

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 135.

Well, here we are: three-and-a-half years and 134 episodes later, we are at the end of this podcast.

First, I want to say thank you to everyone who has listened to the show, written in to share your thoughts, and generously made a gift to support the show. This is definitely a labor of love for me, and you the listeners have made it easy for me to stay passionate about sharing these stories with the world. So please accept my deepest gratitude.

In fact, I'm so grateful that I'm not going to make you wait until the end of this episode for the big reveal of what my future plans are. Let's get it out of the way right here, right now. So, after this episode, first I'm going to take a little time off. It probably won't be six months, like when I finished the Three Kingdoms Podcast, but I probably will take at least the summer to just rest, remember what it's like to NOT be producing a podcast three weeks a month in addition to my day job, and lay some groundwork for the next show.

As for what that next show will be, many of you have written in over the past few years with enthusiastic suggestions, and I have given this matter a lot of thought. And I'm excited to announce that the next novel I'll be covering will be ...

[drum roll]

... Investiture of the Gods. Or as I like to call it, Daoist Mafia Wars.

For those of you who are not familiar with this book, it was published sometime in the late 1500s or early 1600s, during the Ming dynasty. So it was written after the Water Margin and the Romance of the Three Kingdoms. But it's set in a time period way before either of those two stories. Investiture of the Gods is set at the end of the Shang Dynasty, which supposedly existed from 1600 to 1046 BC. It's the earliest Chinese dynasty that is actually supported by firm archaeological evidence, and it is best known for oracle bones from that era.

As the name of the novel suggests, this book weaves a tale about the origins of many of the gods in Daoist mythology, and how they were intertwined with the earthly affairs of a dynastic transition. In some respects, it's kind of similar to the stories we have covered so far in that there is a cast of hundreds or thousands, each with their own special abilities, and it has a story that is rooted in historical events, however loosely. But *Investiture of the Gods* really launches us into the realm of the supernatural. As such, it is considered a major work in the Chinese genre of gods-and-demons fiction, a genre that includes works like *Journey to the West*.

Speaking of *Journey to the West*, that was among the most suggested ideas for next projects from listeners who have written in over the years. And believe me when I say that I absolutely intend to cover that novel. I loved *Journey to the West* as a kid, and I definitely will get to it. But after thinking it over for essentially the entire run of the *Water Margin* Podcast, I decided to do *Investiture of the Gods* next for a couple reasons.

First, now that I have built some semblance of a base of core listeners, I want to branch out from the often-cited four great Chinese classics and introduce you to some of the other interesting works as well that don't necessarily get as much attention in the West as the four classics. I think the *Investiture of the Gods* falls into that category.

Second, *Investiture of the Gods* is a logical transition in a couple ways. First, it still has many similarities to the epics we have covered thus far in its loosely historical premise and its parade of characters. At the same time, it starts to move us into that supernatural fantasy realm, which something like *Journey to the West* squarely occupies.

Also, even though *Investiture of the Gods* was written after *Journey to the West*, its storyline serves as a prequel of sorts. When we get to *Journey to the West*, we are going to encounter gaggles of gods and heavenly generals and such on every page, and *Investiture of the Gods* concocts a backstory for a

number of those characters. So I think it's a nice way to build some familiarity with some of those characters before we see them make cameo appearances in Journey to the West.

I know many of you are itching for the Monkey King and Pigsy and Sandy and all that, and we'll get there, probably in 2-3 years. In the meantime, there are also lots of neat and honestly crazy stuff in Investiture of the Gods, like a devious fox demon, a pissed off creation goddess, a super boy made out of lotus, a mighty warrior who rides around on a magical cow, and a mediocre priest who fails at everything, except kingmaking. And that's just the first few chapters. Wait till you get to the killer bees and the guy with hands growing out of his eyes that have eyes on them. So sit back and enjoy.

So we'll do Investiture of the Gods next, and then, we'll move on to Journey to the West, and then after that, tentatively, I'm thinking we'll do stories from the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. And that sounds like a couple pretty darn solid 5-year plans. And maybe sometime in the next decade I will have finished reading the Dream of the Red Chamber in Chinese and come to a decision on whether it's the kind of book I can do justice to in the format and style of my podcast.

