堂前陰雲中。于吉足步而來。孫策取劍斬之。忽然昏倒。未知性命如何。且聽下回分解。

(*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, tr. Downs)[21]

It was rainy and windy throughout the night. When it turned dawn, suddenly Yu Ji's body was missing. Those tasked with keeping watch told Sun Ce, who was extremely angry and called for their deaths. Suddenly, Yu Ji appeared in the clouds in front of the main hall, slowly walking. Sun Ce grabbed his sword to kill him, but suddenly fainted. He was then carried to his chamber, remaining in a stupor and not waking up. When Lady Wu came to see him, crying out to ask what happened, Sun Ce then awoke, bringing slight comfort to the situation.

其夜雨風一通して、曉に至て俄に于吉が屍失にけり。其趣を孫策に報じければ、孫策大に怒り、番の者共を殺んとしけるに、忽ち堂の前に陰雲起て、于吉靜々と歩み來る。孫策劍を拔て之を斬んとしけるが、忽ち目昏氣絕て眞倒に倒けり。諸人扶て内に入れども昏迷して醒ず。老母吳夫人走り來て、これは如何にと哭ければ、須臾にして甦り、少し人心地付にけり。

(*Tsūzoku sangokushi*, tr. Downs)[22]

In the source text, the reference to the session can be seen at the end, which reads 'Listen on to the next session to find out' *qie ting xia hui fenjie* 且聽下回分解. In the target text, however, this acknowledgement of the unit is omitted. Whilst it could be argued that this written rhetorical device of 'session' is hardly an oral feature, it does hark back to oral culture; thus, by its inclusion readers are reminded repeatedly that they are engaging with a text reminiscent of oral practices. By removing this feature to increase readability, the text consequently moves farther away from oral on the 'oral-written' spectrum. An oral feature was emulated when *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was written, but through the removal of these features, Bunzan's translation has, as it were, undergone further textualization. Though one could argue that these aspects have simply been deleted from the text in translation, it is reasonable to assume that they were removed precisely because

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[21] *Li's Three Kingdoms* (Jiusitang ed.): *juan* 8, *hui* 29, 62.
[22] Konan Bunzan (1912: 1.566-7).

they were *perceived* as markers of oral effects. The lack of suitability of these oral compo-
nents for the emerging Japanese readership of vernacular texts indicates that the text has
undergone a quasi-textualization process through their removal.

2. Notes of suspense

Like the tag-expressions that explicitly mention the unit of 'session' in *Li's Three Kingdoms*,
all suspense-constructing tag-expressions are omitted in Bunzan's translation. In Ming
vernacular novels, it is a distinguishing feature for each volume 卷 (ch: *juan*, jp: *ken*) to
finish on a cliffhanger, enticing readers to either continue reading or to await the next in-
stalment of the serialization of the text. Whilst this feature resembles a characteristic of
a written text, it is an emulation of the end of a storyteller's performance of a narrative
session; the dramatic concluding tag-expressions at the end of a session encourage listen-
ers to return the following day to hear the next session of narrative. In her studies into
Yangzhou *pinghua*, Børdahl discusses the use of these suspense-building 'conclusive stock
phrases' and explains how they are linked to the storytelling phenomenon of *mai guanzi*
賣關子 (selling the crisis), where the narration is halted during the climax of an exciting
episode (2013: 44).[23] This feature, which is omitted in Bunzan's translation, is what Idema
(1974: 70) would describe as 'the conclusion of each chapter on a note of suspense'. It is
utilized prominently in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Tab. 2).

Tab. 2:   Examples of notes of suspense in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

此人是誰	Who is this person?
畢竟是誰	After all, who is it?
不知性命如何	It is unknown if they will live
試看曹操道出甚話來	Look to see what Cao Cao has to say
其計如何	What is this plan?
其言如何	What do they say?
不知勝負如何	It is not known who will win and lose
如何對答	What will the answer be?
有何妙策	What's the best solution?

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[23] McLaren has also researched 'notes of suspense' in her analysis of the *bianwen* 變文 (transformation texts) corpus
uncovered at Jiading (1998: 277).

未知獻計者何人	It is not known who came up with the plan
未知有甚言詞	It is not known what was said
畢竟如何	After all, how is it?
曹操性命如何	What will become of Cao Cao's life
畢竟斯人是誰	After all, who is this person?
其計如何	What will come of this plan?
不知如何	It is unknown what will happen
言者是誰	Who was the speaker?

