

宴桃園豪傑三結義，斬黃巾英雄首立功

Three Bold Spirits Plight Mutual Faith in the Peach Garden; Heroes and Champions Win First Honors Fighting the Yellow Scarves

話說天下大勢 分久必合 合久必分

Here begins our tale. The empire, long divided, must unite; long united, must divide. Thus it has ever been.

周末七國分爭 并入於秦

In the closing years of the Zhou dynasty, seven kingdoms warred among themselves until the kingdom of Qin prevailed and absorbed the other six.

* The Zhou dynasty, founded in the 11th century b. c., was conquered in 256 B. c. by the western state of Qin, which established its unified rule over the empire in 221 b. c. In its fifteen-year dominion (221 to 206 b. c.) the Qin dynasty organized the realm into a system of imperial districts and counties (jun and xian), thus laying the geographical and bureaucratic foundation for the succeeding dynasty, the Han (206 b. c. to a. d. 220), China's longest and mightiest. The Warring States period (403 to 221 b. c.) preceded the Qin-Han era of unity; the Three Kingdoms era (a. d. 220 to 280) followed the Han.

及秦滅之後 楚漢分爭 又并入於漢

But Qin soon fell, and on its ruins two opposing kingdoms, Chu and Han, fought for mastery until the kingdom of Han prevailed and absorbed its rival, as Qin had done before.

* The Supreme Ancestor (Gao Zu), founder of the Han, was Liu Bang (256 to 195 b. c.), one of many rebels against the Qin. According to his "Basic Annals" in the S] the serpent he slew was the son of

the White Emperor, god of the west, which certain Qin kings had worshiped. The "Feng shan shu" of the SJ explains the incident of the killing of the serpent as the killing of the son of the White Emperor by the son of the Red Emperor. Eventually, fire and the color red came to symbolize the Han; they also symbolized the Zhou dynasty.'

念劉備 關羽 張飛 雖然異姓 既結為兄弟 則同心協力 救困扶危

We three, though of separate ancestry, join in brotherhood here, combining strength and purpose, to relieve the present crisis.

上報國家 下安黎庶

We will perform our duty to the Emperor and protect the common folk of the land.

不求同年同月同日生 但願同年同月同日死

We dare not hope to be together always but hereby vow to die the selfsame day.

皇天后土 實鑒此心 背義忘恩 天人共戮

Let shining Heaven above and the fruitful land below bear witness to our resolve. May Heaven and man scourge whosoever fails this vow.

子治世之能臣 亂世之奸雄也

You could be an able statesman in a time of peace or a treacherous villain in a time of chaos.