Oh, and while we are talking about next steps, I should tell you this: All the stories I'll be doing from here on out will be under the umbrella of the Chinese Lore Podcast. When I started doing the Three Kingdoms Podcast, it was kind of just a one-off thing. And then when I got done with that, I thought, hey that was fun; let me do the Water Margin, too. And then I realized I really enjoy this and that there are many other classic Chinese stories I want to share with you in podcast form. But it's just not sustainable to spin up a separate podcast feed and website and have to rebuild the listener base every three years when I start a new story. So I'm going to consolidate all future, past, and present episodes under the Chinese Lore Podcast. Go to [chineselore.com](http://chineselore.com), that's chinese-L-O-R-E dot com, and you'll start seeing new episodes there when I come back from my break. You can also look for the Chinese Lore Podcast in your favorite podcast app now and subscribe to it.

My plan is to leave the Three Kingdoms Podcast and Water Margin Podcast websites and feeds as they are, so they'll always remain accessible as standalone shows, but I'll also copy those episodes into the Chinese Lore Podcast feed, because I'm a completist in that way. And then Investiture of the Gods will launch on the Chinese Lore Podcast feed in a few months, picking up where the Water Margin Podcasts left off. And don't worry. When the time comes, I'll be sure to drop an announcement on the feeds for both the Three Kingdoms Podcast and the Water Margin Podcast. So just stay subscribed to those feeds and you'll get a heads up.

Alright, I think that's all I've got about future plans for now, and I've got to say, I'm really excited; I hope you are, too. But let's now shift gears and close the book on the Water Margin. For the rest of this episode, I'm going to talk a little bit about the real-life or pseudo-real-life bandits of Liangshan, share some of my own thoughts on the novel, and answer some of the questions that you have sent in.

So, way back in episode 1 of this podcast, I mentioned that the Water Margin is something like 1 percent history and 99 percent fiction. So let's talk about that 1 percent of history.

There was in fact a historical outlaw from around this time period named Song Jiang. According to historical records, he led a gang of bandits that wreaked havoc for a while in Shandong and Hebei Provinces, which were the regions in which much of the novel was set. But beyond that, the history part really gets shaky. A lot of the so-called historical basis for Song Jiang and his gang came from a work that's basically Cliff's Notes for oral storytellers, and this work focused on the final years of the Northern Song. It contained some content about an outlaw named Song Jiang.

According to that text, this Song Jiang supposedly had 36 chieftains in his gang, and many of those chieftains had names that were the same as or similar to some of the chieftains in the novel. We are talking about guys like Wu Yong, Lu Junyi, Yang Zhi, Wu Song, Gongsun Sheng, and so on. They even had a lot of the same nicknames.

Also, supposedly tens of thousands of government troops were sent to put down the real Song Jiang, but to no avail. Eventually though, the real-life Song Jiang and his gang were pacified, but there's no agreement on how that happened. One version said the court granted them amnesty. Another version, though, said they were ambushed and defeated by a general. There's also no agreement on what happened to Song Jiang after that. One version has it that he was just executed upon being captured, while another claims that he joined the campaign against the rebel Fang La. But again, keep in mind that all of this is coming from sources that are probably more fictional than historical. But in any case, you can see where the novel got much of its inspiration.

Next I'm just going to ramble a bit about some of my main impressions of the novel, which will touch on some of the questions that were sent in. First, as you probably recognized, this is really a tale of two stories. The first two-thirds of the novel was really lively, colorful, interesting, and at times hilarious. The last third, however, gets really depressing and kind of just dull after a while, as our heroes kept getting killed off in chapter after chapter.

I don't have any basis for this thought, but I think that split nature might be one reason for the suggestion that the first 70 chapters were written by Shi (3) Naian (4,1), while the last 30 chapters were written by his protege Luo (2) Guanzhong (3,4). Also, the first two-thirds of the novel were all about individual arcs centering around specific characters and really delving into some day-to-day-life level of storytelling. The last third, on the other hand, was all about giant battles and military deployments. In many ways, the last third of the Water Margin reads more like sections from the Romance of the Three Kingdoms, which was written by Luo Guanzhong. So I can definitely see why some might speculate he had a hand in the Water Margin in some way.