Whilst not explicitly referred to in terms of oral effects or orality, the removal of this feature to make the text more familiar to target readers has been discussed in extant Japanological research (Zakou 2002; Qiu and Wu 2006; Fraleigh 2022). Fraleigh stresses 'it is important to remember that an audience specifically interested in vernacular narrative did not yet exist in Japan' (2022: 74). I agree with Fraleigh, but wish to deepen this analysis, by considering the implications of these reflections on secondary orality with regard to two aspects. First, all tag-expressions were removed in translation. Therefore, we may ask whether Bunzan's priority was to omit suspenseful elements or whether they were a collateral loss emerging from the prioritization of removing tag-expressions. Given that in all instances the resolution of the climax is provided, which starkly contrasts with the storytelling convention of *mai guanzi*, it is evident that the 'notes of suspense' themselves were considered inappropriate for the target Japanese readers. Second, considering Børdahl's observations regarding the connection between 'notes of suspense' and storytelling culture, the loss of tag-expressions in Bunzan's translation can similarly be considered as distancing the translation from storytelling traditions. The tag-expressions which entertain in Chinese storytelling and are emulated in Ming vernacular fiction are replaced with a closed-ending narrative in *Tsūzoku sangokushi*. Both the marker of the storyteller's manner and its functions are thus lost, showing the precedence attributed by Konan Bunzan to the faithfulness of the translation as opposed to retaining its vernacularity (Fraleigh 2022).

3. Recurrent use of phrases

Let us now turn to discussing what Idema calls 'recurrent use of phrases' (1974: 70). These phrases are 'stock phrases' 套語 (ch: *tao yu*, jp: *tōgo*), and they are a common feature of Ming vernacular fiction. Examples given by Idema include 'the story goes …' 話說 (*hua shuo*), 'let's talk of …' 且說 (*qie shuo*), and 'this will not concern us' 不在話下 (*bu zai hua xia*) (Idema 1974: 70).[24] These expressions all simulate oral culture given their use of components such as 'speech' 話 (ch: *hua*, jp: *hanashi*) and 'to say' 說 (ch: *shuo*, jp: *shōu)*. Like the previous two areas of enquiry (use of 'sessions' and notes of suspense), they are also missing in *Tsūzoku sangokushi*. However, unlike those markers, stock phrases are seldom used in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, a detail that distinguishes it from *Water Margin* (Børdahl 2003: 71). The reason is that the novel is the least vernacularized of the Four Classic Chinese Novels category and is the closest linguistically to Classical Chinese 文言. This carries implications for the present analysis. Due to their scarcity, the recurrent use of stock phrases is perhaps not an obvious line of inquiry. Nevertheless, the application of Idema's framework requires pursuing it and offers insight into Bunzan's translation with respect to oral effects.

The expressions *que shuo* 却說 (let's not talk of), *qie shuo* 且說 (let's talk of), and *bu zai hua xia* 不在話下 (this will not concern us) all occur in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and serve to construct the voice of an omniscient narrator. These expressions are omitted in *Tsūzoku sangokushi*:

> In fact, Wei Yan had received a secret plan from Kongming. He held back 30 cavalrymen and hid by the side of Wang Shuang's camp. When Wang left with his troops, the camp was then set alight. When Wang Shuang returned, they took care of him, killing him. **Let's not talk of this.** Wei Yan led his troops back to Hanzhong. He met Kongming, delivering men and horses. Kongming hosted a large banquet. **This will not concern us. Let's talk of** Zhang He, who had been pursuing and unable to reach the Shu troops. He returned to the camp. From Chencang, Hao Zhao sent a report explaining that Wang Shuang had died. Cao Zhen sunk into overwhelming sadness, which then caused him to become ill. He returned to Luoyang. He ordered Guo Huai, Sun Li, and Zhang He to guard all roads to Chang'an. **Let's not talk of this.** Sun Quan, Prince of Wu, held court.
>
> 原說魏延受了孔明密計。先教下三十騎。伏於王雙營邊。只待王起兵趨時。却去他營中放火。雙若回寨。可作隄防。延因此斬之。**却說**魏延引兵回到漢中。

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[24] Some of the concluding couplets discussed in the previous two sections such as *qie ting xia hui fenjie* 且聽下回分解 ('listen on to the next session to find out') can also be considered recurrent stock phrases.

