

## **THE PATTERNS OF KOREAN'S NARRATIVE: BASED ON THE 'RULE OF THREE'**

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**Abstract:** Korea has several conflicting images. The first image was that Korea has been a small and weak country. Korean Peninsula places at the collision point of continents and oceans, so it has been forced to encounter the frequent invasions from other strong neighboring countries. The second image is that Korea is a very interesting and dynamic society which has a long history and excellent cultures. Nowadays Koreans are known to be very smart and excellent in arts and science. Owing to the ardent desire for the children's education, young Korean students are more educated and talented than those of any other nations. Between the passive belittlement opinion and extremely exaggerated applause, there could be more balanced third opinions suitable for Korean's position.

Korea is trying to confirm its identity through the comparison with other countries; China, Japan, and the United States. China has been the most powerful empire at the center of East Asia. For this reason, Korea chose a voluntary way of submission to China for a long time. Of course, there happened to be a time of resistance as an opponent. Korea sometimes has kept the attitude of "subservience to the stronger" on China. Japan has been considered as a less civilized country than Korea. But it grew to be the most powerful imperialist's nation in East Asia and dominated Korea as a kind

of substantial colony for 35 years. At the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States emerged as the super power among the all nations. Their power influenced to lots of nations as a police of the world as if they were the only police who can keep world peace. They were the friendly helper to South Korea for a long time. But it is not strange there were some occasional conflicts between the two nations.

In general, Korea has chosen a policy of obedience to these powerful countries. But on the contrary of realistic attitude to them, Korean has continuously kept the attitude of independence and resistance in their deep minds. In the folk tale, it is the universal law that the weakest finally wins the strongest. The pattern of Korean's narratives is same to that folk tale.

Koreans feels a kind of empathy to these folk tales for they have been too weak themselves. So they made their own tales based on the contrast between strong and weak. Koreans have felt serious agony against inevitable power between continent/ ocean, China/ Japan, China/ United States. These were the Koreans' destiny in their daily life. But Koreans developed lots of fictitious narrative which shows the imaginative victory of Korean.

The pattern of 'Rule of three' can be divided into four; simple or cumulative, progressive or ascending, contrasting or double negative, dialectical. In this paper, I am going to introduce some Korean narratives, which show the victory of the weakest. The stories of General Yushin Kim and Great Monk Samyeong could be chosen the representative examples of Korean narratives.

"Three colored national flag" has been used in the world. For example, French people uses three colored flag for the meaning of liberty, equality and fraternity. I guess, in Poland, the legend of 'three eagles' could be used for the relationship of Russia, Germany and Poland or Germany, Czech and Poland. Currently, it can be used for the Korean's dilemma between the powerful Group Two. Koreans are always asking to themselves: which way we must choose to survive between two powerful brothers, what is the third way we can choose as the youngest brother. These questions are making many narratives on Korean themselves.

**Key words:** rule of three, growth story, Korean's narrative, fictitious

### 한국인의 서사 유형: '3의 법칙'을 중심으로

**논문초록:** 한국은 몇 가지 상반된 이미지를 가진다. 첫째, 한국은 약소국이라는 인식이다. 한국은 반도라는 지정학적인 위치로 인해 대륙과 해양세력의 충돌지점에 놓여 있으며, 술한 외국의 침략을 받으면서 수난의 역사를 살아왔다는 인식이다. 둘째, 한국은 매우 문명적이며 역동적이라는 인식이다. 한국은 높은 교육열로 인한 개인적

역량의 수월성, 오랜 역사적 경험의 축적을 통해 다양하고 역동적인 문화를 창조하고 있다는 것이다. 셋째, 한국은 작지만 강한 나라라는 인식이다. 한국의 규모는 작은 편이지만 아주 작은 나라는 아니며 고유의 정체성을 가지고 있다는 것이다.

대부분의 나라가 그렇듯, 한국은 다른 나라와의 비교를 통해 자신의 정체성을 확인하고자 한다. 이때 자주 비교의 대상이 되는 국가가 중국, 일본, 미국이었다. 중국은 역사상 가장 강력하고 지속적인 제국으로서 동아시아의 중심이었으며, 한국은 중국에 대해 대부분 자발적인 순종의 길을 택했다. 물론 저항과 예속의 시기도 있었으나, 한국은 중국에 대해 '사대'의 태도를 보이면서도 때에 따라서는 '자주'와 저항을 선택하기도 했다. 일본은 한국보다 변방에 있는 나라로 치부되었으나, 근대 이후 가장 강력한 제국주의 국가로 성장하고 한국을 실질적인 식민지로 지배하였다. 한국인은 일본에 대해서도 복종, 저항, 비판의 태도를 유지해왔다. 미국은 20 세기 이후 세계의 경찰국가로 떠오르면서 한국에 대해 원조자의 위치를 점해왔다.

