
RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Psychological Modernism to a Poetics of Everyday Life: The Evolution of Wang Zengqi's Fictional Style and Its Driving Forces

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ABSTRACT

Existing scholarship has concentrated on the "poetics of everyday life" in Wang Zengqi's post-1979 fiction, while his early modernist experiments have often been treated as an immature or separate phase. As a result, the mechanism of his stylistic transition and the continuity between his early and late artistic practices remain insufficiently explained. Taking "Fuchou" (Revenge), "Jiya Mingjia" (The Master of Poultry), "Shoujie" (Initiation into Monkhood), and "Danao Jishi" (Tales of the Big Marsh) as its core texts, this article combines close reading, diachronic comparison, and contextual analysis of Wang's literary statements, artistic practice, and historical circumstances. It examines changes in narrative structure, characterization, linguistic rhythm, and aesthetic orientation. The analysis shows that Wang's early fiction, shaped in important ways by Woolfian psychological modernism, renders tense subjective experience through psychological time, weakened plotting, structural discontinuity, and linguistic defamiliarization. His later fiction shifts its aesthetic center toward everyday life, local customs, and vernacular ethics, developing a poetics of everyday life marked by restraint, ellipsis, and the resilience of ordinary existence. This transition does not negate his early experimentation; rather, techniques of linguistic control, detail management, and weak plotting are internalized from conspicuous formal devices into an apparently effortless narrative mode. The transformation was jointly enabled by Wang's modernist training at National Southwest Associated University, his grassroots experience, his work in traditional opera, and the cultural climate of the New Period. By conceptualizing the transition as "continuity within rupture," this article reinterprets Wang's aesthetic trajectory and defines his poetics of everyday life as a locally grounded paradigm distinct from both the aestheticization of everyday life in consumer culture and classical Chinese theories of artistic conception.

KEYWORDS

Wang Zengqi; psychological modernism; poetics of everyday life; stylistic evolution; continuity within rupture; Fuchou; Jiya Mingjia; Shoujie; Danao Jishi; novel style

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1. Introduction

In scholarship on Wang Zengqi, "Shoujie" (Initiation into Monkhood) and "Danao Jishi" (Tales of the Big Marsh) are commonly regarded as representative works of his mature style, whereas early stories such as "Fuchou" (Revenge) and "Jiya Mingjia" (The Master of Poultry) have seldom been examined within the same creative trajectory.

Research has long privileged Wang's fiction of the New Period, while the experimental qualities of his early writing and its relationship to European modernism have received less systematic attention. His career has consequently been divided into two apparently separate phases: an early stage interpreted as immature experimentation and a later stage understood as the point at which his distinctive style truly emerged. (Wang, 2023, pp. 26-27)

Read together, however, these four works reveal not a style fixed from the outset but a process in which formal experimentation gradually gave way to the writing of lived experience. Rather than treating the poetic quality of the later fiction in isolation, it is more productive to ask how this transformation occurred and what elements of continuity remained beneath it.

The term “modernism” in this article does not refer broadly to every anti-traditional literary movement of the twentieth century. It is used more specifically to denote a Woolfian mode of psychological modernism that emphasizes the movement of consciousness, the elasticity of psychological time, the weakening of external plot, and the direct embodiment of mental states through linguistic rhythm. The movement from the tension, symbolism, and deplotting of “Fuchou” to the measured realism and custom-rich narration of “Shoujie” produces a striking aesthetic contrast. Wang later described his own change as a descent “from the clouds to the ground” (Wang, 1991, p. 366). This was not a minor adjustment of style but a profound shift from psychological form toward lived existence as the primary substance of fiction.

Although research on Wang Zengqi is now extensive, it remains characterized by a tendency to privilege the later period over the earlier one and to emphasize style as a finished achievement rather than as a historical process.