And as long as we're making comparisons between the Water Margin and the Romance of the Three Kingdoms, I'll just say that they are pretty much 1A and 1B on my list as my favorites among the four Chinese classics. They're very different works, and I love them both for different reasons. I love the Three Kingdoms because of its breadth. It's such an epic story, dealing with the grand sweep of a century of history and focusing on the actions of kings and kingmakers.

On the other hand, I love the Water Margin because of its depth. When you think about it, the Water Margin is really a small story compared to the Three Kingdoms. The Three Kingdoms spans the entire empire, while the Water Margin for the most part takes place in one or two provinces. The Three Kingdoms covers almost a century, while the Water Margin deals with maybe 20 years if we match it up to the length of the historical reign of the emperor in the novel. The Three Kingdoms has battles featuring armies of hundreds of thousands, while the Water Margin has battles featuring armies of hundreds OR thousands. The Three Kingdoms is all about emperors, ministers, and generals, while the Water Margin mostly operates at the level of petty local functionaries, the occasional local rich man, and the vast underclass of civilians.

And yet, the Water Margin offers a much more colorful look at the people from those different tiers of society and their day-to-day life. Think about the detailed descriptions we get about life in a Buddhist monastery from the Lu Zhishen story arc, or the glimpse into the life of small-town merchants as we followed Wu Song and his brother the steamed bun peddler, or the look at how a low-level county official like Song Jiang lives and operates. Also, many of the characters in the Water Margin are more fleshed out in the text than in the Three Kingdoms. I always feel like the Three Kingdoms' stories are great, but you have to do a lot of homework to backfill the characters to truly appreciate them, whereas the Water Margin does a lot more of that work FOR you.

And of course, anyone above the age of 10 who reads or listens to the Water Margin will likely come away with some sense of ambivalence about our heroes, or anti-heroes. They are basically all shades of gray. Li Kui the Black Whirlwind could be a do-gooder one moment, a brutish cheating gambler the next, and a stone-cold killer at the drop of a hat. Song Jiang could be renowned for his kindness, charity and sense of justice, but he also did not hesitate to offer hush money and flee the law to avoid facing justice for murdering his mistress. Even Lin Chong the Panther Head, perhaps the most consistently good man in the novel, could lose his temper and beat up a bunch of village workhands for refusing to give him a sip of their wine.

So, not surprisingly, it's been an often-debated issue as to whether our heroes are really heroes, and how that affects the way we interpret the novel's message. Some have said the novel is about the importance of loyalty and honor, while others make a good case that the novel is really about the foolhardiness of stubborn loyalty to a liege who does not deserve it. A couple listeners, in fact, have written to suggest that the novel is really a satire of the notion of honor and loyalty that Song Jiang preached.

I think there are definitely multiple legitimate ways of viewing this novel. The quote unquote "traditional" way of viewing it is that the bandits were members of a peasant rebellion, commoners pushed too far by wicked officials and unscrupulous members of a corrupt upper class. And therefore, they were heroes, kind of like Robin Hood and his gang of merry men. The idea is that these were good, upright folks who were forced into banditry because society had no place for their sense of justice and honor. In fact, the phrase "Forced onto Liangshan" has become synonymous with being forced into going outside the law because you're the victim of a broken system.

But the thing is, if you think about it, I don't know if we can really say that's true for our outlaws. First, while some of them do come from the lowest rungs of society, most of them do not. Sure you have characters like the Ruan brothers, who were poor fishermen who couldn't make an honest living due to

no fault of their own. But look at most of the major characters: Song Jiang was a county magisterial clerk. Chao Gai, who decided to rob the premier's birthday gift convoy, was a respected local manorial lord. Lu Junyi was a card-toting member of the 1 percent. Lu Zhishen was a military officer. In fact, a big chunk of our outlaws were former civil or military officials of varying ranks. True, they were not court ministers or high-ranking commanders, but simply by virtue of their government positions, they were probably better off than 95 percent of the population, if not more. And then, among the people who weren't officials, most of them were not impoverished farmers or fishermen. We have shopkeepers, tavern owners, manorial lords, traders, merchants, and the like. For the most part, they did not sound like they were in particularly dire straits as far as making a living goes.