한국은 이들 강대국에 대해 대체적으로는 순종의 노선을 택했으나, 한국인의 정체성은 이들에 대한 반감과 증오, 경쟁의 관계 속에서 마련되었다. 적어도 상상적 차원에서는 '가장 약한 자가 가장 강한 자를 이긴다'는 서사를 지속적으로 변주해내었다.

가장 약한 셋째가 첫째, 둘째를 이기고 마침내 성공한다는 이야기는 구비문학 전체에서 보편적인 이야기 형식으로 전승된다. 이를 '3의 법칙'이라 부를 수 있다. 한국은 늘 대륙/ 해양, 중국/ 일본, 중국/ 미국 등의 틈새에서 시달렸지만, 적어도 상상적 차원에서는 '3의 법칙'에 기반한 한국인의 서사를 개발함으로써 그들과의 차별성을 강조하고 자신의 정체성을 제시한 것이다.

'3의 법칙'은 축적형, 상승형, 대조형, 변증법형으로 구분할 수 있다. 본고에서는 고구려, 백제를 물리치고 삼국 통일에 공헌한 김유신의 서사, 임진왜란 이후 일본을 굴복시킨 사명대사의 서사, 그리고 현재에도 진행 중인 '작지만 강한 나라'로서의 한국인에 대한 서사를 이러한 유형에 따라 분류하고 평가하였다.

세계의 국가들에도 '삼색기'가 가장 많이 사용된다. 자유-평등-박애, 자유주의-공산주의-민족주의 등은 한 국가가 자신의 정체성을 만들기 위해 가장 자주 사용하는 상징적 조각이라 볼 수 있다. 예를 들어, 폴란드는 러시아-독일이라는 강력한 나라 사이에서 생존해야 했던 폴란드의 역사를 '세 마리의 독수리' 이야기로 만들어 건국신화의 틀로 활용하고 있다. 현재 한국은 세계의 두 정상(group two)'에 해당하는 미국과 중국 사이에서 또 하나의 '3의 서사'를 만들고 있는 것으로 볼 수 있다.

**주제어:** 3의 법칙, 성장담, 한국인의 서사, 허구적

## **PRZYKŁADY NARRACJI KOREAŃSKIEJ W OPARCIU O 'REGULĘ TRZECH'**

**Streszczenie:** Istnieje kilka sprzecznych ze sobą wizerunków Korei. Pierwszy z nich ukazuje ją jako małe, słabe państwo, często atakowane przez silniejszych sąsiadów. Drugi z kolei jako bardzo interesujący kraj z dynamicznym społeczeństwem, długą historią i piękną kulturą. Trzeci głosi, iż Korea pomimo bycia małym krajem jest silna i posiada swoją tożsamość.

Korea podobnie jak i inne kraje potwierdza swoją tożsamość poprzez porównanie z innymi - Chinami, Japonią czy Stanami Zjednoczonymi. Chiny były najsilniejszym imperium w centrum Azji Wschodniej, dlatego też Korea przez długi okres czasu była jej podległa. Japonia z kolei, choć została uznana za kraj mniej cywilizowany od Korei, będąc najpotężniejszym narodem imperialistycznym Azji Wschodniej zdominowała ją na okres 35 lat. Z kolei Stany Zjednoczone ukazały się na początku XX wieku jako wpływowe supermocarstwo - jedyna siła mogąca utrzymać pokój na świecie. Pomimo, iż Korea wybrała prowadzenie polityki posłuszeństwa wobec wspomnianych mocarstw, Koreańczycy w swojej twórczości przez cały czas zachowywali postawę niezależności i oporu.