First, scholarship on Wang’s New Period fiction has developed a relatively stable interpretive paradigm centered on its “poetics of everyday life.” Li Zhengxiu argues, “Wang’s stories frequently draw on ordinary incidents and develop a natural, unadorned style that discovers poetry in secular daily life and constructs aesthetic value within the warmth of vernacular existence” (2023, p. 136). Xiao Li similarly describes, “Wang’s work as a form of ‘poetic fiction’ in which warmth and poetic feeling emerge from authentic details of ordinary life” (2005, p. 80). These studies illuminate the distinctive value of Wang’s later writing, but they generally approach its style as an already completed form and give less attention to the process through which it came into being.

Second, discussion of Wang’s early fiction has often remained subordinate to the study of his later work. Wang Binbin recognizes, “Thematic and formal connections between the two periods and acknowledges the consummate artistic quality of the later fiction, while also suggesting that its maturation involved certain compromises” (2023, p. 26). Such discussions, however, tend to focus on the supposed immaturity of the early works. They do not fully evaluate the literary-historical significance of Wang’s avant-garde experimentation or explain how that experimentation was transformed into a poetics of everyday life.

Third, existing explanations of Wang’s stylistic transformation approach the question from several directions but have not yet produced an integrated account. Taking “Yangshe de Yewan” (Night at the Sheepfold) as a transitional text, Bian Yongqing argues, “The three decades from 1948 to 1979 were not a creative blank but a period of accumulation that connected Wang’s fiction of the 1940s to that of the 1980s” (2025, p. 18). Li Yiqian, “From the perspective of literary influence, identifies Wang’s reception of Virginia Woolf and other modernists at National Southwest Associated University as a major basis for his early formal experimentation” (2024, p. 16). These studies address individual factors such as life experience or literary training, but they do not fully integrate personal history, historical context, and aesthetic choice into a composite explanation.

This article therefore places “Fuchou,” “Jiya Mingjia,” “Shoujie,” and “Danao Jishi” within a single diachronic framework and addresses three questions. What specific differences distinguish Wang’s early and late fiction in narrative structure, characterization, and linguistic style? What combination of life experience, artistic practice, and changing literary ideas drove the movement from psychological modernism to a poetics of everyday life? Finally, despite the visible differences between the two phases, what forms of artistic continuity link the early experiments to the mature later style?

Methodologically, the article combines close reading with comparative analysis. It examines the narrative organization, character construction, linguistic features, and aesthetic effects of the four core texts, while also drawing on Wang’s essays, statements on writing, and relevant scholarship. By considering the writer’s life experience and historical position alongside textual form, the article seeks to reconstruct the process through which his distinctive aesthetic path was formed.

2. The Unfolding of Psychological Modernism: “Fuchou” and “Jiya Mingjia”

Although Wang Zengqi’s early fiction is less widely known than his later work, it provides an indispensable starting point for understanding his artistic development. In contrast to the plainness, warmth, and composure associated with “Shoujie” and “Danao Jishi,” the early stories display an overt interest in formal inquiry and aesthetic experimentation. Despite their different subject matter, “Fuchou” and “Jiya Mingjia” both depart from the conventions of realist fiction organized around complete plots, clear causality, and stable social relationships. Atmosphere, emotion, fragmentary presentation, and verbal rhythm become more important than event-driven narration.

2.1 Narrative Discontinuity and the Tendency toward Deplotting

One of the most conspicuous features of Wang’s early fiction is its deliberate weakening of conventional plot.

The title “Fuchou” appears to promise an event of violent conflict and a clearly defined objective, yet the story is less concerned with the act of revenge itself than with an atmosphere of repression, anxiety, and psychic pressure. The narrative does not proceed through a stable chronological sequence, and the protagonist’s actions are not organized by a complete chain of cause and effect. Instead, narration shifts rapidly between scenes and sensations, disrupting the smooth reading experience associated with conventional story-centered fiction. Its use of temporal montage fixes the

character within a spatial situation while allowing consciousness to move freely across past, present, and imagined future. Physical chronology is broken in order to foreground the movement of consciousness.(Li, 2024, p. 18)

The narrative center of "Fuchou," therefore, lies not in what happens but in the psychic condition within which the character exists. Revenge becomes less a completed action than a symbolic emotional presence. The story produces its overall effect not through event progression but through the juxtaposition of local scenes and the accumulation of emotional tension. Its deplotting thus signals an aesthetic aspiration distinct from conventional realism.

