

# Wang Zengqi's Literary Thought

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**Abstract.** Wang Zengqi has formed his own set of literary and artistic thought system in his long-term writing practice. This system includes: 1. Literature and art are the expression of emotions and the transmission of ideas; 2. Language is the essence of fiction; 3. Literature and art have not only aesthetic but also educational functions; the educational and aesthetic functions of literature and art are identical; 4. Realistic creative principles of literature and art.

## 1. Introduction

In October 1980, Wang Zengqi's novel "*Caution*" was published in "*Beijing Literature*" and was highly praised by literary critics for his scattered culture and poetic novel language. He is famous for his "scattered cultural novels" or "poetic novels." The publication of "*Caution*" marked the return of Wang Zengqi in the literary world. Wang Zengqi published a novel in 1944. In Shanghai in 1946 and 1947, he wrote a number of works and compiled them into a book entitled *The Encounter*. After liberation, he served as an editor for a long time and gave up writing novels. In 1957, he accidentally wrote a little prose and prose poetry. In 1961, he wrote three novels such as "The Sheep House One Night". By the 1980s, he had resumed his old business and his literary creation was interrupted for more than 20 years. He is known as the last "scholar" and belongs to the Beijing school writer. His novel language has a unique style. His novel language is poetic, plain, elegant, and unrestrained, and has a unique aesthetic function. His unique artistic style derives from his unique literary thoughts. Wang Zengqi has made a series of theoretical explanations on his literary thoughts, and his literary thoughts have gradually formed a system. Specifically, his literary and artistic thoughts were influenced by Confucianism and influenced by the May 4th New Literature and the Beijing School of Literature. Any kind of literary and artistic thoughts can not be separated from thinking about the relationship between literature and art and self, literature and life, literature and art and society. Thus forming a rational understanding of the essence of literature and art, the noumenon of literature and art, the function of literature and art and so on, and the deep insight into the above issues naturally formed Wang Zengqi's basic view of literature and art.

## 2. On the Essence of Emotion and Thought in Literature and Art

What is the essence of literature and art? Wang Zengqi believes that literature and art are the expression of emotion and the transmission of ideas. He believes that "writers are emotional producers." "I think that writers should constantly show their views on life and their thoughts and feelings, especially those with feelings. Writers are emotional producers." [1] In his Statement of remarks about fiction published in *Novels Selected Journal* in November 1988, he said: "I do not object to the philosophy in literary works, but literary works mainly write about life. Only from life to philosophy, not from philosophy to life. [2] In the article "*The Thought and Language of Novels*", Wang Zengqi said, "What is the most important thing in the novel?" I say the most important thing is thought. Thought is the writer's view, feeling and thinking about life. [3] French existentialist Camus said that any novel is a "figurative philosophy". Wang Zengqi believes that there is always a certain philosophical meaning in better works, but the depth is different. But it always concerns the author's own unique ideas. If a writer has any unique style, I say that first of all, he has a unique idea. [4]

### 3. Language Ontology of Literature and Art

What is the essence of literature and art? Formalists believe that form is the only existence of art, so form is the essence of art. What is the relationship between form and content? Which is more important, form or content? Wang Zengqi attaches great importance to language. He pushed the importance of language to the extreme. In his opinion, language is the noumenon of novel, which is the most distinctive point in Wang Zengqi's literary and artistic thought, and has become one of the core contents of Wang Zengqi's literary and artistic view. "I think language is content," he said in *"Self-reported Home"*. Language is the essence of fiction, not external, not just form and skill. To explore a writer's temperament and thoughts (his attitude towards life, not his idea), we must start with language and immerse it in the author's language all the time. Language is cultural. The language of the work reflects the author's cultural accomplishment. The beauty of language is not in a sentence, but in the relationship between sentence and sentence. [5]

In *My Creative Career*, he believes that language is not only a form, but also a content. Language and thought are both big and inseparable. Language is not only the so-called "carrier". It is the essence of a work and every sentence of a work, which immerses the author's thoughts and feelings. I once said that writing a novel is writing language. Language is a cultural phenomenon. Nobody has ever created a new language. The ancients said: No word, no origin. All our languages have their origins. They have been inherited from the languages of our predecessors, or have been born out or reformed. There are cultural deposits behind the language. The higher one's cultural accomplishment, the more information his language conveys. Chairman Mao wrote Liu Yazi's poem "Reading Beautiful articles at Flowering Season", "Flowering Season" is not only the time of falling flowers, it is derived from Du Fu's *"Meeting with Li Guinian in the South of the Yangtze River"*. Du Fu's original poem is:

It is common meeting at Qiwang's residence.

heard about it several times in Cui Jiu's living room

It is the beautiful scenery in the south of the Yangtze River.

