

Comparison of Businessmen in Tales of a Thousand and One Nights and Sanyan and Erpai

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Abstract: *Tales of a Thousand and One Nights* and *Sanyan and Erpai* emerged in the same period, shaping different images of businessmen. Due to different cultural backgrounds and author identities, Arab businessmen value integrity, while Chinese businessmen emphasize morality and righteousness; Arab businessmen often have an adventurous spirit, while Chinese businessmen conduct business with a cautious and prudent mindset; The purpose of Arab businessmen pursuing wealth is secular pleasure, while Chinese businessmen pursue a combination with official power. Based on this analysis, Chinese businessmen should learn from and absorb the positive energy of others, promote their own characteristics, and play a greater role in commercial activities.

1. Introduction

As literary works of the same period, *Tales of a Thousand and One Nights* and *Sanyan and Erpai* each depict a merchant image that deserves attention. There are many articles that involve the image of businessmen in one of the works[1], or analyze their similarities and differences. It is believed that Chinese businessmen are cautious and steady, seeking political power after becoming rich, while Arab businessmen boldly take risks and focus on material pleasures, which has some truth. Due to their different cultural backgrounds, *tales of a Thousand and one Nights* reflects the moral values of the Arab nation and Islam. The Quran clearly stipulates that the essential duty of Muslims is to encourage and protect commerce, and rulers reward trade. The enormous profits of commerce have elevated the social status of businessmen, and the commercial aristocracy is an important component of the upper ruling class. *Sanyan and Erpai* is a combination of traditional Chinese culture and the concept of citizens in the mid Ming Dynasty. The authors who collected vernacular stories were literati, which influenced the shaping of the image of businessmen. Specifically, there are many differences between the two books:

2. Arab businessmen emphasize promises and honesty; Chinese businessmen value morality and righteousness, and emphasize the principle of karma.

Arab businessmen value the spirit of contracts and promote the healthy development of commercial trade. "The shop owners sell their goods at a fixed price. If someone deceives customers, they ride a camel on the streets to show off and make them confess their guilt while ringing the bell." [2] After the first voyage, navigator Sinboda managed the port for the king on the

island and saw a large ship approaching with his goods on board. The captain was originally planning to sell it and bring the money back to Baghdad to return to his relatives. (Captain) compensate me for the goods; there is no loss, they are all intact, with my name written on them. "With this, Xin Boda sold the goods and made a huge profit. In the third voyage adventure, the ship owner still retained the cargo he left behind when he disappeared last time, allowing him to turn over again and earn a lot of money. In the story of 'The Merchant and the Devil', the devil intends to kill the merchant. The merchant, due to various family affairs that need to be dealt with, temporarily releases the devil to return home. He will definitely come back to be dealt with by the devil on New Year's Day next year. After returning home, the merchant indeed cleared all debts, counted and pawned various things, and said goodbye to his family to fulfill his promise.

The phrase *Sanyan and Erpai* also expresses appreciation for businessmen adherence to honesty and righteousness, indicating that businessmen can also possess both righteousness and virtue, and righteousness and benefit are not contradictory. As stated in *Yu Shi Ming Yan*: people in the oil workshop know that the Oil Salesman Qin Zhong was provoked and "felt very unfair in his heart, and had the intention to support him"[3] by giving him high-quality oil. This is helping others from the perspective of human goodness, out of righteous indignation. In Volume 26 of *Yu Shi Ming Yan*, "Shen Xiaoguan's One Bird Kills Seven Lives", the old man with a bucket killed Shen Xiu and sold the obtained sparrow to the merchant Li Ji. Li Ji was first found by the government through clues, forced into a confession, and beheaded. The merchant who came to Hangzhou with Li Ji to sell medicine felt indignant about Li Ji's wrongful death and sought revenge on Zhang Gong, who had found the barrel. It can be seen that there are also businessmen who uphold justice.

Many stories in *Sanyan and Erpai* believe that moral qualities play an important role, and from a public perspective, they criticize some unethical behaviors and talk about karma. As in the book "Transporting Han and Encountering Dongting Hong", Wen Ruoxu advised everyone not to be dissatisfied, and everyone said: With a sincere and honest heart, one should have such wealth and honor. [4]In the novel "Han Shilang's Maid Lady", Huishang used two taels of silver to save the lives of the mother and son. As the couple came to thank him, they escaped the pressure of the wall. The Warning to the World: Lv Dalang Returns the Gold and Bones "states that the cloth merchant Lv Yu found two hundred gold coins left by a merchant surnamed Chen from Huizhou (who opened a grain shop on the Yangzhou gate) and returned them intact. The two sides became in laws and took the opportunity to find their son who had been separated for seven years[5]. Lv Dalang also used the twenty taels of silver gifted by his in laws Chen Chao as a reward for rescuing the drowning person, which was also a considerable reward. As a result, he accidentally saved his third brother. If a merchant engages in similar behavior, it is a sign of accumulating virtue and will be rewarded with good deeds. Otherwise, they will be punished by the heavens. This kind of story ending is very in line with the happy and resentful mentality of the lower class people[6].