"Jiya Mingjia" displays a comparable tendency. Although it draws on figures from vernacular life, it does not organize its material according to a linear sequence of character, event, and outcome. Instead, it dwells on habitual gestures, states of being, and modes of existence. Plot progression is repeatedly delayed while actions, expressions, and relations to the surrounding environment are elaborated. The story is intentionally muted; characterological presence and aesthetic atmosphere occupy the center of narration.

Both stories consequently share a structural preference for state over plot, sensation over causality, and fragment over continuity. This departure from traditional narrative logic constitutes the first major expression of Wang's early psychological modernism.

2.2 Psychological and Symbolic Characterization

The transformation of narrative structure is accompanied by a corresponding change in characterization. In the later fiction, characters are normally embedded in fully realized environments and networks of human relations; they possess an unmistakable everyday quality. In the early works, by contrast, characters often function as bearers of a particular emotion, mental state, or existential posture. Their social backgrounds and concrete relationships are deliberately reduced, producing a more psychological and symbolic mode of characterization.

The protagonist of "Fuchou" exemplifies this tendency. Readers can register his tension, repression, and unease, but they are given relatively little access to a complete social identity or stable material situation. He is not constructed primarily as an individualized social person; he appears instead as the concentrated embodiment of a powerful emotional condition. As the act of revenge is abstracted, the character himself takes on symbolic force: he is both an individual within the story and an emblem of repressed psychic energy.

The figures in "Jiya Mingjia" are closer to recognizable social life, yet they retain a degree of abstraction. The narrative is less interested in reconstructing a complete biography than in capturing the concentration, stillness, and near-obsessive commitment with which a figure inhabits a particular craft. Social identity becomes secondary to the distinctive spiritual posture produced by artistic selection. Such a character is not a conventional realist type built through biography and social relations, but a "state-like existence" distilled by form.

This method intensifies the artistic tension of the texts and produces a sense of estrangement from ordinary experience. Yet it also creates distance: readers are less likely to feel the intimacy available in the later stories and are instead invited to observe the characters through a consciously aesthetic frame.

2.3 Linguistic Experiment and Defamiliarization

If structural discontinuity and psychological characterization are the outward signs of Wang's early modernism, his experimentation with language reveals its inner mechanism. In contrast to the natural, unhurried prose of the later stories, the early language is compressed, discontinuous, and highly attentive to the defamiliarizing effects generated by syntax and rhythm.

The prose of "Fuchou" is frequently terse and contracted. Sentences do not always flow through smooth transitions; sudden pauses and rapid shifts produce a sustained sense of pressure that mirrors the protagonist's mental state. Language does not merely communicate narrative information but actively constructs the emotional atmosphere. Wang's purpose is not simply to clarify the story but to make verbal form itself generate artistic intensity.

The effect is evident in a sequence of short exchanges: "Do you know this man?" "No." "Have you heard of him?" "No." "But I must have my revenge!"(Wang, 1993, p. 21) The dialogue is compressed almost to the point of rupture. With little transitional cushioning, the final exclamation closes the sequence abruptly and allows obsession, anxiety, and a sense of impending action to enter the rhythm of the prose itself.

The linguistic experiment of "Jiya Mingjia" is more concerned with condensation and visual fixation. Through concentrated descriptions of movement, expression, and detail, the prose acquires a pronounced pictorial quality. Characters are not always represented through complete processes of action; they emerge from a small number of selected, almost frozen details. Language therefore performs more than an informational function: it shapes character and establishes aesthetic distance.

Taken as a whole, Wang's early prose is marked by an explicit consciousness of form. The accumulation of short sentences, semantic leaps, and carefully selected details all reveal sustained reflection on how fiction should be written. Wang once argued, "Vivid language requires sentences to be cut as short as possible, with unnecessary elements omitted" (Wang, 2019, p. 193). This principle does not advocate mechanical brevity; it uses segmentation, ellipsis, and pause to control the breath of

narration. In "Fuchou," that linguistic ideal is pushed toward psychological expression: the denser the short sentences become, the more palpable the character's unrelieved mental pressure. Such experimentation gives the fiction a distinctly modern quality.