W folklorze zauważamy uniwersalne prawo, mówiące o tym, iż to najsłabszy zwycięża najsilniejszego. Kontrast pomiędzy silnym a słabym stał się motywem przewodnim wielu podań ludowych, w których koreańscy autorzy pomimo słabości kraju, ukazują wymyślne zwycięstwo Koreańczyków. Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu omówienie opowiadań obrazujących zwycięstwo właśnie tych najsłabszych. Opowieści autorstwa generała Yousin Kim oraz Wielkiego Mnicha Samyeonga stanowią najbardziej reprezentatywne przykłady takich narracji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** reguła trzech, opowieść o wzroście, opowieść narracyjna, fikcja

### **1. Preface**

Korea has several conflicting images. The first image was that Korea has been a small and weak country. Korean Peninsula places at the collision point of continents and oceans, so it has been forced to encounter the frequent invasions from other strong neighboring countries. Because of these geopolitical positions of that peninsula, Korean people had to endure many violent invasions from other countries. The only policy that weak Koreans could choose was

thought to endure and conform to the strong nation's covet. The second image was that Korea is a very interesting and dynamic society which has a long history and excellent cultures. Nowadays Koreans are known to be very smart and excellent in arts and science. Owing to the ardent desire for the children's education, young Koreans are more educated and talented than those of any other nations. Some people mentioned the power of 'Korean Wave (Hallyu)' that came from some popular cultures focused on the fan ship of teenagers (Huntington and Harrison 2001: 8). Between the passive belittlement opinion and extremely exaggerated applause, there could be more balanced opinions suitable for Korean's position.

Though dwarfed by China and only two-thirds the size of Vietnam, Korea is actually a country of average size and more than average population. One can emphasize its smallness by saying that it is scarcely larger than the single state of Minnesota, but it would be more meaningful to say that it is not much smaller than the combined area of England, Scotland, and Wales. Its present population of close 50 million is not much less than that of the traditional "great powers" of Western Europe (Fairbank, Reischauer and Craig 1973: 277).

Korea is trying to confirm its identity through the comparison with other countries; China, Japan, and the United States. China has been the most powerful empire at the center of East Asia. For this reason, Korea chose a voluntary way of submission to China for a long time. Of course, there happened to be a time of resistance as an opponent. Korea has kept the attitude of "subservience to the stronger" on China. Japan has been considered as a less civilized country than Korea. But it grew to be the most powerful imperialist nation in East Asia and dominated Korea as a kind of substantial colony for 35 years. Because of these historical experiences, most Koreans hate Japan as a violent attacker. Even though Japanese occupation on Korea has been finished with the end of World War 2, the feeling of hatred on Japanese has been continued yet. At the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States emerged as the super power among the all nations. Their power influenced to lots of nations as a police of the world as if they were the only police who can keep world peace. They were the friendly helper

to South Korea for a long time. But it is not strange there were some occasional conflicts between the two nations.

In general, Korea has chosen a policy of obedience to these powerful countries. But on the contrary of realistic attitude to them, Korean has continuously kept the attitude of independence and resistance in their deep minds. In the folk tale, it is the universal law that the weakest finally wins the strongest. For example, the stupidest and youngest child wins the giant-monster at the tale of <*Jack and Bean Tree*>. The third pig wins the wolf and save the first and second brothers at the tale of <*Three Little Pigs*>. These patterns can be named to "the rule of three."

Koreans feels a kind of empathy to these folk tales for they have been too weak themselves. So they made their own tales based on the contrast between strong and weak. Koreans have felt serious agony against inevitable power between continent/ ocean, China/ Japan, China/ United States. These were the Koreans' destiny in their daily life. But Koreans developed lots of fictitious narrative which shows the imaginative victory of Korean. Even though these narratives are not real, they can bring lots of energy and strong pride to themselves. In this paper, I am going to introduce some Korean narratives, which show the victory of the weakest.

## 2. Some cases of Korean's narratives

### (1) The Slightest Joke

An American, a Japanese and a Korean died at the same day. They were sent down to the Underworld. The King of the Underworld ordered them to be beaten on the ass because they had made many sins throughout their lives. However, he gave them one benefit which would lessen their pains during being beaten by big stick. An American asked him a thick pad which would lessen his pain. He managed to be beaten less painfully with the help of a thick pad attached on his ass. The next turn was a Japanese. He asked the King two pieces of thick pad on his ass. Owing to these two pads, he also managed to be beaten less painfully (Japanese are usually good

at imitating other's skill and ideas!). The last turn was a Korean. He asked the King to call the Japanese again. He used Japanese's ass instead of thick pads.

In this joke, Japanese is cleverer than American. He could lesson his pain owing to his cleverness. But Korean is cleverer than American and Japanese. He could win the victory finally owing to his cleverness.