The second aspect of the traditional view that doesn't seem to hold up very well is the idea that our heroes were forced into banditry by a broken system. When you think about it, only a few of them actually ended up as outlaws because of this reason. Lin Chong the Panther Head, for instance, was just going about his own business when a corrupt government official's son started scheming against him, and in that case, the whole system did work against him. And you could also argue that Wu Song the Pilgrim or Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk had to take matters into their own hands and seek vigilante justice because the system was stacked against them.

But beyond those and a few others, most of our outlaws became outlaws by their own free will. Song Jiang went on the lam because he killed his mistress instead of sticking around to answer for his crime. Nobody held Chao Gai's head under water and forced him to hijack the premier's birthday gifts. Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu became outlaws after they killed Yang Xiong's unfaithful wife and her lover, a punishment that was way more severe than the crime. Yang Zhi the Blue-faced Beast didn't have to kill the thug who was harassing him on the streets. And then of course you had all the former government officers who opted to join the bandits after losing to them in battle. If honor and loyalty were a thing, shouldn't those guys have chosen death over surrender?

Oh, and speaking of a broken system, I think it's worth pointing out that many of our outlaws were not so much victims of a broken system, but beneficiaries of it. Just think about Song Jiang or Wu Song literally getting away with murder because they were well liked and well-connected. Or how about people like the constables Lei Heng and Zhu Tong, or jailers like Dai Zong the Magic Traveler or the Cai brothers who watched over Lu Junyi while he was in jail? They were lining their pockets with the various bribes that defined every interaction in the ancient Chinese legal system. They weren't victims of that corruption; they were active participants in and beneficiaries of that corruption.

So when you get down to it, only a small portion of the outlaws were really forced into banditry, and half of those guys were forced into it not by the system, but by other outlaws. Just ask Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt, who lost everything when Song Jiang framed him for a massacre in order to recruit him. Or Lu Junyi, who lost everything because, again, Song Jiang wanted to recruit him. Or An Daoquan the Miracle Healer, who was forced to go to Liangshan because his bandit friend killed a bunch of people in his name in order to make him turn brigand. So really, I think the phrase "Forced onto Liangshan" really should carry an asterisk. As for most of the other guys, I would say they were people who were doing ok financially, but perhaps were discontent with their station in life or restless and unable or unwilling to live within the boundaries that society imposes on them.

So one alternative is that we dismiss the traditional view and see most of the outlaws not as heroes or even anti-heroes, but just as a bunch of violent criminals who hide behind the rhetoric of honor. And if that's the view, then you could say they got their just deserts, or even got better than they deserved. In fact, one writer in the Qing Dynasty actually penned a different version of the last third of the novel where, instead of being granted amnesty, the outlaws were all killed or apprehended by government forces.

Another way to read it is that the outlaws were indeed heroes, their occasional questionable conduct notwithstanding. If we go in that direction, then what light does that cast Song Jiang in? Was he a man of honor who died for the principles he believed in? Was he an opportunist who betrayed the trust that his band of brothers had placed in him? Was he mostly a good man but just misguided in his faith in the imperial court?

My feelings about Song Jiang are ever shifting. At times, I think he was a fool whose obsession with loyalty and reputation doomed himself and most of his comrades. But then at other times, you have to ask, "Ok, if they didn't accept amnesty, what would've happened?" And the answer would probably have been that eventually, the government would send enough troops to take them out. Or they would have just succumbed to the inevitable deterioration of age, at which point they would have also been wiped out. Either way, there weren't a lot of good potential outcomes in the long run once you went to Liangshan. So, was Song Jiang right in that amnesty was really the only way out, and that it was preferable to have 20-some chieftains survive than to have none of them survive?

If I had to choose, I would say I come down on the negative side where Song Jiang is concerned. Whether he was opportunistic or just misguided, the fact is, his comrades put their faith in him, and he took them down a path that got most of them killed. And no matter what one thinks about his pursuit of amnesty, his final betrayal of Li Kui the Black Whirlwind is pretty hard to ignore.