"Fuchou" and "Jiya Mingjia" thus concentrate the experimental traits of Wang's early fiction. Plot is weakened, characters are rendered through psychic states and symbolic postures, and language seeks defamiliarization and rhythmic force. At this stage, Wang is centrally concerned with the question of how a story can be written. His challenge to inherited narrative norms is an attempt to extend the expressive possibilities of fiction. Although these works do not yet possess the effortless integration of his mature style, they should not be reduced to failed or immature exercises; they constitute an essential period of testing and accumulation.

In the literary context of the 1940s, this work also possessed a pronounced avant-garde quality. Mainstream fiction continued to rely heavily on complete events, social causation, and typified characterization, whereas Wang was already placing psychological time, fragmentary structure, and linguistic rhythm before plot. Even where these techniques appear self-conscious, they demonstrate his early entry into the formal problems of modern fiction and anticipate the subtler artistic control of his later writing.

3. Constructing a Poetics of Everyday Life: "Shoujie" and "Danao Jishi"

If "Fuchou" and "Jiya Mingjia" represent Wang Zengqi's early inquiry into fictional form, "Shoujie" and "Danao Jishi" mark the formation of his mature and stable personal style. The tension, rupture, and symbolism of the earlier works give way to an attentive perception of daily life, a gentle gaze upon vernacular communities, and a poetic representation of ordinary modes of existence. Wang recalled, "When I was young he wrote difficult poems, but after passing through the sweetness and bitterness and the four seasons of life, I came down from the clouds to the ground" (Wang, 2019, p. 434). The statement identifies a shift in the position from which he observes the world: literature is no longer suspended above experience in abstraction or pure form but re-enters the material textures of life.

The "poetics of everyday life" in this article refers both to Wang's practice of transforming ordinary experience into aesthetic form and to a locally grounded poetic paradigm that can be abstracted from that practice. It differs from the "aestheticization of everyday life" associated with consumer society in Featherstone's account. Primarily concerned with lifestyle, commodity signs, and self-presentation. (Featherstone, 2000, pp. 95-105) Wang's everyday world is rooted instead in vernacular ethics, labor, and interpersonal warmth. It also differs from classical Chinese theories of *yijing*, or artistic conception, in which poetic value is often produced through the fusion of scene and emotion. In Wang's fiction, poetry also includes an affirmation of secular human feeling, existential resilience, and the dignity of ordinary people. The term is therefore not merely a descriptive label for a warm and gentle style; it names a mode of rebuilding aesthetic value from within vernacular life.

3.1 Everyday Life as the Aesthetic Center

The most visible transformation in Wang's later fiction is the movement from abnormal or intensified psychological experience toward everyday life itself. "Shoujie" contains neither violent conflict nor a highly complicated plot. Its opening statement, "Minghai had been a monk for four years," is plain and unforced. It neither manufactures suspense nor insists on dramatic effect, yet it immediately places the character within a stable and concrete environment. The opening makes clear that the story will not unfold as legend or spectacle; it will explore how a person exists within the order of ordinary life.

The narrative center of "Shoujie" lies not in plot advancement but in the customs of Anzhaozhuang, the daily routines of the monastery, the appearance of Xiaoyingzi, and the gradual development of affection between the characters. What makes the work compelling is not narrative complication but the freshness and savor with which life is rendered. A sentence such as "There were water grasses in the river; the water was clear, and the fish could be seen" uses extremely simple syntax, yet it evokes the clarity, quietness, and vitality of the waterside world. The environment is not decorative background; it is part of life itself and a primary source of the story's aesthetic meaning.

"Danao Jishi" works in a similar manner. Rather than allowing a single event to support the whole story, it centers the collective atmosphere of a local world. It writes of people and water, labor and custom, personal feeling and communal rhythm. "Life" therefore ceases to function as mere background and becomes the central object of representation. Wang rediscovers a poetic space within apparently ordinary material. The poetry of the later fiction is not an escape from reality but something that grows organically from daily experience.