## (2) Yushin Kim (김유신)

As you know, Kingdom of Shilla (신라) has conquered two other Kingdoms, Goguryeo (고구려) and Baikje (백제) and unified Korean Peninsula into a single Kingdom. The top leader of this achievement was not the King of Shilla, but the general Yushin Kim. He could not become a King because he was not royal family. His origins were those of perished Kingdom, Gaya (가야). But he could rise up to the second ranking because he made his sister to marry the future King. As a prime minister and commander, he could do the most important thing. For example, he could save the future King confined at Goguryeo's prison. He advised the confined future King to escape the prison by telling a lie. That lie was a kind of trick or dishonesty (it came from the folklore of 'Liver of Rabbit'). Anyway, the future King could return to his country and work together for unification of three Kingdoms. The last war was very difficult because the opponent was the Chinese Empire that had supported the weak Shilla for a long time (Kim 2010: 749-783). at that time, he used the people of two perished Kingdom and won the satisfying unification again against China's covet.

In fact, Shilla was weaker than Goguryeo and Baikje. According to my model, Goguryeo had a Powerful Identity (하늘, 天) and Baikje had a Rich Land (땅, 地). The only thing Shilla has had was a Talented Man (사람, 人). Shilla could win the two strong Kingdoms by using the power of Man. Its power was thought to come from the system of Hwarang (화랑). Yushin Kim was neither a King nor a royal family. But he was the member of Hwarang. And he exploited the power of Hwarang to his political task. His story belongs to the pattern of "the weakest over the strongest".

### (3) Reverend Samyeong (사명대사)

‘Japanese Invasion of Korea in 1592 (임진왜란)’ ended in 1598. During that war time, many Korean ordinary people took participate in the battle as warrior. Even lots of monks fought as warrior against the Japanese army. Two famous leaders of those monks were Great monk, Seosan-daesa (서산대사) and Samyeong-daesa (사명대사). They became the war hero. After that war, Samyeong-daesa went over to Japan to negotiate the remaining problem of prisoner-of-war. The Japanese were forced to receive him. The reception room where he was staying looks very comfortable. But they made the room very hot like boiled iron capsule. But the Reverend Samyeong changed that hot room into iced room by his unbelievable magic. The Japanese were very shocked at his powerful magic and begged him their mean acts were intentional. They apologized their mean acts and promised not to make war again. at final, he could receive 3,000 prisoners-of-war and return to Korea (Gyutae 1984: 41-47).

That story which he blamed Japanese by powerful magic would not be a precise historical event. It would be a fictitious legend invented and inherited by many people who had suffered from Japanese’ slaughter and other cruel war crimes. They admired Samyeong as their Messiah and wanted to make a kind of fictional victory over Japan. at that time, Korean people hated their King and government as well as Japanese. Yi dynasty was very weak and corrupted enough not to defeat Japanese invasion. So they needed the third hero who could defeat two hateful powers; Yi dynasty and Japanese.

### (4) Other imperialism within imperialism

We can say that Korea has been subject to the control of the powerful countries. Korea has long been plagued by the rule of the imperialist, directly or indirectly. But on the other hand, Korea has internal imperialism in it. The mechanism of imperialism has been imitated and repeated in the internal Korean society. For example, Korean people who had been dominated by Japanese dominated poor

Chinese people at Manchurian during the era of Pseudo-Manchu State (위만주국, 1932-1945). These double faces are continuing even now. Sometimes Koreans are tend to dominate or look down on the people who came from poorer countries; Vietnam, Philippines, Cambodia and Pakistan. Korean people is on the both side of dominated and dominating.

The novel *Shadows of Weapons* (무기의 그늘, first written in 1988), written by Hwang Seok-yeong (황석영), focused on the Vietnam War, especially in terms of capitalism. It dealt with the relationship between the Vietnamese, Koreans and Americans. They all gathered at the battlefield to get money. One Korean soldier said to an American about the essence of the Vietnam War:

I'd rather like to say that my position is the same as the Vietnamese. The conditions of life we've been through over the past century are the same to those of all Asians. White people are fighting with quarry bloody claws and teeth to bite each other like beasts on every continent. (...) Yet soldiers were forced to come here to the dirty back alleys, the dark bars, the cheap super markets, and the oily car garages. Why? Noble young gentlemen would not come here. You guys, ask your entrepreneurs and your politicians who have served as salesmen of the rich. It is for them that you are dying at the battlefields of Vietnam like dogs.

I know them well. (...) The capitalists are trying not to retreat from their realms according to their commercial principle (Hwang 1988: 117-118).

