

## Candidate 2

**How does the depiction of Zhuge Liang compare in Chen Shou's records of the Three Kingdoms, Luo Guanzhong's Romance of the Three Kingdoms and in John Woo's Red Cliff?**

Zhugé Liang is remembered by historians for being one of the most proficient and well-known strategists from the Three Kingdoms age. However, many writers have disagreed about the extent of his ability, with the likes of Luo Guanzhong and Woo suggesting that Zhuge Liang possessed somewhat supernatural powers, which resulted in Shu's victory over Wu at the Battle of Chibi, while Chen Shou's records present Zhuge Liang as more of a standard shrewd politician than as a wizard-like figure. Due to the large time period between the publication of *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Red Cliff*, the perception of this controversial strategist has changed significantly, and this essay will attempt to analyse these changes in perception.

Luo Guanzhong's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* has clearly been influenced by the mystery, and subsequent rumours and tales about Zhuge Liang which had built up over the decades between Zhuge Liang's life and Guanzhong's writing. Guanzhong introduces Zhuge Liang as someone of wisdom. During one of Liu Bei's first visits to Zhuge Liang, it is mentioned that Liu Bei encounters farmers singing a song composed by Zhuge Liang. The lyrics of “蒼天如圓蓋，陸地似棋局。世人黑白分，往來爭榮辱。榮者自安安，辱者定碌碌。南陽有隱居，高眠臥不足。” show Zhuge Liang's philosophical ability and wisdom. These words compare the land to a chessboard, with the darker areas representing disgrace whilst the light shows honour and peace. Unlike Chen Shou's *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, which aims to be historically accurate, Guanzhong is writing a novel and so will have used these farmers as a way of introducing Zhuge Liang as somebody of status and wisdom. This is furthered by how Liu Bei disturbs Zhuge Liang at rest when he visits, only for Zhuge Liang to wake and compose a poem on the spot in “大夢誰先覺？平生我自知。草堂春睡足，窗外日遲遲”， proving his ability and wisdom. Guanzhong develops this into a potential supernatural ability when he describes Zhuge Liang's home as “不數里，遙望臥龍岡，果然清景異常”， implying that it like a heaven on earth. This all

shows us that Guanzhong's interpretation of Zhuge Liang is that he is powerful, wise and potentially possesses superhuman abilities.

John Woo develops these thoughts in the 2008 film Red Cliff. Like Luo Guanzhong, Woo presents Zhuge Liang as a man of great wisdom and ability. Woo furthers the idea that Zhuge Liang has a strong connection with heaven and nature when he precisely predicts the weather before battle. Woo shows us why Zhuge Liang thinks he is capable of this in what translates to "The clear stars and winding clouds show that fog is near. If you know how earth, sky and yin and yang change, then the sun, moon, stars, wind, forest, fire and mountains become your own soldiers." However it is wrong to think that John Woo has copied Luo Guanzhong's interpretation of Zhuge Liang. Woo also shows a strong sense of morality in Zhuge Liang. For example, he believes that despite Prime Minister Cao Cao possessing a far larger army than Zhou Yu and Liu Bei, they should not surrender as he believes it would be like "aiding a tyrant". This quotation follows a line of Zhuge Liang's which compares the thoughts of philosophers Confucius and Mencius, which therefore shows us that Woo aims to portray Zhuge Liang as a man of morality as well as wisdom. This culminates in "即使我们赢不了, 我们也必须战斗", proving how noble and morally driven Woo wants Zhuge Liang to be seen as.

Chen Shou's Records of the Three Kingdoms provide the most differing view on Zhuge Liang. Shou's book is often cited as the most accurate depiction of Zhuge Liang, because he was writing approximately 40 years after Zhuge Liang's death, meaning there would be little time for myths to develop. Unlike John Woo and Luo Guanzhong, Chen Shou does not make Zhuge Liang seem like he played a key role in military matters. This can be seen in his appraisal at the end of Zhuge Liang's biography in "他想关中和一样, 有着出色的组织管理能力。然而, 他年复一年的集结军队却从未取得过胜利。这可能正是因为战略灵活性从来都不是他的强项。" This shows us that Chen Shou agrees that Zhuge Liang has wisdom - after all he does praise his administrative skills. However, it appears that Zhuge Liang did not have the impact on the army that he is shown to have in Red Cliff. Additionally, a lack of time for mythology to develop means that Chen Shou promotes a very realistic image of Zhuge Liang; there is little mention or provenance of supernatural power.

Chen Shou also discusses Zhuge Liang's morality, mentioning that "in the criminal and heinous, he would dispense punishment even if they were friends or relatives", therefore showing that Chen Shou believes that Zhuge Liang was not corrupt and was a fair man.

It is evident then where Luo Guanzhong and John Woo got their ideas for the character of Zhuge Liang from. However whilst all three agree that Zhuge Liang was a man of wisdom and morality, it is always possible that Luo Guanzhong and John Woo adjusted Zhuge Liang's character to include a more supernatural element for dramatic effect. After all, Luo Guanzhong's novel and John Woo's film were used for commercial purpose and so by adjusting Zhuge Liang's character it would make their storylines more interesting and dramatic. Chen Shou on the other hand is writing an historical account, and so it is likely that he will be more accurate in his account of Zhuge Liang. However, it must be remembered that Chen Shou was writing for Shu, and so it is possible that he has written with a bias that favours leaders of Shu in order to impress his superiors. This could explain why he states that Zhuge Liang was not successful in military matters - he does not want to admit that Shu's opposition were better in warfare.

Overall, it seems that Chen Shou will have the most accurate representation of Zhuge Liang - the mystical image created by John Woo and Luo Guanzhong are more likely to be exaggerations of Zhuge Liang's character. This is not to say that Luo Guanzhong or John Woo are wrong to depict Zhuge Liang in this way, because these depictions must stem from some truth, but it is nonetheless likely to be exaggerated for commercial purposes.

**Words: 1294**

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