Given the complexity of the Song Jiang character, I've always enjoyed observing his portrayal in different TV adaptations of the novel. Sometimes he's portrayed as ready to drop to his knees at the court's beck and call, down on all fours like a servile dog. Other times, he's portrayed as someone with a more heroic streak, who truly believes in the words he's espousing about loyalty and honor, and that it was his strength of character that convinced his fellow outlaws to follow him even when they questioned the path he was leading them on.

Alright, that's enough about Song Jiang, and enough rambling from me. Let's get to some listener questions.

First, listener Nolan asked why the Water Margin doesn't seem to be as popular or well known in the West as the Romance of the Three Kingdoms or Journey to the West, even though all three are epic adventures featuring heroes, villains, battle, and magic.

And you know what, Nolan? Beats me. I understand why the Three Kingdoms or Journey to the West would be relatively popular. But I really don't know why the Water Margin would not be. If anything, I would say the Water Margin would be the easiest of the three for adults to get into. Unlike Romance of the Three Kingdoms, you don't need to know anything about Chinese history or these characters' place in it in order to really appreciate the story. And even though it has a lot of names, the structure of the first half of the novel makes it easier to digest because we are typically only following the arc of a few characters at any one time. I mean, the book basically follows the Marvel Cinematic Universe formula of establishing one key character and then using that character's story to introduce other characters who then star in their own story arcs, before they all join forces in epic battles. The movies and TV shows practically make themselves! And compared to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms, a larger percentage of the characters are more fleshed out and less one-dimensional. And they are all shades of gray, which you would think would be very popular in this age of ambiguous anti-heroes.

So, if any of you out there have any influence on popular culture and mass media, feel free to pitch a streaming series based on the Water Margin. Or even better, pitch a Witcher or Red Dead Redemption-style open-world video game set in the world of the Water Margin. Do that, and I will insist you take my money.

Next, I got questions from multiple listeners about who my favorite characters are. So, when I read the novel as a kid, I always loved Hua Rong the archer. I think I just love the idea of a guy who's really

good with the bow and arrow, and it doesn't hurt that he's portrayed as dashing and heroic. But as I reread the novel as an adult, I found Hua Rong to be ... well, a bit dishonorable. I don't think he ever won a fight without resorting to the bow and arrow, and often times, he was essentially taking cheap shots at an enemy who was in the heat of battle against someone else. That just doesn't seem quite right.

So if I had to pick a favorite character now, I would probably say Lu Zhishen. He was a straight shooter, tolerated no fools, and really, made no pretense of what he was doing. Sure he was a brute, but unlike some of the other characters, he REALLY did only beat up the people who deserved it.

As for other favorite characters, I'd say, in no particular order, Gongsun Sheng the Daoist Priest, because of his magic and the fact that he was smart enough to get out before things fell apart. Dai Zong the Magic Traveler, because who doesn't want to be the Flash? Wu Song the Pilgrim because he's a Wolverine-esque berserker, though he loses a few points for getting into that one killing spree where he didn't discriminate between the guilty and the innocent. And Yan Qing the Prodigy because he's frankly the smartest and most versatile of all the outlaws.

Related to that, listener Jon also asked about my favorite character who did not survive the final campaign against Fang La. I think I'd say it's Mu Hong the Unrestrained, who I never paid attention to while reading the novel as a kid, but who now seems rather underrated. He was always in the first couple tiers of warriors among the chieftains, but just never seemed to get the respect or attention as the others in those tiers.

Listener Alex asked: What are some works of Chinese literature that aren't as well-known outside of China as Three Kingdoms or Water Margin, but are still influential and well-known in China?

Great question, and I assume, Alex, you would also include the other great classics like Journey to the West and the Dream of the Red Chamber alongside the Three Kingdoms and the Water Margin. So, I

already gave one answer earlier, and that was Investiture of the Gods. Another that comes to mind are the stories of the Spring and Autumn period, which are foundational in Chinese culture. There are also the stories about the Yang family, a multi-generation tale of a family utterly devoted to an imperial court that kept letting them down. There are also the various works by Feng (2) Menglong (4,2), a 16th- and 17th-century novelist who wrote a lot of short stories that gave a vivid depiction of life during the Ming dynasty. And then of course, you have all the great philosophical works like the Analects, the Dao De Jing, and the Yi (4) Jing (1).