3. Arab businessmen have a bold spirit of adventure, while Chinese businessmen seek stability and find business opportunities with flexible minds

Arab businessmen value varying degrees of adventure in the pursuit of wealth, which is a manifestation of human desire and restlessness, as well as to satisfy readers' curiosity. Navigator Xinboda advocated his own actions, and only by constantly striving and advancing can he obtain wealth. He has seven sailing adventures, stemming from the insatiable human nature and endless pursuit.[7] After each voyage experience, he would live a leisurely life, but every once in a while, he couldn't resist the temptation and temptation of dirty desires, and always couldn't forget his travel life. He longed to make friends with various groups of people, engage in business buying and selling, and make a lot of money. This has the typical characteristics of a businessman, with a mind,

vision, and the courage to take risks. Egyptian businessman Ali spent the night in a haunted house in Baghdad and gained a lot of jewelry wealth because he was at his wit's end and had a fearless spirit of adventure, which seemed more symbolic. Ali used his wealth to befriend the emperor and formed a marriage alliance with him. His son Hassan eventually became emperor and rose to the position of prime minister, demonstrating the bold imagination of the urban class[8].

Although Chinese businessmen have successful cases of making money overseas, most of them still stick to their homes. In the book "Transporting Han and Encountering Dongting Hong", Wen Ruoxu followed several close neighbors such as Zhang Da who were traveling overseas for goods, and had an adventure. This indicates that with the development of the shipbuilding industry in the Ming Dynasty, Chinese businessmen also had the opportunity to participate in overseas trade. In Volume 28 of "Er Ke Pai An Jing Qi", "Cheng Chaofeng Meets a Headless Woman", it is mentioned that Chaofeng has loved Chen Shi, the wife of Li Fangge, who sells alcohol. He offers to help Li with 20-30 taels of silver as capital. Li Fangge says, "If someone is willing to borrow money and owes a debt, they will have to compensate for it. It's better to keep this small capital broker." This shows the relatively stable business mentality of Chinese businessmen. In the movie "General Wu Must Pay for a Meal", Wang Sheng from Suzhou sent goods to Nanjing for the first time. However, when he crossed the river at Jingkou, the goods were stolen by bandits. His aunt Yang comforted him by saying, "I will only do some business nearby to make up for the original losses. I don't have to worry about going to distant places like this." His aunt encouraged him that a man should travel thousands of miles for business[9]. The second time, on the section of the canal from Changzhou to Danyang, the ships were blocked and the boatman suggested going through Menghe, but he was robbed by the same group of strong men. After the third divination, with strong psychological support, he set off again and met his former gang of strong men. Wang Sheng bravely grabbed the robber who had returned his package the day before (which also showed Wang Sheng's meticulousness and cleverness), only seeking death. The king felt sorry for him and threw the bundled ramie he had stolen to him. Wang Sheng also knew that this was stolen property, and if he were to sell it directly and be recognized, it would not be beautiful. Therefore, he planned to go home and change the style to sell it elsewhere. As a result, when I arrived home and opened it, I saw ingots of platinum inside, totaling over 5000 taels. This is an experienced merchant who used the waterway as a disguise to prevent theft, but was eventually robbed by bandits without questioning, and Wang Sheng became wealthy. On the one hand, this indicates that doing business outside is quite risky, and on the other hand, Wang Sheng's prudence, meticulousness, and cleverness are also essential qualities for doing business. Compared with traditional agriculture, commercial activities inherently carry greater uncertainty and risks. Compared to the farmers who cling to their land, Chinese businessmen naturally have a spirit of adventure, but compared to the Arab businessmen in *Tales of a Thousand and One Nights*, their spirit of adventure and exploration is insufficient, and they rely more on hard work and flexible thinking to win.