The protagonist said that war resulted from the interest of the capitalists. They regarded this battlefield as a beneficial and profitable market. They came here to get much money, but poor Americans came here to get little money. He said himself, "The dollar! It is the leader of colonial imperialism. It is the certificate of being an American." In his novel, Koreans did not hate all Americans. Instead, they hated only rich American capitalists and politicians as their partners. All poor people are friends regardless of their nationality. The only terrible target is the capitalist and their system of capitalism. At least, it was not related with nationalistic feelings.

### 3. Meaning of these narrative based on ‘the rule of three’

The rule of three is a writing principle that suggests that things that come in threes are inherently funnier, more satisfying, or more effective than other numbers of things. The reader or audience of this form of text is also more likely to consume information if it is written in groups of threes. From slogans ("Go, fight, Win!") to films, many things are structured in threes (Booker 2010: 229-238).

Next tableau has been made to explain the pattern of stories based on ‘the rule of three’. Left column is the form of these stories, right column is the examples according to each forms.

<Form>	<Representative narrative>
Simple or cumulative	(1) the slightest joke
Progressive or ascending	(2) Yushin Kim
Contrasting or double negative	(3) Reverend Samyeong
Dialectical: dominated and dominating	(4) Seok-yeong Hwang's <i>Shadows of Weapon</i>

The ‘Simple’ or ‘cumulative three’, where each thing is of much the same value, but all three have to be put together or succeed each other in sequence before the hero or heroine can move on, or come to their final transformation: e.g., Cinderella’s three visits to the ball. In the slightest joke mentioned at chapter 2, we can find the principle of ‘cumulative three’. B is stronger than A, but C is stronger than B. Of course, Korea is C. And at most cases, Japan is B because it is a direct and concrete rival to Korea.

The ‘progressive’ or ‘ascending three’, where each thing is of positive value but each little more important or valuable than the last; e.g., the ascending value of Jack’s three treasures won from the giant (this idea is more explicitly expressed in those folk tales where the hero has to win three objects, made in bronze, silver and gold). Commander Yushin Kim fought three times. The first battle was to get his own position; the second was to defeat two countries.

The final battle was to get freedom from China's covet and to unite three kingdoms. He started at disadvantage position but overcome it gradually. His career was the typical sample of 'from rags to riches', a kind of success story in the folklore. Through the whole history of Korea, the power of king is weaker. The noble men called Yangban (양반) had little financial abilities but had been respected highly only in the level of mental status. Korea has had also a rigid status discrimination system for a long time. But common people always insisted that all the peoples are equal. Owing to the thought and desire for equality, I think Korea could achieve high level of democracy rapidly among the developing countries. A grows to be B, B grows to be C. The lower the hero lied at, the stronger he can grow to be. I think this was the main desire that common Koreans could dream. Yushin Kim's story belongs to it typically.

In the 'contrasting' or 'double-negative three', the first two are inadequate or wrong (essentially in the same way) and only the third one works or succeeds. We see an element of this in the *Three Little Pigs*, two of whom get eaten, although it is most commonly seen in the folk tales where the hero or heroine is the third child, contrasted with two identical others. In the story of Reverend Seosan, we can find the people's hero who overcomes two negative powers, Japanese army and Korean dynasty. He was not a military man but a monk who had been look down on. In the real world, it is natural that he had no power. But at the emergent time, he led the group of monk and fought against the evil army to save poor and powerless people. This would be the crucial reason to be respected as a hero.

The final form of three, the one capable of the most sophisticated development, is what may be called the 'dialectical three' where, as we see reflected in *Goldilocks*, the first is wrong in one way, the second in another or opposite way, and only the third, in the middle, is just right. This idea that the way forward lies in finding an exact middle path between opposites is of extraordinary importance.

## 4. Conclusion

'Three' give us many interesting stories. So many stories and symbols are constituted by the rule of three. For example, "Three colored national flag" has been used in the world. 70 nations use it for their national flags and their identities. For example, French people uses three colored flag for the meaning of liberty, equality and fraternity (berté, Égalité, Fraternité). Sometimes it has been used the meaning of liberalism, communism and nationalism. I guess, in Poland, the legend of 'three eagles' could be used for the relationship of Russia, Germany and Poland or Germany, Czech and Poland.

Currently, it can used for the Korean's dilemma between the powerful Group Two (the United States and China). Koreans are always asking to themselves: which way we must choose to survive between two powerful brothers, what is the third way we can choose as the youngest brother. These questions are making many narratives on Korean themselves.

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