Josh asked: Could you tell us how and why you make the choices you do for music, effects, tone, etc?

Well, Josh, to be honest, I was just making it up as I went. You'll notice that I dialed back the sound effects to virtually zero after the first couple episodes because I just didn't feel like they worked well. As for music, my approach was apparently to find three or four clips that worked well and use the heck out of them. I did know, going in, that I did not want to just use stereotypical "ancient Chinese" music. I wanted some of that in there, but I also wanted to use more contemporary music that you might hear in other storytelling settings. This was the first time I had played around with incorporating music into my podcast, so thank you all for bearing with me while I figured things out.

Craig asked: Were the nicknames actually in vogue during the time period, or were they just artistic license?

I guess it's a bit of both. Certainly there were examples of folks using and giving others nicknames, both complimentary and not quite so. But was everybody walking around calling themselves Long-Neck Tiger or Golden Mange? Probably not. I'd say that in fiction, you definitely see nicknames used a lot in genres of literature that came after the Water Margin, such as the Wuxia novels and such.

James asked why, even though Lu Junyi and Wu Song's elder brother Wu Dalang were both made cuckolds, Lu Junyi was regarded as a hero while Wu Dalang was a subject for ridicule. I think the distinction there is that Wu Dalang was painted as a timid, meek character who, even after he discovered his wife's treachery, could do nothing about it, while Lu Junyi, while temporarily fooled, got his revenge.

James also asked about Lin Chong the Panther Head, and why the author made it so that he never got his revenge when all the other outlaws ultimately got their revenge on the people who wronged them.

My feeling is that Lin Chong was the character used to show how the system was so broken that it would not allow you to keep your head down and stay away from trouble even if you tried. Lin Chong, unlike some of the other outlaws, really bent over backward to take the high road, let bygones be bygones, and be the bigger man. But the wicked who wielded power just would not let him be. All the high roads he took led to him being an exiled criminal, and his enemies couldn't even leave it at that and tried to kill him. So maybe his story is to illustrate that when the wicked are in power and the system is truly broken, there is no such thing as keeping your head down and going about your business.

Oh, and speaking of Lin Chong not getting his revenge, I came across what's basically an ancient fanfic of the Water Margin, and in that version, they actually had a couple chieftains go rogue behind Song Jiang's back and kill Lin Chong's archnemesis, the wicked Marshal Gao Qiu. And then they brought his head to Lin Chong, who was laid up in bed sick at the time. And Lin Chong was so enraged at seeing his nemesis's head that he leaped to his feet, cursed Gao Qiu, punted his head out the window and off a cliffside, and got so worked up that his illness flared up and killed him. So really, Lin Chong is just doomed to forever be the tragic hero, even when he does get his revenge.

Listener Kwee asked about whether the 70-, 100-, and 120-chapter versions of the novel all end in roughly the same way. So, the 100- and 120-chapter versions end basically the same way. I believe all the

chieftains die the same deaths. The main difference is that the outlaws went on a couple more campaigns to put down other outlaws after accepting amnesty before their bloody Southern campaign against Fang La. So they were even bigger sellouts in the 120-chapter version. There were also some other additional minor plot lines, like Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow finding himself a warrior for a bride on one of the campaigns.

The 70-chapter version, on the other hand, stops at the point where the outlaws received the stone tablet from heaven with all their names on it. There's no amnesty. Instead, it ends abruptly with Lu Junyi having a dream one night where all the outlaws were captured or killed, and he wakes up in a cold sweat. Some people have speculated that the editor who created this version chopped off the last 30 chapters as a statement about the futility of amnesty as a means for pacifying rebels, sort of sub-tweeting imperial policy in his own time.

