

Discussion on the Significance of Algirdas Julien Greimas's Semiotic Square in Character Shaping — A Case Study of the Novel *Mo Dao Zu Shi*

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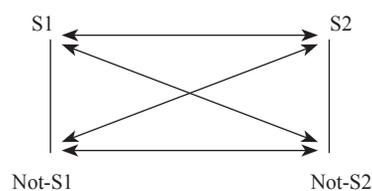
Abstract: Algirdas Julien Greimas uses semiotic square to clarify the relationship between characters in the text, and studies the original value judgment of the text through logical deduction. This complete and effective interpretation method has been gradually applied to more disciplines. Today, in works such as *Mo Dao Zu Shi*, the characterization of characters is increasingly complicated, while the flat characterization is gradually declining. Therefore, the internal factors that form character images in literary works begin to become more and more complex. The use of Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square to analyze the relationship between multiple factors in a character's personality not only reveals the multifaceted nature of the character in front of readers, but also helps to build a feasible frame for the creation of character images in the future.

Keywords: Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square, characterization, reverse of the positiveness, reverse of the negativeness, hard to calm down

1. Principle of Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square

Algirdas Julien Greimas's theory of semiotic square is a theoretical model with distinctive structural characteristics, which borrows Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralist linguistics and Claude Levi-Strauss's binary opposition, and inherits Vladimir Propp's theory of narrative function. This method of analysis can be traced back to Aristotle's proposition and antiproposition. The binary concepts of language and speech, diachronic and synchronic proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralist linguistics, as well as the binary opposition views of surface structure and deep structure in Claude Levi-Strauss's mythological structuralism, have a direct influence on Algirdas Julien Greimas's suggestion of semiotic square. On this basis, inspired by Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of Russian Folk Fairy Tales*, which subdivides the story type into 31 functional sequences, Algirdas Julien Greimas expands Claude Levi-Strauss's binary opposition mode to the quaternion mode, forming Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square.

To be specific, Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square starts from a set of opposite semantic axes. Algirdas Julien Greimas uses S to represent meaning, and the two pairs of items contained in it are displayed as S1 and S2 on the semantic axis. S1 and S2 are a set of completely antisense opposites, thus forming opposite propositions. However, in addition to the antithesis of complete antisense, there are also contradictory propositions, which are weaker than opposites. Under the interaction of these four elements, Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square is formed. As shown in the figure:



Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square was used to study the value judgment of social context, rather than the content of literature research. He analyzes the relationship between characters in narrative texts and then explores the stable structural relationship formed by the logic of characters' actions, in order to "write a set of grammatical rules for narrative [1]". Therefore, Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square is fundamentally to establish a more convincing anatomical model of modernity. Through analysis, two results are obtained: one is to clarify the logical relationship in the text, and the other is to study the text through logical derivation primitive value judgments. The semiotic square tries to freeze the dynamic literature in this static template, so that people can quickly find the value of the article in reading.

Traditionally, Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square has been used to analyze a story or plot. But today, it seems that Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square can be used to analyze a previously unnoticed area. In the analysis of character structure, Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square also plays a unique role. Regardless of the whole logical relationship of the text and analysis on the multifaceted character of a character alone will also have unexpected findings. Especially for novels that are characterized by prominent characters, the shaping of characters' personalities plays a vital role in works. The character itself denotes a complex contradiction, which resembles the fact that just like a good man can not be aboveboard all his life, bad people also have tender moments.

If a novel is made with comprehensiveness in its characterization of a person's strengths or weaknesses and ignores the contradictions, the characters may be flat and unreal. Therefore, in shaping the characters in the novel, it is necessary to take into account the three-dimensional and multidimensional nature of the characters themselves. In this case, the use of the opposite and contradictory propositions in Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square principle seems to make the characterization more real and the story told by the work more vivid.

2. Character image analysis of *Mo Dao Zu Shi* under Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square

In a good work of fiction, the characters are the most charming, and this charm often comes from the real side of the characters. Single, flat characters lose their vitality as a distinct life, and are reduced to paper people who cannot "empathize" with readers. Because in real life, people are complex and changeable, people's personality is multidimensional and three-dimensional. At different stages of life and under the influence of different events, a person's values are bound to change. The choices that a person has to make in different environments also affect the image of a character. The network literature work *Mo Dao Zu Shi*, created by Mo Xiang Tong Xiu, has obviously noticed this point in the shaping of characters.