3.2 The Integrated Construction of Character, Environment, and Human Relations

The maturation of Wang's poetics of everyday life is also visible in his changed method of characterization. Unlike the relatively abstract and isolated figures of the early stories, the characters of "Shoujie" and "Danao Jishi" are always situated within concrete environments and networks of human relationship. They do not embody a single emotion or concept; they exist naturally within a lived world and consequently appear intimate, warm, and vital.

Minghai and Xiaoyingzi in "Shoujie" are not created through extended psychological analysis. They emerge gradually through action and detail. When Xiaoyingzi "showed a row of even teeth," the description is ordinary yet highly expressive. Wang does not

tell the reader directly that she is innocent or lively. A small, bodily detail conveys her brightness, naturalness, and health. Character is not defined by abstract commentary but allowed to stand independently through everyday gesture and expression.

"Danao Jishi" more fully integrates character, environment, and human relationship. Its figures are inseparable from the waters of Danao, local customs, and collective life. Their actions do not form an isolated linear plot but unfold within a living community. Human feeling is consequently expressed not only through dramatic confrontation but through ordinary exchange, mutual care, and patterns of coexistence. The vernacular world of the story acquires a holistic harmony in which people and environment reflect one another and interpersonal relations retain warmth and generosity.

This harmony, however, should not be mistaken for an idealized or shadowless pastoral. In "Danao Jishi," Qiaoyun is violated by Officer Liu, and Shiyizi is beaten almost to death; the value of communal warmth becomes visible precisely under the pressure of violence and power. In "Shoujie," Minghai's transgression of monastic rules is not merely the spontaneous expression of youthful affection but also an instinctive resistance to rigid religious order. Wang does not deny suffering. He absorbs it through restraint, ellipsis, and the characters' resilience so that harsh reality does not extinguish life itself. "His ordinary people bear injury while preserving dignity and continuing to inhabit the sensory world of daily existence" (Xiao, 2005, pp. 80-81). The fiction thus moves from representing a "state of character" to representing "character in life."

3.3 Plain Language and an Unhurried Narrative Rhythm

The most celebrated feature of Wang's mature style is the natural plainness of its language. This plainness is neither careless nor simplistic; it is a carefully refined artistic effect. The prose of "Shoujie" appears close to speech, yet it is exact and controlled. Its sentences are short and natural, without ostentatious ornament, but they render character, environment, and emotion with precision. Wang seeks not verbal brilliance on the surface but accuracy of expression and a natural movement of breath. The result is clear, fresh, and quietly resonant.

The language of "Danao Jishi" is equally unadorned. Describing local life, the story often uses sentences such as: "It was hot. Everyone went into the water. The water was not deep; one could stand in it." The diction is nearly colloquial and contains no conspicuous rhetoric, yet its very simplicity makes the scene tangible. Form and content are closely aligned: ordinary life is represented through an unhurried, appropriate, and relaxed verbal rhythm. The prose reads like conversation, but it is never loose; its flavor emerges precisely from understatement.

Compared with the sharp discontinuities of "Fuchou," "Danao Jishi" often uses extended syntax to carry the flow of communal life: "After breakfast, each person went into the street carrying, shouldering, slinging, or lifting their goods, singing and calling in different local accents and different tones" (Wang, 1993, p. 232). The sequence of verbs and repeated structures slowly unfolds people, sounds, and actions. Although the sentence possesses internal beats, it is not abruptly cut off; it advances with the ease of flowing water.

This language also determines the narrative rhythm. In contrast to the strained and discontinuous cadence of the early works, "Shoujie" and "Danao Jishi" move at a deliberately slower pace. Plot, environment, bodily action, and emotional movement mingle without urgency, creating a rhythm close to life itself. The fiction does not depend on dramatic peaks and reversals. Through verbal restraint and rhythmic extension, it acquires a quiet and lasting power. Such rhythm is one of the essential artistic conditions of Wang's poetics of everyday life.

