

# An analysis of the nature of businessmen in *Tales of a Thousand and One Nights* and *Sanyan* and *Erpai*

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**Abstract:** Although *Tales of a Thousand and One Nights* and *Sanyan* and *Erpai* were produced in different countries, they produced the image of businessmen. The images of businessmen produced by the two works had the tendency of pursuing profit, money and sex, which reflects the common characteristics of citizen literature.

**Key words:** *Tales of a Thousand and One Nights*; *Sanyan* and *Erpai*; Businessman

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## 1 Introduction

In the mid-late Ming Dynasty, when commercial capital was in its infancy, Feng Menglong's *Sanyan* and Ling Mengchu's *Erpai* represented the highest achievements of the ancient Chinese short stories, much of which involved the image of merchants. According to scholars, the first draft of the *Tales of a Thousand and One Nights* was written in Iraq before the middle of the tenth century, and was finalized in Egypt in 1517-1535, reflecting the social customs of some Arab and Asian countries in the Middle Ages [1]. There were also many images and stories of businessmen, both of which belonged to the representatives of civil literature, and were created in their commercial activities at the stage of prosperity. There are quite a few articles about the image of businessmen in one of the works, but only a few articles analyze their similarities and differences [2]. They thought that Chinese businessmen were cautious and prudent, seeking political power after getting rich, and Arab businessmen took bold risks, favoring the enjoyment of material life. That was some truth. There is much room for in-depth analysis in comparison.

The *Tales of a Thousand and One Nights* was a collection of Arabic folklore. It was a novel with a unique narrative style, showing us the unique exotic customs. Although the fictional elements were very obvious, they still reflected people's different aspirations, ideals. Many middle and lower class people and businessmen were the protagonists of the story. There were many depictions of debauchery, adultery orgies in the works. This paper focuses on the analysis of the nature of businessmen in the *Tales of a Thousand and One Nights* and *Sanyan* and *Erpai*, showing the similarities of businessman images in different cultural backgrounds, reflecting the characteristics of folk literature.

## 2 Common business background

Both the *Tales of a Thousand and One Nights* and *Sanyan* and *Erpai* reflected the high level of commercial development. The geographical location of the Arab nation is in the coastal region of Arabian Peninsula, the North African coast, and other desert areas. They obtained subsistence through trade and commerce and commerce has become the most

common means of livelihood and played a significant role in the economies of the Arab empires. As the center of power moved southward, such as the Southern Song Dynasty, Chinese commercial cities began to expand to the southeastern coastal areas. In these two types of works, there were some similarities in describing the image of businessmen, such as profit-seeking, greed, and so on.

### **3 Pursuing benefits**

Profit-seeking is a necessary factor for merchants. In the story of "Malloof", the prime minister saw that Malloof, who had obtained the treasure, lavished jewels on soldiers and maids, "By rights, a businessman is only interested in making money" the prime minister said, which makes Malloof a crook because he's throwing away money against his will, then his purpose and motive are very suspicious. The Prime Minister's vision is still very accurate. In the context of today's social networking scams, where many victims are easily fooled and lured by meager profits, it is important to understand a person's motives and intentions. The story of the "Christian Merchant" typifies the way in which merchants amass their wealth, buying and selling the difference between the price they pay and the price they receive. The Egyptian businessman received a brokerage fee of ten percent. This kind of wealth acquisition requires merchants not only to have enough capital, just as Chinese merchants often move goods from one place to another to get the difference, but also to bear the risk of transportation and timing. Since the young man who did business with the Egyptian businessman never took the money, he made a lot of money from the savings. That is, Egyptian merchants had a lot of money, and money regenerated money, like Alipay and other intermediary transactions in the pool of funds. In the story of "Win Tin", "I found a businessman, who borrowed a thousand gold coins, bought cloth, shipped it to Syria, and made twice as much money," said Hassan. "Then I bought local goods and sold them in Halabah, and I made twice as much. Then I bought Halabah's produce and shipped it to Baghdad for sale. I made more money this time. Since then, I have continued my business and now have a capital of 10,000 ducats" [3]. Merchants engaged in intermediary trade, so they have a relatively wide range of social contacts.