At Flowering season meets you again.

"Flowering season" contains the meaning of a long separation and reunion. [6]

In *the novel Thought and Language*, Wang Zengqi put forward "the content of language", he said: "I think language is content." "In my opinion, language and content are interdependent and inseparable. Stalin said in his discussion of language: "Language is the direct reality of thought". I think Stalin said that very well. From thought to language, there is no gap between them. There is no gap between thinking and speaking. It is not like this. Therefore, the only way to understand a writer's thoughts is through his language. You need to feel his language before you can feel his thoughts. I once said the ultimate sentence, "Writing a novel is writing a language." [7] Whether a writer can be regarded as a writer or not depends first on whether he has his own language or not, and whether he can find a language which belongs to him and that is quite different from others. [8]

### 4. Aesthetic and Educational Consistency of Literature and Art

As for the social function of literature and art, Wang Zengqi holds that literature and art not only have aesthetic function, but also have educational function.

Wang Zengqi expressed his views on the social function of literature in his article *"Reading"* published in the tenth issue of 1994, *"Making the world more poetic"*: I think the educational role of literature and art exists, but it is not so direct, so "immediate effect". The educational function of literature and art can only be tortuous and latent, as Du Fu's poem *Spring Rain* said: "sneak into the night with the wind, moisten things silently", so that readers (audience) are unconsciously affected... I think it is the responsibility of writers to delight the readers and make them feel that life is beautiful, poetic and enjoyable. In this way, he will feel that he should live better, more noble, more beautiful and more poetic. Novels should improve people's cultural literacy. The function of fiction is to make the world more poetic. In this way, the educational and aesthetic functions of literature and art can be unified, and good and beautiful can be unified. Therefore, I think that literature and art should write

beautiful things. Beauty, first of all, is the beauty of human spirit, personality and humanity. Next is the beauty of man's appearance. Chinese people have a unique sensitivity to the beauty of nature. [9]

Wang Zengqi upholds the view of literature and art towards goodness and beauty, which is the most valuable point of Wang Zengqi's literary and artistic thought, and has become one of the core contents of Wang Zengqi's literary and artistic view.

"I have said that I hope that my works will be beneficial to the hearts of the world, I hope that people's feelings will be moistened, people feel that life is beautiful, people are beautiful, poetic." [10]

Wang Zengqi has always attached great importance to the aesthetic effect of literature, believing that aesthetic education is an important way to cure national trauma and improve human morality. This is Wang Zengqi's literary proposition. [11] This idea is similar to Shen Congwen's "new religion of love and beauty" and "advocating aesthetic education to rebuild politics". Wang Zengqi's literary and artistic view of benevolence towards beauty is the continuation of the literary aesthetic tradition of Beijing School.

Western literary masters share the same view of literature and art. Shakespeare said, "Truth, goodness and beauty are all my themes. Truth, goodness and beauty are changed into different rhetoric. My creativity is spent in this change. Three themes are combined to produce a magnificent scene." [12] Leo Tolstoy also said to himself, "I am an artist and I have been looking for beauty all my life." [13] Truth, goodness and beauty have similar qualities. Kindness and beauty are also Wang Zengqi's lifelong pursuit of art.