In 2018, Guan Wei used the "Character Arc" theory to analyze the dynamics of the characters in the novel in The Application of the "Character Arc" Skill in Network Text — Taking Wei Wuxian as an Example from the "Magic of Taoism" published in Journal of Gansu Normal Colleges in 2018. The article points out that the characters improve their own images in the process of growing up, and also points out that there are some confrontational factors in the characters themselves, and there will be some turbulence and struggle under the influence of the environment [2]. However, these are not specific and comprehensive enough. Therefore, it is necessary to make detailed analysis of the characters with the help of Greimas's semiotic square.

2.1 The reverse of the positiveness — Wei Wuxian

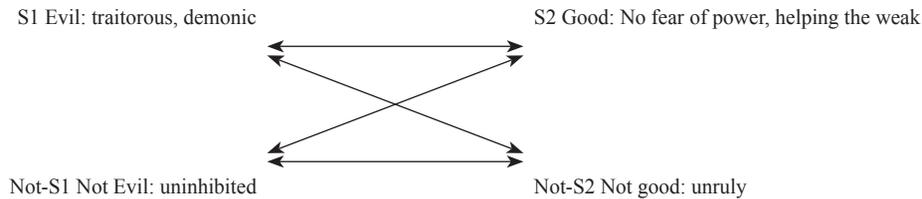
The protagonist of the novel *Mo Dao Zu Shi* is Wei Wuxian. The opening line of the novel reads, "It is so gratified to see that Wei Wuxian is dead!"[3] From this, it can be seen that Wei Wuxian, the protagonist of the novel, is obviously not a decent person. His appearance comes from a sorcery called "Xian She", in which the caster sacrifices his own life to summon evil spirits. And the hero Wei Wuxian because of the poor strange way mistakenly killed her brother-in-law Jin Zixuan, in the night to kill decent three thousand monks, and master can drive the inferi of the Yin tiger, was identified as the most evil evil spirit. Generally speaking, an evil outsider image cannot appear as the protagonist of the novel. Therefore, the character image will inevitably develop and change in the following plots.

But here we have to label the mad side of his personality S1. While S1 is marked as an evil aspect of Wei Wuxian's character, its counterpart, S2, represents a righteous aspect of his character. Just as the hero of the story will not be a heedless bad man, Wei Wuxian, as the protagonist of *Mo Dao Zu Shi*, was once a sunny young, intelligent and warm-hearted man, who was ready to help others. Although he was not bound by rules, he was also the outstanding one in the noble family. He was not afraid of the powerful forces, instead, he was always ready to help the weak. Consequently, it is because of his conducts to be involved in other affairs, disaster occurred for the family, leading to the entanglement of good and evil in his character.

According to Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square, we can easily find two other contradictory terms, not-s1 and not-s2. The item not-S1 represents the non-evil side of Wei Wuxian's character. He was uninhibited and did what he wanted to do. Although he did it for saving people, he inadvertently offended many people. In the Xuanwu Hole he hijacked the two sons of the Wen family, although rescued the entourage, but also buried the curse for the lotus dock. The non-evil aspect of Wei Wuxian's character is not opposite but contradictory to the potential real mad side of his character, so it is not-S1. Wei without envy still exist in the injustice of a character can be marked as not-S2, although highlighted in this a smart, studious, extrapolate in the part of his character, but this kind of thinking jump he listen to school in blue's repeated violation of house rules, and even say "aura is gas, anger is gas, anger why cannot be used" such a big negative point of view, When Wei Wuxian

because of the rescue of the same door to lose the golden Dan can not practice, such a character for him to make Yin Tiger control inferi, resulting in fairy doors hundreds of fear buried.

From the point of view of Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square, Wei Wuxian's character is interwoven with both good and evil factors. However, the behavior of the mad demon is more like a means of self-protection forced and forced. His nature is still a chivalrous man who helps the danger and rescues the emergency and helps the justice



The setting of the protagonist Wei Wuxian in the novel *Mo Dao Zu Shi* has an obvious intention of the reverse of the positiveness. The author seems to criticize evil outsiders, in fact, in the protection of a secular acceptance of the heretic youth. Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square sets the evil represented by S1 in front, with the denotation of the reverse of the positiveness. The main character was portrayed as an alien identity to make the plot progressive. The story is interspersed with memories, which also explains why the protagonist Wei Wuxian still has a sunny side of justice in her character, that is, S2, the opposite of S1. And as the story progresses, the reader discovers that the book is actually talking about exclusions, revenge, and group violence. With the help of the plot, the author showed the readers why a sunny boy was finally deserted by his family. Besides, his options, perseverance, achievements and lost were all explained.