Together, "Shoujie" and "Danao Jishi" present the mature form of this poetics. Everyday life becomes the aesthetic center; characters return to concrete environments and human relations; and language develops a plain, unhurried, and suggestive quality. Wang no longer pursues conspicuous formal experiment for its own sake. Through a deep recognition of the lived world, he achieves a more integrated and individual artistic construction.

4. Accumulated Life Experience and a Reoriented Literary Outlook: The Historical Forces behind the Transformation

If the experimental character of "Fuchou" and "Jiya Mingjia" derives largely from Wang's early literary training and aesthetic interests, the movement of his later fiction toward a natural, everyday poetics cannot be explained solely as a technical development. It must be understood in relation to his life history and the changing literary environment. The transformation of his style was not merely a change in method; it resulted from the interaction between accumulated experience and a reconstructed understanding of literature. The process followed an internal artistic logic, but it was also driven by the continuous intervention of historical reality.

4.1 National Southwest Associated University and the Formation of Early Aesthetic Taste

Wang's years at National Southwest Associated University profoundly shaped his literary path. There he encountered both the Chinese classical tradition and the work of Western modernists such as Virginia Woolf. He learned early that "fiction need not depend on a complete plot and could generate artistic effects through consciousness, atmosphere, rhythm, and language" (Li, 2024, p. 16). His early interest in structural leaps, psychological representation, and verbal form is closely connected to this education.

The same environment shaped his aesthetic taste. The young Wang was drawn to expressions marked by estrangement and formal intensity and was concerned with how conventional writing might be disrupted to create new artistic pressure. The discontinuity, tension, and symbolism of "Fuchou" are therefore not simply signs of inexperience but deliberate aesthetic decisions. His early modernist exploration arose from a clearly formed literary interest rather than from accident.

4.2 From Grassroots Experience to the Vernacular World

After 1949, the literary environment changed. Writing could no longer be understood solely as an expression of private aesthetic taste; it was increasingly required to confront social reality. Wang entered state cultural institutions and worked extensively on adaptations for traditional opera. This work exposed him to folk culture, regional speech, and grassroots life, and it gradually taught him that literature is not only an arrangement of form but also a way of grasping human feeling and lived experience.

Even more consequential was his long removal from the literary center and his direct participation in grassroots labor. Creative interruption and periods of being sent down altered his social position and enlarged his experiential world. He no longer encountered life only through reading and ideas but became an active participant in ordinary reality. Sustained contact with farmers, workers, and folk artists changed his understanding of the human subject. The abstract and estranged consciousness of the early stories increasingly gave way to concrete and embodied experience.

Several cultural forces reinforced this transition. The aesthetic tradition represented by Shen Congwen exerted a deep influence, encouraging a warm, restrained, and humane mode of expression. The rise of "roots-seeking" discourse in the 1980s renewed attention to local culture and regional experience. Wang's long involvement with traditional opera allowed him to absorb vernacular linguistic resources and develop a more flexible sense of narrative structure. He observed, "A writer should remain intensely interested in language and should read Chinese opera and folk songs, which is an inexhaustible treasure" (Wang, 2019, p. 450). Opera and folk song supplied not only speech rhythms, dialect, and tonal resources but also a new way of organizing fiction.

Traditional opera depends on suggestion, ellipsis, and the expressive power of scene. Crucial relations need not be explained analytically; they can be disclosed through song, gesture, and stage arrangement. When this experience entered Wang's fiction, it loosened strict causal chains. Stories began to resemble sequences of dramatic scenes, relatively independent yet mutually responsive. The intermittent unfolding of custom, character, and event in "Shoujie" and "Danao Jishi" reflects this structural principle of allowing scenes to replace continuous plot advancement.

Most importantly, these experiences did more than provide new subject matter. They changed Wang's understanding of what literature could value. The richness of reality taught him that everyday life itself contained meanings and poetic possibilities worthy of representation, and that literary force often emerged from the precise perception of what appeared ordinary.