見了孔明交割了人馬。孔明設宴大會。**不在話下。且說**張郃追蜀兵不上。回到寨中。忽有陳倉城郝昭差人申報。言斬了王雙曹眞聞知。傷感不已。因此憂成病疾。遂回洛陽。命郭淮孫禮張郃守長安諸道。**却說**吳王孫權設朝。

(*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, tr. Downs, my emphasis)[25]

For this reason, Wei Yan ordered 30 cavalrymen to retreat to the back, gradually returning to Hanzhong. Cao Zhen suffered so many losses that he felt ashamed in his heart. In addition to this, the report came suddenly from Hao Zhao in Caocheng that Wang Sheng had been killed. Cao Zhen wailed with sorrow, becoming ill. He left Guo Huai, Sun Li, and Zhang He (amongst others) to remain and protect Chang'an, returning to Luoyang himself. *[start of new session]* At that time, Sun Quan, Prince of Wu, gathered the commanders-in-chief of the literary and military arts.

此ゆゑに魏延は三十騎の兵を引て後陣に下り、徐々と漢中へ回りける。曹眞は夥しく討れて心の内慚愧する上に、陳倉城より郝昭が早馬きたり、王雙が討れたる由を告ければ、哀み哭て病を受、郭淮、孫禮、張郃等を留めて長安を守らせ、其身は洛陽へ上りけり。*[start of new session]*

この時呉主孫權は文武の大將を集め (...)

(*Tsūzoku sangokushi,* tr. Downs)[26]

The stock phrases 'let's talk of', 'let's not talk of this', and 'this will not concern us' have all been removed in this example. Their omission was made possible by two strategies. First, details of the event were omitted. As a result of this less detailed rendering, it was not necessary to switch between narratives describing the actions of different characters. The oral effects represented by the stock phrases were therefore not required to help the text flow. Second, a 'session' break splits up the text, which is made evident by editorial segmentation as opposed to the use of tag-expressions (see section 1 for examples). This break substitutes for the stock phrase 'let's not talk of this'. Instead of using a storyteller's voice to end the narrative, a textual division has the same effect. These two translational strategies fulfil the literary functions of the stock phrases, and the oral dimension of these stock phrases is ignored.

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[25] *Li's Three Kingdoms* (Jiusitang ed.): *juan* 21, *hui* 98, 5–6.
[26] Konan Bunzan (1912: 3.316–7).

4. Inclusion of poems and descriptive pieces in parallel prose into the narrative

The fourth marker of the storyteller's manner as understood by Idema is the inclusion of poems and descriptive pieces in parallel prose into the narrative. This feature is evident in a text where the majority of the narrative is written in prose, but with frequent insertions of poetry. As explained by Børdahl, it is the narrative form that evinces the storyteller's manner, as opposed to 'the frequency of inserted poems' (2003: 70). So, what renders this feature reminiscent of storytelling culture? Alternating prose-verse style has been attested in early forms of orally-linked texts, such as *bianwen* 變文 (transformation texts).[27] *Bianwen*, which normally feature Buddhist themes, have designated narrative sections and sections designed to be recited. This renders the genre a clear example of *prosimetrum* (a type of text which alternates between prose and poetry) in the Chinese context.[28] Elements from *bianwen*, including this prosimetry, 'became constant features of Chinese drama and story-telling' (Børdahl 2013: 7). Thus, by examining the use of this prose-verse style, oral effects which mimic the storytellers' manner are discernible in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

Bunzan's translation appears to omit many poems from the source text. Fraleigh (2022: 71) pointed out that extradiegetic poems were omitted in *Tsūzoku sangokushi*. However, he notes three other categories of poem that are retained:

- those composed or recited by the characters;
- the contemporaneous children's songs that are occasionally referenced as prophesies;
- other instances where verse is somehow directly implicated in events unfolding at the diegetic level.

The inclusion of some poems and exclusion of others carries huge implications for orality studies regarding *Tsūzoku sangokushi*. First, whilst many oral elements were lost due to the omission of certain poems, an example being the one to mark Guo Jia's 郭嘉 death, other poems are retained, and their narrative function is the same. Second, the way to read these poems was indicated by the use of *kunten* 訓点 (instruction marks), a system to facilitate reading the text aloud. Whilst the loss of extradiegetic poems makes the text less prosimetric overall, it retains a general prosimetric character and therefore possesses a greater oral quality than the markers of 'the storyteller's manner' that have been examined thus far.

By applying Idema's model, greater questions are also raised regarding the role of poems

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[27] Sometimes known as *chantefables* within sinological discourse (for example, McLaren 1981, 1998).
[28] For more information on *bianwen*, see Mair (1983, 1989).

and oral effects more broadly in *Tsūzoku sangokushi*. One such question is why the oral dimension of certain poems was upheld. An explanation could be that the poems were not regarded by Bunzan as a foreign vernacular element that would have been unfamiliar to prospective Japanese readers, perhaps unaware of their function as an oral effect in the source text. Another reason could be that oral elements were received differently in Japanese reception of Chinese poetry as opposed to prose and these conventions played a role in the choice to keep certain classes of poems. Whilst these proposed reasons are speculative, the divergence from the pattern of removing oral effects reflected by the retention of certain types of poems and the consequent prosimetric format of the novel are notable features. Poems and their function in the novel therefore emerge as a fruitful avenue for further enquiry.