Kwee also asked about what the real rebel emperor Fang La was like. The truth is, there's not that much about him. His rebellion started, waxed, waned, and was crushed all in a span of about two years. So, remember that at one point in the novel, we mentioned that the Song emperor was building a fancy garden and had sent men everywhere to collect local plants and rocks to transport back to the capital for the garden. Well, that happened in real life, too, and it was such an immense undertaking that it took a heavy toll on the people and caused much popular discontent. Fang La capitalized on that discontent to launch his rebellion, which quickly overwhelmed local authorities and took over a large swath of the region south of the Yangzi River. It's said that Fang La tortured the Song officials he captured. But once the Song court got its act together and sent a large army, Fang La's rebellion was doomed.

Next, Kerim asked what my favorite film and TV adaptations of the Water Margin are. So, I don't really have a favorite film adaptation, because no two-hour movie can really do justice to this story. As for TV adaptations, I really enjoyed both the 1998 series and the 2011 series. Both take a degree of

liberty with some plot points, probably just for the convenience of storytelling and efficiency. But I didn't really mind it for the most part. The 1998 version had some really great music, and its title song is still iconic in China today. The 2011 version, meanwhile, had some great action scenes, and perhaps far too many bandits who look more like male models than hardened ruffians. There is a mostly complete version of the 1998 series with English subtitles on YouTube, but I haven't seen the same for the 2011 series. Good luck hunting.

A few listeners had questions about the demons that were freed in the opening episode, in what was essentially a prologue to the main story. So, the 108 demons were obviously supposed to have manifested themselves as the 108 outlaws after they were unleashed. One listener asked if there's any backstory to those demons in Chinese culture or literature. The answer is that in Daoist mythology, they are believed to be stars in the Big Dipper. Also, the 36 heavenly spirits are mentioned in, of all places, *Investiture of the Gods*, which we'll cover next. But there's really no connection between that instance and the mention of the demons in the *Water Margin*.

Aiman asked what the word "speed" meant, and here we are talking about how whenever someone casts a spell in the novel, they always chant "Speed". It's basically like shouting "Go!" Or I might compare it to Harry Potter chanting *expelliarmus* or the like. The actual Chinese character that they shout means disease or fast or quick. In his English translation of the novel, Sidney Shapiro translated it as "Speed", and since I couldn't think of anything that struck me as more accurate or suitable, I just went with that.

Listener SL asked what exactly were the weapons that the strategist Wu Yong was using when we first met him. When we were introduced to Wu Yong, he was trying to break up a fight between a couple other characters, and the novel said he came out of his house carrying a couple "copper chains" and swung them in between the two guys who were fighting in order to separate them.

So, the Chinese characters for the name of the weapon literally mean copper chains. But after receiving SL's question, I went looking a bit, and the best answer I could find is that Wu Yong was actually wielding a couple copper staffs. Basically, the conjecture is that older versions of the novel used a different character instead of the character for chains, and that character has an alternate definition that meant axle, as in the axle of a cart. And, there's another Chinese character that also means axle, but that character also refers to a weapon that's a short metallic staff wielded with one hand. So you have to kind of make a couple leaps with that explanation, but honestly, copper staffs probably make more sense as a weapon than copper chains. But this whole thing is so convoluted and confusing that some old paintings of the scene depicted Wu Yong wielding two chains, as did an older TV adaptation of the novel. In subsequent TV adaptations, though, they just stayed away from that mess altogether by never showing Wu Yong with a weapon, which is just as well, since in the novel we never ever see him wield anything but his wits after that scene.

And finally, listener Gail asked if anything new struck me as I was retelling the story in English compared to when I read it in Chinese. I think one thing that became even more apparent to me was just how accessible the language of the Water Margin is. Compared to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms, translating the Water Margin for a colloquial retelling in English was a breeze. Whereas I consulted the English translation of the Three Kingdoms regularly when I was doing that podcast, I only did so infrequently for the Water Margin.

Whew! I think that about does it. I've tried my best to answer some version of every question I received. And I'm going to go back through and reply to everyone who wrote in once I get this episode out, so I'll try to catch anything that I might've missed here.

And with that, I think that is a wrap on the Water Margin Podcast. I want to express my gratitude once more to everyone for listening, and please, go follow the Chinese Lore Podcast, where I will embark

on Investiture of the Gods in a few months. Thank you, everyone, for your continued support, and we will resume our journey through great Chinese stories soon. Take care!