In the story of "Yang Balao's Adventure in the State of Yue", one day, yang said to his wife Lee, "I'm in my late 20s. I can't finish my studies and my family is running out. My ancestors were merchants in Fujian province, and I wanted to make some money to buy goods and sell them in Zhangzhou for some interest, so that I could support my family" [4]. In "Jiang Xingge Got Back Pearl Blouse", Jiang went out to learn how to do business, left his beautiful wife at home. The story of "Wang Xinzhi Saves His Family" writes that Wang Xinzhi made his fortune because of his shrewd mind. When Wang went to Anqing, seeing countless barren mountains covered with charcoal, he built an iron smelting plant and became very rich. The navigator Sinbad's success stemmed from his father's genes. His father was a successful businessman with numerous properties. After his father died, though his father left him enough money to spend, he spent it all. He auctioned off the remaining items and got three thousand gold coins, and resolved to sail. Of course, long-distance trafficking is always accompanied by a variety of risks, and traveling by sea or land inevitably involves bandits and various adverse weather conditions, which requires a strong psychological tolerance.

### **4 Greed**

Greed is not a necessary attribute of businessmen, but a weakness of human nature. However, in the atmosphere of commercial economic development, people's desires are difficult to satisfy. The story of "Juder and His Two Older Brothers" writes that his two older brothers did everything possible to seize the property that their father gave to their younger brother, and finally the money fell into the hands of corrupt officials, and the three brothers became poor. The story of "The Businessman and the Old Woman" writes that the businessman coveted old woman's pancake at a low price, the result is that the businessman is seriously ill. In the story of "Malloof", the Chancellor said to Malloof, "In all our lives we have never seen a businessman so rich as you, nor so generous and forbearing. This is clearly not the manner of a

merchant, but the manner of an emperor" [5]. It was Maloof's unusual performance that led many merchants, including the king, to be deceived.

In "Jiang Xingge Got Back Pearl Blouse", merchant Chen and San Qiao need Xue Po as the broker, "Look, there's never been a broker who wasn't greedy." In the process of accumulating wealth, businessmen inevitably did illegal or harmful things. "Lin'anli Qian Poliu Gain Fortune" writes that Qian took the road of private traders, and engaged in illegal trading of private salt. "Wei Chaofeng Bravely Regained His Own Property" writes that Huizhou Wei Chaofeng opened a shop (similar to pawnshop), earned Chen Xiucan's real estate at a low price. "Zheng Ruizhu Complains the Old Case of Justice" writes that the merchant Qian was going to save Zheng Ruizhu in the well, but seeing her beauty, out of selfishness, killed the companion Zhao Shen, and engulfed his money, which is the evil result of the lust of profit.

*Tales of a Thousand and One Nights* and *Sanyan* and *Erpai* are the products of civil literature, and the description of worldly wealth is full of envy. Businessmen have more social contacts than ordinary people, coupled with financial support, so it is easy for men and women to have romantic affairs. Although *Sanyan* and *Erpai* have the meaning of exhortation, many times the detailed description of the cheating process is more to meet the public's curiosity, which brings about adverse social impact, so is the *Tales of a Thousand and One Nights*. In *Tales of a Thousand and One Nights*, there were people's drinking carnival, and relish in the gorgeous rich life scene, promoting the hedonistic life. The human desire is difficult to meet. In particular, some descriptions of sensually stimulating pornographic scenes make people have to look for excerpts when reading such stories for children.

The narrative mode of *Tales of a Thousand and One Nights* is to narrate other people's affairs. *Sanyan* and *Erpai* also have the element of storybooks, many of which are storybook manuscripts. They both focus on the twists and turns of the story to attract people's attention, similar to today's headline news. The authors describe the process of making a fortune too easily, emphasizing the novelty of the experience, ignoring the hardships and sufferings, and the listeners focus on the twists and turns of the story, but it does not hinder the enthusiasm of the listeners. For example, Wen Ruoxu began to do fan business, but because he did not have a lot of heart for the market and climate, it was a fiasco. However, his turn of luck is a bit of a falsehood, showing that the author lacks enough understanding of business, and images the process of getting rich being too easy. Under the guidance of the Sea God, Cheng Zai, a Hui merchant, gradually earned more and more wealth by buying cheap and selling expensive medicinal materials, adding mystery to the process of making a fortune, weakening the hard journey of doing business. "Simberda's Seven Voyages" focused not on the difficulties of his business, but on his peculiar experiences and hardships. Therefore, the prosperity of businessmen generally emphasizes contingency, which reflects the adventurous and radical nature of commercial activities themselves. However, it is also possible to imagine the vibrant maritime activities of that time.

## 5 Conclusion

Many businessmen are portrayed as positive images. Especially the clear affirmation of businessmen and business status reflects the historical requirements and literary tastes of the citizens in the rising stage, which is the reflection of the development of the times in literary works, and deserves our attention.

Although *Tales of a Thousand and One Nights* and *Sanyan* and *Erpai* were produced in different countries, they produced the image of businessmen. The images of businessmen produced by the two works had the tendency of pursuing profit, pursuing money and sex, reflecting the common characteristics of citizen literature.

## Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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