5. The occasional passages in which the author in the guise of a professional storyteller addresses the public directly to give a moral verdict

Examining the storyteller's manner in relation to poetry has opened up many possibilities for the study of oral effects in Bunzan's translation. Unfortunately, the next marker is less fruitful: the use of the storyteller's voice as a didactic tool. This feature consists of a constructed voice which directly addresses the listeners, prior to imparting a moral verdict on the events that have just transpired. This marker features prominently in the genres of *pinghua* and *huaben*, and even in other Ming vernacular novels such as *Water Margin* (see Børdahl 2003: 69). But it is mostly missing from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.[29] There are some imperatives such as 'try and look' 試看 (ch: *shi kan*) at the end of sections in the source text, but these are not didactic and therefore do not fulfil the criteria for this particular marker of the storytellers' manner. Furthermore, in Bunzan's translation, this feature has not been added. Due to its seemingly low importance in relation to the orality of the translation, this marker will not be discussed further.

6. Episodic structure of the novel as a whole

The final marker of the storytellers' manner which will help us to understand *Tsūzoku sangokushi vis-à-vis* orality is the episodic structure of the novel as a whole. It is often noted that Ming vernacular fiction tends to be episodic, owing greatly to its division into sessions (see section 1). Eoyang (1977: 57) notes that whilst it is correct to label the fiction as episodic, it is not a negative attribute. This episodic form has arisen out of necessity. The stories were historically recited in short units, thereby creating an episodic structure when linked

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[29] Porter (1989: 158) describes the use of interjections such as *kan guan ting shuo* 看官聴説 ('dear reader, let it be known that...').

together. In relation to the form, Liu (2020: 38) writes that the 'Ming-Qing communicative context dictates that the episodic novel is a fictional genre; an author's choice to write in that style communicates his or her intention to fabricate'. The association of this episodic format based originally on the constraints of the oral storytelling requirements with fiction is clear. This structural feature of the storyteller's manner is also present in Bunzan's translation, given that it is editorially segmented into sessions (as discussed in section 1). Whilst the divisions are different from the source text, the retention of the episodic structure indicates that this oral effect has not been greatly affected by translation.

Conclusion

This paper has applied Idema's framework of 'the storyteller's manner' from Chinese studies to Konan Bunzan's *Tsūzoku sangokushi* to assess how oral effects shift through the process of translation. Significant differences are found in relation to the first three features (sessions, notes of suspense, and recurrent use of phrases) as their systematic omission was proved. With regard to the division of the text into sessions, the original divisions of the source text were not upheld in *Tsūzoku sangokushi*. Furthermore, references to the unit of 'session' in tag-expressions are omitted. A change was also visible regarding the notes of suspense and recurrent use of stock phrases. In the former, tag-expressions were removed in translation, and in the latter, translational strategies to fulfil the literary function of the phrases were used. The remaining three markers of the storytellers' manner underwent less drastic changes. For example, most poems and descriptive pieces in parallel prose are retained in the narrative so that the effect of the interplay between prose and poetry remains apparent. Neither the source text nor *Tsūzoku sangokushi* make frequent use of the storyteller's voice as a tool to address the audience directly and impart a moral judgement; a notable change has not transpired. Finally, the episodic structure of the novel remained consistent with the source text.

To conclude, the application of Idema's framework to *Tsūzoku sangokushi* has had mixed results. It has revealed more about the oral nature of the text in relation to some markers and proved lacking regarding others. The idea of oral effects being lost *wholly* in translation has been disproved. As a result, we are forced to challenge the function of poems within narratives in Bunzan's translation and their bearing on orality. The application of Idema's model has also enriched the discussion of topics discussed by other Japanologists, such as 'sessions', connecting them more strongly to their role as oral effects and encouraging more detailed reflections, such as distinctions between editorial markers of sessions and tag-expressions explicitly mentioning the unit. To expand upon this study, the inclusion of poems in parallel prose into the narrative should be further analyzed, as the reasons for not

fully omitting these features whilst many others are cut should tell us more about Bunzan's attitudes towards oral effects. Furthermore, other theories of orality could be applied, or perhaps more early examples of Japanese translations of Ming vernacular fiction could be included, to construct a polysystem of the literary climate into which Konan Bunzan was translating.

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