Some seemingly unreasonable behaviors of the protagonist Wei Wuxian in certain situations are explained, and his tragic fate becomes inevitable. Thus, his distinct personality is also displayed in the lines of the story. Wei Wuxian's behavior is influenced by four factors in his personality. Behind his unusual behavior, he has to do something. Even though his actions are not understood and his choices are not allowed in the world, In the whole story, Wei Wuxian still helps people in his own way at every critical moment. The younger members of the Lan family once felt that he was as convincing as their elder Han Guangjun. The righteous side of his character was actually dominant from the beginning to the end.

In shaping the character of Wei Wuxian, the author interweaved the elements of both good and evil from the evil beginning to the good end, and created the character image by means of desire and restraint, putting Wei Wuxian in a situation where everyone was crying, and then revealing the truth bit by bit. On the one hand, this creation technique of the reverse of the positiveness is more conducive to promoting the development of the plot, on the other hand, it also creates a more three-dimensional image of the characters and gives them a fresh sense of life.

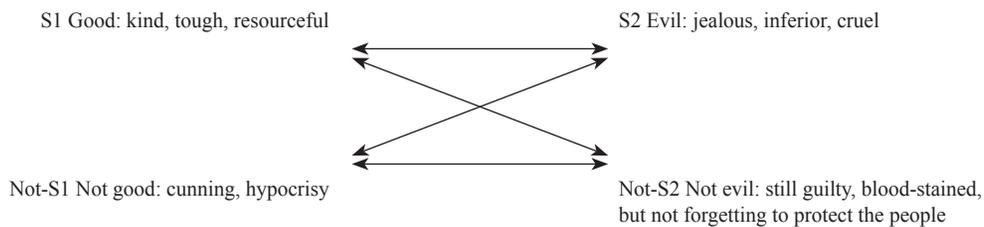
2.2 The reverse of the negativeness — Jin Guangyao

If Wei Wuxian in *Mo Dao Zu Shi* highlights her personality through the reverse of the positiveness, then Jin Guangyao, the villain, highlights the tragic outcome of her struggle against fate through the reverse of the negativeness. Jin Guangyao is the illegitimate son of Jin Guangshan, the leader of the Lanling Jin clan. Before her paternity, she lived with her mother Meng Shi, a geisha of Yunmeng, who was gentle, comely and talented.

Mother had told Jin Guangyao to maintain kindness, and he had rescued the blue Xichen, also had to bear the humiliation of undercover. Besides, he assassinates Wen Ruohan, helped decent monks achieved the victory of the march of the day. Therefore, in light of the character of Jin Guangyao with semiotic square, his kind, tough, intelligent and resourceful character can be set as S1. In contrast, the hidden sense of inferiority in Jin Guangyao's disposition led to his evil thoughts, marked S2. All the evil Jin Guangyao had done in her life was caused by her inner inferiority complex. He grew up in a brothel with abuse and his status as the son of a prostitute took a toll on him. Because he was jealous of his eldest brother Jin Zixuan, he planned to kill him by Qiong Qidao; his sworn brother Nie Mingjue was wary of his origin, so he dismembered him. All this contrasts sharply with his good side.

In addition, there are some contradictory and non-antagonistic elements of his personality that can be labeled not-S1 and not-S2. Not-S1 represents the unjust side of his character. Although he is resourceful, Jin Guangyao is cunning and hypocritical. He always hides his dirty intrigues behind his smiling face. The wife he tried so hard to marry was actually his half-sister. He knew the truth, but because he did not dare to offend his father and father-in-law, he chose to conceal the truth, which indirectly caused the death of her wife. Not-S2 represents the non-evil side of his personality. When he served as immortal governor, with a smiling face, in five years, both soft and hard, and countless people have made an alliance, and countless people turned over the face, finally abruptly to build more than 1200 watchtowers.

