

# The Narration of War and the Shaping of Characters in Novels: Taking Jin Yong's The Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils and The Legend of the Condor Heroes as Examples

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**Abstract.** In the Southern Song Dynasty, there was a long confrontation between the Song and the Jin. In the later period, Song and Mongolia combined to destroy Jin, and Song was also conquered by the Mongols. The two novels of Jin Yong analyzed in this paper set in the Song Dynasty as historical background. This paper uses empirical research and literary creation theory to research The Legend of the Condor Heroes and The Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils, and discusses the influence of the war background on the characters of the protagonists Guo Jing, Yang Kang and Qiao Feng, which is reflected in three aspects: identity, views of nation and war, the fate of death. The paper demonstrates that the war profoundly affected the life trajectory of the characters, and the characters could not escape the influence of war. The wars put the three characters in a dilemma of identity choice, which was the most essential dilemma that the characters faced. In the dilemma, all three characters ended their lives in a painful way.

**Keywords:** Jin Yong; Martial Arts Novel; Fictional Character; Narration of War.

## 1. Introduction

During the Song Dynasty, Liao, Xia, Jin, Dali and Mongolia were the major regimes of coexistence. Power ebbed and flowed between the regimes. In the Northern Song Dynasty, Song, Liao and Xia were in a state of fierce war. In the Southern Song Dynasty, there was a long confrontation between the Song and the Jin. In the later period, Song and Mongolia combined to destroy Jin, and Song was also conquered by the Mongols. The two novels of Jin Yong analyzed in this paper set in the Song Dynasty as historical background. The background of The Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils is the reign of Emperor Zhezong and Emperor Shao in the Northern Song Dynasty, around 1094 AD, which mainly involves the war between Song and Liao. The story of the Condor Heroes is based on the period from the fifth year of Ningzong's reign (1199) to the death of Genghis Khan (1227) in the Southern Song Dynasty. It reflects the struggle of the Southern Song defending itself against the two powerful enemies, Jin and Mongolia.

In the change of dynasties, war factors often take up a tremendous proportion. As a long-standing and serious subject, war has become a part of people's cultural life, and its related literary works have emerged endlessly. There have been a lot of domestic and foreign research achievements, but most of them are literature studies. There is little research on the relationship between Jin Yong's swordsman fictions and war, even less about the influence of war on Jin Yong's swordsmen fictions.

This text applies empirical research and literary creation theories to compare the two works The Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils and The Legend of the Condor Heroes. The stories of the two novels took place under the background of continuous wars in the Song Dynasty. The paper mainly discusses the influence of the war background on Qiao Feng, Yang Kang and Guo Jing's personal fate, living

condition and conceptual change. The study not only demonstrates the helplessness of individual survival and choice under the war, but also further explores the shaping of characters in the novel, thereby analyzing the multiple relationships in the novels.

## 2. Literature review

Much scholarship has analyzed the characters of Qiao Feng and Guo Jing from various aspects. Some scholars discuss the hero image of Guo Jing respectively, and explain the origin of hero complex, value choice, sacrifice for the country and so on [1-3]. Recent studies analyze Qiao Feng inner conflict struggle and fate tragedy from different theoretical perspectives [4-5]. The reading and analysis of Yang Kang by Li Aijuan and Li Wanli are the main existing studies on the character so far [6-7]. These studies enrich the study of Jin Yong's fictional characters and provide a theoretical basis for this study.

The current scholarly works about fictional figures of Jin Yong's martial arts novels mainly focus on three perspectives. First is about the commonalities of a certain type of character image in the novels. This type of studies often analyzes several novels of Jin Yong. Secondly, the existing research analyze the personality and features of a typical character from multiple dimensions and the reasons for the formation of this character's image. Finally, they compare typical characters in Jin Yong's novels with those in the works of others and analyze how Jin Yong creates the characters in his writings. Thus, much scholarly attention has been paid to the creation of fictional characters in Jin Yong's martial arts novels.

However, the current research has paid little attention to the differences that exist between different fictional figures. Even less research has been conducted on the comparison of characters between Jin Yong's different martial arts novels. Moreover, although Jin Yong's martial arts novels often involve historical wars, there are not many studies examining the novels from the perspective of these wars. Even when war is mentioned in the analysis of character building, studies have focused more on war as a political and social context rather than war itself. To bridge the gap, this is the focus of this research.

## 3. Fictional figures in the war

### 3.1 The narrative mode of The Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils and The Legend of the Condor Heroes

In literature, characters are constructed by the writer and therefore to a certain extent reflect the writer's worldview and values. Before researching what specific effects the war context has on Qiao Feng, Guo Jing and Yang Kang, it is necessary to understand Jin Yong's view of war and the nation. Regarding Jin Yong's view of war, a scholar points out that "he opposes war, no matter under what pretext it is, and he advocates avoiding it by all means; he believes that when war breaks out, it is always the common people who suffer, and in war, the lives and properties of the common people are not protected and they lose their minimum conditions of survival ." As for the ethnic view, Jin Yong even built his characters based on the concept of ethnic equality, breaking away from the traditional narrow ethnic view and acknowledging the status and role of Chinese minority leaders. These views of his have a modernity-inspiring effect.