4. The pursuit of wealth by Arab businessmen carries the psychological characteristics of lower class citizens, while Chinese businessmen value fame and officialdom more

Most of the caliphs in Egypt lived a luxurious and comfortable life, and the businessmen in *Tales of a Thousand and One Night* pursued wealth for secular pleasures, including beauty, power, and even marrying the emperor, creating miracles of social class crossing. In the story of the cobbler Malulf, his childhood friend Ali taught him how to deceive people: "Brother, you should know that as the saying goes, 'Deception is everywhere in the world. If you don't do it for yourself, heaven and earth will destroy you.' With this way of dealing with people, you can do whatever you want when you come to places where you don't know anyone." The businessmen who sat with him were mostly

stingy when facing beggars, and he gave them a handful of gold coins one by one, of course, this was an illusion.[10] This indicates that the essence of human nature itself is selfish, and those businessmen who see him generously helping beggars will naturally consider him a wealthy and influential figure. So he lent Malulf sixty thousand gold coins back and forth. After playing the role of a wealthy businessman for a long time, Malulf became accustomed to this role and shamelessly boasted in front of the king, even marrying a princess. In the end, my son became the king and lived comfortably and happily until his white hair lasted forever. On his fourth voyage, Xin Boda married a noble, wealthy, and beautiful woman, representing the common dream of all the lower class people[11].

Chinese businessmen believe that wealth alone does not bring secular stability, and that a combination of power and wealth is generally necessary for long-term peace. If Guo Qilang wants to use money to buy fame, in "Qian Xiucai Mistakenly Occupys Phoenix Gourd", the grain seller Gao Zan sees his daughter as beautiful and intelligent, and "refuses to match him with an equal person. He must choose a scholar who is both talented and beautiful to match him. This is also considered a top priority for studying and becoming an official. Scholar Qian Qing later rose to fame and became a married couple. Father Zhou Dalang disagrees with the marriage between his daughter Zhou Shengxian and Fan Erlang in the movie "The Fan Lou Love of Zhou Shengxian" because Fan Erlang only runs a hotel and "my daughter is afraid that there won't be a wealthy family to marry her". Obviously, many businessmen lack sufficient confidence in their own business status, which is related to the deep-rooted traditional concept of valuing agriculture over commerce, and also indicates the social concept that power is higher than wealth. In the movie "The Golden Slave Beats the Thin Lover", after several generations of being a beggar, the eldest son of Jin became very wealthy. He has a daughter who is very beautiful and has received a good education. He wants her to marry a scholar. If it were an ordinary agent with no future prospects, Mr. Jin wouldn't want to deal with him again. Here, the future clearly refers to the ideal for businessmen to have a successful career, and the status of scholars should be higher than that of businessmen in this regard. Even for a down and out scholar, Mr. Jin would rather pay his dowry to support him. His son-in-law's disdain for his father-in-law's family background after gaining fame also indicates the difficulty of crossing social classes. In "Zhang Tingxiu's Escape to Save Father," it is written that the Wang family, who opened a jade shop, had hundreds of thousands of personal belongings. He envied the carpenter Zhang Quan for giving birth to two good sons: "If I had such a son, I would ask a gentleman to teach him how to read. I'm afraid he wouldn't excel in the imperial examination and shine on our ancestors." Later, he saw Zhang Tingxiu diligently studying and becoming a son-in-law. This concept is closely related to the author's identity and is the author's fantasy that the status of scholars is higher than that of businessmen[12].

The images of businessmen portrayed in the two works have similarities as well as differences. Many businessmen are portrayed as positive images, especially the clear affirmation of businessmen and their business status[6], reflecting the historical requirements and literary interests of the rising urban class. This is a reflection of the development of the times in literary works and deserves our attention.

5. Conclusion

The consciousness of valuing agriculture over commerce in traditional Chinese culture has led to officials holding a higher position than businessmen, causing Chinese businessmen to tend towards officialdom after acquiring wealth in order to gain long-term power. This social phenomenon is reflected in various forms in the "Sanyan and Erpai" and is a reflection of reality in literature. Compared to other cities, cities such as Baghdad have a much higher level of national commercial

trade, and the international markets in the East and West are almost entirely controlled by Arab businessmen. The images of businessmen in "Tales of a Thousand and One Nights" are more reflections of reality, and Arab culture has its unique characteristics. Based on this analysis, the religious beliefs and contractual spirit of the Arab nation are worthy of our respect and reference. Chinese businessmen should reflect on and absorb them, while maintaining their advantages of hard work and flexible thinking, and seize the opportunities in the current world economic situation, gradually occupying the center stage of commercial activities in cultural integration.

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