Distributed in remote and barren land, send each student to adhere to, a demon can be timely to lend a hand, protect the peace of many. When people cannot afford to pay for cleaning, the Ranlingjin family provides subsidies. Though he became king, he did his duty to protect the people. And because of guilt, the son of the eldest brother Jin Ling every kind of care. Because Lan Xichen does not discriminate against his background, he regarded Lan Xichen as a friend. Although Lan Xichen was hijacked as a hostage in the process of escaping with his mother's remains in the Guanyin Temple, he still gave up the idea of dying with him at the last moment, and did not hurt him. The four elements of Jin Guangyao's personality build up this complex character image. He is good and evil at the same time, and he cannot be judged simply by good or bad. In terms of Greimas's semiotic square, the specific figure is as follows:



In the process of shaping the role of Jin Guangyao, the novel *Mo Dao Zu Shi* was portrayed with the uses of the technique of the reverse of the negativeness, showing the good and just side of the character to readers first, and then gradually revealing his evil side in the process of telling the story. This evil is different from the really heinous bad people or hypocrites, is a rather helpless evil. Forced by relatives, the world had to choose evil, in order to let themselves be able to stand in front of people and kill some people, these people are not entirely innocent. Because of this, the author adds some elements of justice to the character image of Jin Guangyao, making him a contradictory image. The reader's sense of this image is more pity than disgust. Providing that Jin Guangyao was not unfortunately born in the miserable environment without the contempt of his family, nor the person he loved was not his half-sister, he would have been supposed to be a gentleman and he could be with the person he loved all his life. By separating out the four elements of Jin Guangyao's character with Greimas's semiotic square, readers can have a clearer understanding of how the tragedy of his life was formed. From a good beginning to a bad end, such characters leave readers feeling "hard to calm down".

3. The characters' ending of "hard to calm down" under Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square

"Hard to calm down" is a catchphrase on the Internet. It first appeared in the Song Dynasty poet Sun Yingshi's poem "Blocking the wind, Returning to the Boat and Wandering Jingzhong Temple". These days, people use this word when they are watching TV series, or when they see unhappy or unhappy endings. This kind of ending is a psychological effect known as the Zeigarnik memory effect, in which people are driven to finish what they start and tend to finish what they left undone. People will always have a deep memory of the people or things that have not been obtained or completed, while the people and things that have been obtained, achieved and completed will be gradually ignored and forgotten by people. Psychologically, people pursue the integrity of a structure and desire that everything in life has a beginning and an end, while the things without results, along with unmet wishes or needs, are brought into the future life. It's not a bad thing, but rather an obsession, an unfulfilled wish. This psychological effect is used in the creation of the novel *Mo Dao Zu Shi*, so that readers can not forget the endings of some characters.

There is a certain reason for the characters' ending of "hard to calm down". In this paper, the author uses Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square to analyze the diversity of the character image, and analyzes the multiple elements in the character, so that readers can have a more specific cognition of the multifaceted character of the character image. There are both good and bad aspects in a character's personality, and these elements are interwoven to form the complex and changeable life form of the character. This leads to a character who acts both good and evil. In traditional literature, there is a clear distinction between good people and bad people, the good people have a happy ending, and the bad people get their deserved punishment.

But the quality of the characters in *Mo Dao Zu Shi* is not easy to judge. There is not a single saint in this literature, nor a pure bad guy. Everyone is a complex. "Everyone seems to be doing something wrong, but everyone seems to be right", and everyone's ending is not happy. When readers get to know these characters, they will regret their past experiences, and the tragic ending of the characters will become the obsession of readers. Just as it is difficult for people in real life to do good or evil all their lives, good people also have a difference in thought, and bad people also have moments of

warmth. Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square presents the complex side of human nature through a more accurate analysis of the character's personality. In *Mo Dao Zu Shi*, readers sighed at Wei Wuxian's sloppy ending, cared about Jiang Yanli and Jin Zixuan, the bitter CP, and lamented that Lan Xichen killed Jin Guangyao by mistake, and friendship was vulnerable in the face of lies. All these are the endings arising from the complex characters of the characters, which are characterized with "hard to calm down". Since Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square analysis shows that the characters are diverse and contradictory rather than flat, there will be an ending of "hard to calm down". The adoption of Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square to separate out the various elements in the character's personality is helpful for the reader to have a comprehensive understanding of the character image so as to explore the multifacetedness of the character, and make the readers to feel the vitality of the characters in the novel.

4. Conclusion

The use of Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square to analyze the character image and excavate its significance in the character creation is not only helpful to explain the multi-faceted character of the character in front of readers, but also helpful to construct a feasible frame for the creation of the character image in the future. This kind of way to the character image shaping, in the literary creation of the template today, appears particularly important.

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