Whether the characters of Qiao Feng, Guo Jing and Yang Kang, as Jin Yong's characters, are influenced by Jin Yong's concept of war or by the characters themselves is a fundamental question for consideration in this study. In this paper, the concept of 'narrator' in literary creation is invoked to discuss this. In 'The Transformation of the Narrative Mode in Chinese Fiction', Chen Pingyuan referred to the theories of Patsy Rabbeck, Radolov and Genet, divided the narrative perspective into three types: omniscient narrative, in which the narrator is larger than the characters; restricted narrative, in which the narrator is equal to the characters; and lastly, purely objective narrative, in which the narrator is smaller than the characters. Some scholars believe that Jin Yong's novels use

more of a restricted narrative perspective, meaning that the narrator does not have a God's perspective and knows as much information as the characters, and that the narrator has no right to narrate what the characters do not know. Jin Yong mentioned that his personal ideal in writing martial arts novels is characterization. When he conceptualizes a novel, he would focus on the main character, first thinking about what kind of personality the person had, and then what would happen to the plot based on the character's personality.

Therefore, in the context of war, the reactions and states presented by the characters should be the instinctive flow of the characters' own life consciousness, which also shows the primitive drive of life. Even without Jin Yong, Qiao Feng and Guo Jing would have been true to themselves in the face of war, and this is their most original human choice.

### **3.2 War in the two Song Dynasties and the mainstream ideology of resisting war**

In the two Song Dynasties, life was basically about the dispute between war and peace. From beginning to end, the political and military line is to bend the knee and seek peace externally, to brutally suppress internally, and to "defend the inside and please the outside". As a result, the wrong strategies and tactics such as "passive defense", "generals follow the royal" and "use infantry to subdue cavalry" have long been dominant. In the Song Dynasty, not only did the military ideology decline, but also the mainstream ideology was to resist armed war. The reasons why this happened may be related to the prevalence of negative frontier defense thought after the failure of the Northern Expedition in the early Song Dynasty, and also related to the overall route of "emphasizing literature over military". However, there are also some scholars who have proposed a more profound social and historical origin.

First of all, significant changes occurred in the inner structure of the ruling group. In the late period of Song Taizong, the number of bureaucrats who successfully entered the ruling group through the imperial examination became increasingly large. By the late period of Song Zhenzong, they had become almost the main body of the ruling group. At this point, the civil officials of the imperial examination whose main body was Confucianism took the stage to dominate. The general was therefore suppressed and people no longer upheld force. The talented people in the past, who became generals and prime ministers with both civil and military skills, gradually disappeared. The military merit consciousness of the ruling group was also gradually weakened. These gave rise to the fact that the Song Dynasty was no longer like the previous dynasties who built a strong army and a powerful country, expand borders and land, but instead advocated cultural governance and internal construction.

Second, the conscription system of the Song Dynasty also influenced the enthusiasm of the people to join the army. The tenancy economy in Song Dynasty flourished. Most of the soldiers came from impoverished farmers who had been forced out of the country, as well as criminals who had been conscripted into the military. Soldiers' social position was not paid enough attention to or well respected, which greatly weakened the combat effectiveness of the army. That, combined with the decline of the militaristic spirit, made it more likely that the ruling establishment would accept anti-war and peace appeals more easily. The warlords were often framed and suppressed.

Finally, the development of the commodity economy had a great influence on the thinking of military issues in the Song Dynasty. Along with the constant rise of the commodity economy in the Song Dynasty, the monetary and commercial tax revenue gradually exceeded the agricultural income. As a result, when facing war and conflict, the ruling group was cost-conscious and tried to solve the border crisis through economic methods instead of force. In the Southern Song Dynasty, the Jurchen and Mongolian armies were oppressed, and the large amount of military expenditure and people's living and production suffered a severe impact. Therefore, the ruling clique did not dare, and did not have the will to fight. Calculating the economic benefits and losses was often an important reason for their advocacy of peace and war aversion.

Whether it was the frequent outbreak of war or the absence of the military spirit, it caused the entire society to resist the war. In this context, Qiao Feng's and Guo Jing's patriotism and chivalrous

spirit of winning the war with great force are tenser with the times. Moreover, dying for the country also has a more heroic and solemn color.

#### 4. Analysis of the characters

To compare and study the influence of war on the figures of Qiao Feng, Guo Jing and Yang Kang, this study uses the comparative methods in Yan Lianke's analysis of Maupassant's *Ball-of-Fat* in *The Historical Background – The Character and Destiny of the Grassland and the Land of Literary Lecture Hall of Yan Lianke*. Yan Lianke analyzes the key plots and characters' responses in the Franco-Prussian War. He argues that "the times, or in other words, the times or the background or history, almost all the masterpieces are the graceful dance floor of man and fate, the interpretation of the stage, and the inevitable changes of characters and destiny, and grasslands and lands that people live on."