4.3 From Formal Experiment to Lived Existence: Reconstructing a Literary Outlook

The decisive point in Wang's transformation was the conversion of these experiences into a new literary outlook. After a long interruption and an extended accumulation of life experience, he returned to fiction with less interest in conspicuous formal innovation and a stronger concern with the intrinsic relation between literature and life. He increasingly believed that powerful work grew from an exact and sustained understanding of familiar experience.

This shift first appeared in his choice of subject. "The later Wang returned repeatedly to the towns and waterside communities of northern Jiangsu that he knew intimately. He described older forms of life, contemporary destinies, customs, and human relationships, and he devoted attention to corners neglected by more programmatic writing." (Xie, 2018, pp. 79-80) In doing so, he affirmed that the small, ordinary, and fragmentary could occupy the center of literature.

The change also involved his understanding of language. After years away from a purely bookish environment, his prose moved from visible artifice toward naturalness, accuracy, and restraint. Such "naturalness" was not spontaneity without labor; it was a conscious choice produced by long experience. His conception of character changed as well. Figures who had once served as bearers of mental states were restored to concrete human relationships and material environments.

From a generational and literary-historical perspective, Wang's reemergence corresponded to the cultural context of the 1980s. His long absence had made him a partially forgotten figure in literary history. "The movement to 'rewrite literary history' around 1988 sought to move beyond a single revolutionary-historical framework and recover suppressed aesthetic standards and literary traditions." (Chen & Wang, 1988, p. 4) Wang's understated fiction, with its reduced political rhetoric and emphasis on human feeling and aesthetic experience, answered the literary world's reflection on the rigidity of Cultural Revolution-era cultural production. For readers shaped by historical trauma, it also offered a way to trust everyday life again and rebuild the warmth of interpersonal relations." His poetics of everyday life therefore functioned not only as an individual achievement but also as a generational mode of aesthetic and emotional repair." (Zhang, 2007, p. 208)

Wang's movement from early modernist experiment to a later poetics of everyday life was thus not an abrupt reversal. It developed through the interaction of literary training, historical hardship, artistic practice, and accumulated experience. The

maturity of his later fiction should be understood not simply as technical improvement but as the process through which a writer rediscovered the substance of literature in life itself.

5. Continuity within Stylistic Difference: The Transformation of Artistic Experience

From "Fuchou" and "Jiya Mingjia" to "Shoujie" and "Danao Jishi," Wang's fiction presents an almost dramatic aesthetic contrast: tension, symbolism, and deplotting in the early period; composure, realism, and the luminous texture of a genre painting in the later one. The descent from the "clouds" to the "ground" can appear to be a complete farewell to his early manner. Yet it would be misleading to divide the career into two entirely disconnected phases. Close reading shows that the later poetics of everyday life does not reject the early experiments; it transforms conspicuous formal devices into subtler and more relaxed forms of artistic control. (Wang, 1991, p. 366)

5.1 The Internalization of Technique: From Linguistic Control and Detail to Apparent Naturalness

A clear line of continuity between the two periods is Wang's sustained consciousness of language. In the early work, that consciousness is conspicuous. The repeated short sentences, semantic leaps, and pauses of "Fuchou" show that the author is actively producing verbal effects rather than merely recounting events. Language helps create pressure and tension.

In "Shoujie" and "Danao Jishi," this linguistic self-consciousness does not disappear; it changes its mode of appearance. The later prose seems plain and colloquial, but it is no less carefully refined. The ending of "Shoujie," for example, reads: "They were together. It was good." The extreme brevity of the sentence becomes meaningful through restraint. Emotion is not exhausted by explanation, and a quiet aftertaste remains. The naturalness of Wang's later prose is therefore not casual expression but technique absorbed into ordinary language.

The two periods share the same underlying concern with how something is said. Early language seeks defamiliarization and pressure; later language seeks accuracy, restraint, and resonance. Both depend on a highly developed power of verbal control.

Wang's sustained attention to detail and rhythm provides another line of continuity. In the early stories, detail often carries symbolic force and serves less to reproduce everyday reality than to condense a state of mind or emotional atmosphere. The movements, expressions, and static postures in "Jiya Mingjia" do not primarily advance plot; they intensify a distinctive spiritual disposition.