## **5. Realistic Creation Principles of Literature and Art**

Wang Zengqi advocates realistic literature. In 1983, he put forward the literary proposition of returning to realism and national tradition. [14] Why do we "go back"? In my youth, I was influenced by Western modernism. I did write fiction in my twenties by stream of consciousness. The obvious traces of stream of consciousness can be seen in my first collection of novels, *Revenge*, and the first collection of cornel published in Taiwan, *The Bell of Primary School*. Why did you change the original way of writing later? There are social reasons, but also my own reasons. Simply put: I am a Chinese. I don't think one nation is the same as another. Chinese people will never learn western literature like western literature unless you have lived abroad for many years and think in foreign languages. When I write about Chinese things and use Chinese, I can not but accept Chinese tradition, and at the same time, I can not but have a realistic color. Language is the most fundamental thing of national tradition. If one is not proficient in the language of his own nation, he will not be able to write literature with distinct national characteristics. But what I mean by national tradition is that it does not exclude any foreign influence. What I mean by realism is that it can accommodate various schools of realism. For example, modernism and stream of consciousness are not bad things in themselves. I didn't completely rule out these things later. I wrote the novel *Asking for Rain* and wrote that the parents of the children hope for rain. Their eyes are blue, those who look for rain are blue, those who look for rain are blue, and those who look for rain are blue, which is a bit of a modern flavor. *Big Nao Chronicle* writes that Qiao Yun falls away in disorder after being raped, and drifting thoughts are also stream of consciousness. Nevertheless, I have incorporated these into the ordinary narrative language so as not to make it appear "unnatural". I advocate that we should adopt foreign traditions, blend strange things with plain ones, take vulgarity as elegance, and take old as new ones. [15]

In the 1991 *postscript of the reprint of Wang Zengqi's anthology*, it further explained: "this realism is the realism that accommodates all kinds of schools. This national tradition is the national tradition of the essence of foreign culture. Realism and modernism can coexist and blend; national tradition and external influence (mainly Western influence) are not contradictory. Literature in the twenty-first century may be more realistic and more modernist; more inheritance of national culture, and deeper and broader acceptance of Western influence." [16]

At the same time, he appreciated Mr. Qian Zhongshu's connection between Chinese and Western literature. He proposed two links: the other is the link between contemporary literature and classical

literature (national tradition). There is also a connection between contemporary literature, classical literature and folk literature. [17]

He believes that literature reflects life and that all writers must have a solid foundation for life. [18] "A novelist should have life first, dare to write life second, and be able to write life third." [19] In his article *Recognizing and Unrecognizing Myself*, he said, "I am probably a realist writer. Realism, originally simple and clear, is to write the real life you see. [20] He inherited Chekhov's tradition of "writing life as it is". He believes that the form of works is the form of life. He said, "To write a novel is to write memories." In *his preface to Deep Potato*, he said, "I write fiction with a sense of truth. I don't have the ability to build towers on the sand. Some of the characters in my novel are archetypal. But fiction is fiction, fiction is not history." [21]

In addition, he thinks that writing a novel is writing memories. In *the postscript of Three Bridgeside Novels*, he mentioned: "I thought the novel was a memory." "I want to make a breakthrough on the concept of 'novel': novel is about life, not storytelling; novel should be sincere, not play tricks. Novels, of course, need to be skilled, but rhetoric is sincere. [22] He believes that authenticity and sincerity are the two principles of novel creation.

## 6. Conclusion

By sorting out and explaining Wang Zengqi's basic views on the essence, noumenon, function and creative principles of art, we have roughly constructed the basic theoretical system of Wang Zengqi's literary and artistic thought. Wang Zengqi's literary and artistic thought is the summary of Wang Zengqi's creative practice experience, and it is also the result of extensive absorption of Chinese and Western literary and artistic theory and practical experience. Wang Zengqi's literary and artistic thought has rich historical connotation and theoretical value. First of all, Wang Zengqi's literary and artistic thought advocates that literature and art are the expression of emotion and the transmission of ideas. He insists on writing the real life he sees. Secondly, he emphasizes the consistency of the educational and aesthetic functions of literature and art, the unity of goodness and beauty, literature and art must keep a distance from politics. Thirdly, he puts forward the literary proposition of returning to realism and national tradition, so that the fractured literary tradition can be returned. "Language Ontology" is an important feature of Wang Zengqi's literary and artistic view, and also one of the core contents of Wang Zengqi's literary and artistic view. Wang Zengqi's literary and artistic thought is a unique existence in the literary and artistic theory of the 1980s, and plays a leading role in the trend of Chinese literature in the 1980s.

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