

# On the Narrative Mode of Three Brothers in Modern Family Novels

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**Abstract:** Modern family novels often have a three-brother narrative model, which is adopted in the modern Chinese novels *The Riptide Trilogy*, *The Siege*, and *The Hall of Four Ages*. The "three brothers" in these three works are placed in different family and social environments and make different choices in life, thus reflecting the turbulent historical situation and changing cultural context of modern China, and also expressing the profound contradictions and unremitting search of modern Chinese intellectuals.

**Keywords:** Family Novel; Three Brothers Narrative Model

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## 1. The Cultural Tradition and Philosophical Implications of the Three

### Brothers' Narrative

In the *Tao Te Ching*, Laozi wrote, "Tao gives birth to one, one gives birth to two, two gives birth to three, and three gives birth to all things". The number three became the beginning of all things in Laozi's writing, and the number three began to represent more than one in ancient Chinese, which is completely different from the specific meaning of the Arabic number three, and also shows the important position of three in the hearts of ancient people. The importance of the number three is further supported by Dong Zhongshu's statement in "The Spring and Autumn Period - Control of the Elephant in the Sky": "Three and one becomes the great scripture of heaven, and this is the system of heaven". It is the importance of the number three that has led people to revere the number three, and thus "three brothers" has become a side expression of the traditional Chinese culture of family ethics of having many children and being blessed.

In the history of Western philosophy, the understanding of the nature of the world is dominated by the philosophical view of "one divided into two" and unity of opposites, but there are also many thinkers and philosophers who believe that the world is "divided into three". Aristotle's "trichotomy is the perfect division of things, in one there is only something (abstract identity), in two there is only another (only opposition), but three is the whole", "is the profound form" of trichotomy and so on. In fact, "one into three" is an extension of "one into two", and the trichotomy is only a division or fusion from the opposing "two". The three-brother narrative mode is an extension of the two-brother narrative mode, precisely because the two-brother narrative mode cannot fully express the author's complex ideas, and the two brothers are often black or white, showing limitations, so a transitional character is needed between the two brothers - non-black or non-white, a neutral character who can relatively objectively express the author's ideas. The author's ideas become a comparison of the other two brothers, and thus the three-brother narrative model emerges.

## 2. The psychological phenomenon reflected in the family ethics in the three brothers' narrative

The different family responsibilities and the different importance attached by the elders in the family lead the three brothers to exhibit different psychological states. The oldest tends to be restricted by the subconscious feudal ethical framework and is cowardly and leads to tragedy. The second is not valued by the family and tends to become a refined egoist.

The third one, on the other hand, takes the path of self-actualization after the awakening of self-awareness.

## **2.1 The tragedy of the eldest grandson: the subconscious feudal ethical framework**

In the family novels of modern contemporary literature, three generations of the family live together, and the authors often do not describe much about the father's image, and even some of the "fathers" in the family novels die young, resulting in the absence of the father's image. This, coupled with the patriarchal system of succession that has existed in China since the Zhou Dynasty - the first-born son - the status of the eldest grandson of the eldest family is exalted, which also obliges the eldest grandson of the third generation to assume the responsibilities of his father, both to fulfill the expectations of his fathers and to shoulder the responsibility of being an example for his younger brothers to follow. Unknowingly, this family ethic of parental expectations and responsibility for younger brothers becomes subconscious to the eldest grandson. This situation causes the eldest grandson to feel confused in the transition between father and son, and the eldest grandson, who is constrained by both identities, becomes the source of a lifelong tragedy.

## **2.2 The second oldest: the desire for recognition by others under exquisite egoism**

In a family with multiple children, the second child is always the least valued one, not as important as the older brother who needs to inherit the family business, and it is also difficult to arouse the parents' licking love like the younger brother, so the second child is always eager to be recognized by the parents, so they always do everything to prove their value, and eventually become exquisite egoists. Because of the lack of attention from their parents, the oldest two tend to become egoists, and they tend to act only in their own interests, rarely considering the consequences their actions will have on the family. Rui Feng in "The Fourth Estate" does not leave home simply because he does not earn enough money to feed his family and his sister-in-law can act as a free old mother. When their own family delayed their own sellout, they couldn't wait to move to Guan Xiaohe's home, sell out their own home intelligence, and even shamelessly come up with a plan to split the family but still eat at home. Because Ruifeng is often lonely, so he loves lively, "students, slowly, three or two came. Ruifeng began to give up his whims; as long as someone was turning in front of him, he could feel safe because he was not lonely." [1]

## **2.3 Lao-san: humanism in the carefree pursuit of freedom**

The third child in the family is the weaker one in the parents' mind, which is more likely to stimulate their licking feelings. In addition, the third child does not have the responsibility to inherit the family business, and his parents do not have strict requirements for him. In ancient times, there was a custom in the grasslands to establish the youngest rather than the eldest, and the third would often develop a confident, arrogant personality and do things without any consideration for the consequences.