The later fiction retains this attention to detail, but changes its function. "Shoujie" and "Danao Jishi" contain abundant small observations, yet they no longer primarily symbolize isolated psychological states. They build the totality of a lived world. The sentence about water grasses, clear water, and visible fish is simple, but it captures the freshness, quietness, and transparency of local life. Detail becomes integrated with the characters' mode of living and functions as a source of everyday poetry.

Rhythmic awareness also continues across the two phases. The rhythm of "Fuchou" is quick and tense; that of "Shoujie" and "Danao Jishi" is calm and relaxed. "It was hot. Everyone went into the water. The water was not deep; one could stand in it." These short, nearly colloquial sentences generate ease rather than pressure. The effect arises not from plot-driven tension but from pause and from the ordinary scene itself.

The "plainness" of the later fiction should therefore not be read as the disappearance of modernist technique. It represents a higher degree of internalization. Segmentation, leaps, and rhythmic management, once recognizable as techniques, cease to draw attention to themselves and become almost instinctive narrative habits. The apparent ease of "Shoujie" does not cancel the formal consciousness of "Fuchou"; it converts visible craftsmanship into seamless control. Artistic maturity does not abandon technique. Technique "disappears" only after it has been fully mastered: readers perceive life unfolding naturally without seeing the structural labor that supports it.

5.2 The Migration of Weak Plot: From Formal Experiment to the Unfolding of Life

The difference between Wang's early and late fiction is not a replacement based on absolute rupture. "In the early period, plot is weakened through deliberate formal experiment; in the later period, it is muted so that everyday life can unfold without being subordinated to dramatic causality. Both approaches depart from strong plot-centered narration." (Wang, 2023, pp. 27-28) Despite its dramatic title, "Fuchou" centers on psychic atmosphere rather than event progression. "Jiya Mingjia" likewise depends on repeated representations of characterological state rather than narrative complication.

The same tendency persists in "Shoujie" and "Danao Jishi," although its implementation changes. Their attraction lies not in what events will occur but in how characters live, how environments open out, and how human feeling circulates. The later stories no longer weaken plot through structural rupture and psychological pressure. They do so through the natural extension of daily life. Weak plotting thus changes from an experimental device into a constitutive feature of the poetics of everyday life.

Wang's movement from early psychological modernism to a mature poetics of everyday life is therefore a substantial stylistic transformation, but not a simple break. His statement that "language embodies a novelist's basic attitude toward life" (Wang, 2019, p. 358) identifies the deep consistency beneath the change. A transformation in verbal form corresponds to a transformation in the writer's attitude, from tense observation to composed recognition. Yet the linguistic control, management of detail, and

weakened plotting developed in the early period do not vanish. They are relocated and naturalized within a new field of experience and a reconstructed literary outlook.

6. Conclusion

By reading “Fuchou,” “Jiya Mingjia,” “Shoujie,” and “Danao Jishi” within a single diachronic framework, this study demonstrates that Wang Zengqi’s stylistic evolution was neither a simple rejection of modernism nor a linear return to realism. His early fiction transformed psychological time, fragmented structure, and verbal tension into an experimental aesthetics, whereas his mature writing relocated these formal resources within local customs, ordinary labor, human relationships, and sensory experience. The decisive change, therefore, lies less in the disappearance of technique than in its internalization: weak plotting, rhythmic control, and concentrated detail became unobtrusive means of allowing everyday life to disclose its ethical and poetic depth. This “continuity within transformation” clarifies how Wang’s education, grassroots experience, opera practice, and historical circumstances jointly reshaped his literary outlook. More importantly, it reveals his poetics of everyday life as an active reconstruction of value after historical rupture, rather than a sentimental beautification of the ordinary. By reconnecting form, vernacular experience, and human dignity, Wang provides a distinctive Chinese response to the possibilities of modern fiction. Future research may test this framework through manuscripts and adaptation archives, and trace its influence on regional writing, rural prose, and contemporary narratives of everyday life, thereby further assessing Wang’s continuing significance in Chinese literary modernity.

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