To compare the different characters in the multi-texts, this study employs the model of characters' mental process in *Plot Versus Character: A Balanced Approach to Writing Great Fiction* by Jeff Gehrke. Gehrke's model suggests that "the character's mental process is the core of our novel creation system". He divides all the characters into five main stages: heart knot – critical moment – initial state – induced event – planning stage – final state. The comparative analysis of Qiao Feng, Guo Jing and Yang Kang's characters mainly follow these stages.

##### 4.1. Analysis of Qiao Feng

In the pre-event and pivotal moment, Qiao Feng learned that he was descended from the Khitan people even if he was loyal to Northern Song Dynasty. Because his blood lineage, Qiao Feng lost his identity as the leader of Guild and became a man whom everyone despised. In his initial state and facing charges from members of Guild, Qiao Feng thought he was gramed. He thus questioned loudly to let off his discontent.

However, he brought himself back to reason quickly. The trigger events for the change of his life were that Qiao Feng's adoptive parents were killed, and Qiao Feng was suspected of being the murderer. Qiao Feng started his journey to find out who he really was, but he did not succeed. On the way, he saw the war and learned that people were suffering from the war. Finally, he found out his origin.

Having seen people's suffering, Qiao Feng wished to stop the war. This period was the activation stage where Qiao stepped in politics. At the time, the armies of the Northern Song Dynasty and the Liao Dynasty confronted each other. A war could be likely to take place. In the end of his life, Qiao forced the Liao emperor to take back his orders and stopped the war from happening. As a consequence, Qiao Feng went to his death.

##### 4.2 Analysis of Guo Jing

After Guo Jing learned his origins through his teacher Qiu Chuji, he decided to take revenge on the murder who had killed his father. This is the pivotal moment for Guo Jing when he gained the truth about his father's murder 18 years ago. He thus industriously practiced martial arts to take revenge and to establish a successful career.

He was involved in war and even wounded by war.

However, Guo Jing felt lost. He doubted that he should learn martial arts and opposed all wars, including self-defense wars. The war became of a trigger for Guo Jing to shift his life goals. After the reunion with his lover and being enlightened by his teacher Hong Qigong, Guo Jing understood the meaning of good and evil. Guo thus established a dialectical view of the war, i.e., opposing unjust war and stopping it by force. With this understanding, Guo Jing trekked to Xiangyang to defend against invasion and sacrificed on the battlefield in the end of the novel.

### 4.3 Analysis of Yang Kang

Yang Kang learned his origins from his mother. However, he did not believe and accept it. This was also the pivotal moment for Yang Kang when he learned the truth that his adoptive father murdered his biological father. Although it was a great shock for Yang, he could not make up his mind to make a complete break with his past identity and life. He was confused about his life choice.

The trigger that changed the course of Yang Kang's life was when Yang Kang learned the Jin Dynasty's intention to invade the Southern Song Dynasty. He was aware that he could benefit from the war, so he chose to maintain his noble identity of the Jin Dynasty that his adoptive father had brought with him. Yang followed his adoptive father to the south to steal the yue-script, but finally failed. After that, Yang Kang used dastardly means to facilitate invasion of the Jin Dynasty. In the end of his life, Yang Kang attempted to kill his adoptive father, but he was unsuccessful.

## 5. Conclusion

The paper demonstrates that the war profoundly affected the life trajectory of the characters, and the characters could not escape the influence of war. On the one hand, Qiao Feng was the leader of Guild. Nevertheless, because his Khitan ancestry, Qiao Feng was kicked out of Guild. Later, he unintentionally rescued the Liao emperor and became a high-ranking official of the Liao Dynasty. The Liao emperor ordered Qiao Feng to invade Northern Song Dynasty, which put Qiao Feng in a dilemma: how should he choose his country and nation? Under the ultimate torture of emotion and morality, Qiao Feng had no choice but to destruct himself to stop the war from happening. Guo Jing originally lived a peaceful and simple life, but his father, who was killed in the war, forced him to bear the fate of revenge. What is more, he was involved in war and wounded, which made him confused and gave him an opportunity to further think about his future life. Finally, Guo Jing trekked to Xiangyang to defend against invasion and sacrificed on the battlefield.

Facing the dilemma of his own identity choice and the temptation of war benefit, Yang Kang made an immoral choice to continue to be a nobleman of the Jin Dynasty. But it could be found that Yang Kang just made the choice as a normal person. The choice of country and nation was too complex for an 18-year-old teenager, so Yang Kang could not make a choice that met correct morality. He could only be distorted and alienated by the war, and finally he could only lead to self-destruction. War put the three characters in a dilemma of identity choice, which was the most essential dilemma that the characters faced. In the dilemma, all three characters ended their lives in a painful way.

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