Writers were influenced by the humanist trend during their studies and created characters who could control their own destiny, such as the runaways in family novels, Qi Ruiquan who pursued the resistance in *The Hall of Four Ages*, and Ning Ke who rebelled against Ning Zhouyi for his personal ideal in *The Family*, and these runaways were often the third in the model of the three brothers. They love their elder brother, but they also hate his sacrifice to the family, so the tragic fate of the elder brother prompts them to escape from the feudal family that suppresses humanity and embark on the path of self-redemption.

## **3. The choice of social path as reflected by the psychological phenomenon of the three brothers**

"The 'Three Brothers' in modern Chinese fiction is more of a metaphor in the text, carrying the grand proposition of seeking a way out for the nation, and the intellectuals represented by the 'Three Brothers' are always haunted by a national anxiety in choosing their own path in life. The intellectuals represented by the 'three brothers' always have a national anxiety in choosing their own life path."<sup>[2]</sup>

### **3.1 The Bosses: Conservatism of the present peace and stability**

The bosses are undoubtedly the victims of the old rituals and seem to be the subscribers of the new ideas, but in essence they are the accomplices of the feudal rituals. He belongs to the whole feudal way of life and traditional ethical norms, and he will not and cannot leave his "home". Like all "in-betweens" in the course of history, Jue Hsin in "The Riptide Trilogy" loves his cousin Mei, but he marries Rui Jue at the behest of Old Master Gao, indirectly killing two innocent women, and even ending up with the tragic deaths of his own two children. He became a walking corpse. Jue Hsin deserves pity and damnation, but he picked up the "chain of evolution" after all.

### **3.2 The Second: Right-leaning Capitalist Ideology**

The second is an ambiguous blend of dualistic values, between resistance and obedience, and it is as if the writer does not know how to arrange the fate of the second, which seems to be a middle reference for the oldest and the third. Jue-min and Jue-hui choose to resist together; while between leaving and staying, Jue-min stays at home, as does Jue-hsin. The symbolic meanings of "progressive" and "conservative" given to the "leaving" and "staying" of young intellectuals thus become ambiguous. The economic chains make the connection between "leaving" and "staying" even more ambiguous.

### **3.3 The Third: Radical Leftism**

Leftism refers to the tendency to pursue progress in politics and sympathize with the working people. But the political ideology is beyond objective and detached from the social reality, and falls into the tendency of empty thinking, blind action and risk-taking. They had no food and clothing at home and had not yet finished their education, they did not know enough about social reality, lacked political consciousness, and were radical and reckless, but they were compassionate and pitied the orphaned working people, so they aspired to change China completely, not to transform China like the conservative royalists and the right-leaning developing capitalism, but like the Soviet regime in Russia, to completely overthrow all inequalities and completely achieve equality for all. That is why Lao-san tends to choose a strongly left-leaning path in the realization of my values, and to take the path of communism. Juehui is a typical example of a young intellectual of the May Fourth era, passionate and impulsive. Juehui's resistance was valuable, but also had personal and historical limitations."The 'Three Brothers' in modern Chinese fiction is more of a metaphor in the text, carrying the grand proposition of seeking a way out for the nation, and the intellectuals represented by the 'Three Brothers' are always haunted by a national anxiety in choosing their own path in life. The intellectuals represented by the 'three brothers' always have a national anxiety in choosing their own life path."<sup>[3]</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The narrative tradition of the "Three Brothers" model has a long history and is constantly being given a new quality in the course of change. Compared with classical literature and folk literature, the "three brothers" in modern Chinese literature has taken on a new appearance. The modern novel shows a more distinctive individuality. Second, the "three brothers" in modern literature are more closely woven into the national society. Third, the depiction of the "three brothers" in modern literature has a clearer intention of typification. In the context of enlightenment and salvation, the typicalized "three brothers" and the typicalized "family" carry the author's aspiration to narrate the "country" with the "family". The author's aspirations are to use "family" to narrate "country".

## **References**

[1] Lao, S. The Four Worlds Together [M]. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1999:696.

[2] Li, XC. On the "three brothers" narrative mode of modern Chinese novels: from "The torrent trilogy", "The sons and daughters of the rich man" and "The Hall of the Four Ages"[J]. Journal of Hainan Normal University, 2014(11):10.

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