



# Jia Pingwa's Prose View

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**Abstract.** Jia Pingwa is a first-class contemporary prose writer in China. In his long-term writing practice, he formed his own prose ideological system. He thinks that prose is all articles, but all articles are beautiful articles. True feelings, freedom, individuality, real feelings of life, sense of history and aesthetic feeling are the six key words of Jia Pingwa's prose theory of value, among which true feelings are the soul. Advocating the historical value of prose is an important feature of Jia Pingwa's prose view. He believes that modern consciousness, traditional flavor and folk meaning together constitute the aesthetic feeling of prose. Jia Pingwa's style has reached a perfect state. His prose represents the highest achievement of China's prose creation in the new period. Jia Pingwa's prose thought has been perfectly embodied in his prose creation practice.

**Keywords:** Jia Pingwa's prose view · free personality · true feelings · epic feelings and aesthetic feelings

## 1 Introduction

In 1983, Jia Pingwa's *"The First Record of Shangzhou"* was published in the fifth issue of *"Zhong Shan"*, which quickly aroused widespread concern in the literary world. Later, he published *"Record of Shangzhou again"* and *"Record of Shangzhou again and again"*. *Three records of Shangzhou*, Writing the history, geography and humanities of Shangzhou in the form of notes also gives an in-depth description of the folk world, showing a strong flavor of classical art. It is also a return to China's traditional culture and expresses the author's pursuit of Chinese classical aesthetic realm. Up to now, Jia Pingwa's prose creation has exceeded 2 million words, which is called the highest achievement of China's prose creation in the new period because of its numerous famous essays, elegant language and profound implications. As early as the 1980s, some people in the literary world have commented that Jia Pingwa's prose can stay, while his novels are second-rate and third-rate. His prose is greatly influenced by Wei-Jin dynasty culture in China, and has the bearing and great realm of Wei-Jin dynasty literati. The writing is written in alternating between classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese. Be good at using verbs, function words and auxiliary words. Some people call him a contemporary stylist. He put forward the concept of "great prose" in 1992, and he also made his own achievements in prose theory. His comments on prose creation are scattered in literary theory, preface, interview and so on.

Chinese prose has a process of transformation from old prose to modern prose. This turning point is the May 4th New Culture Movement. Looking back at the history of Chinese prose theory in the 20th century, the most famous ones are Zhou Zuoren's "beautiful prose" theory, Lu Xun's establishment of "essays" style and so on. Since 1950's, there have been many discussions in the literary world, such as "the form is scattered and the spirit is not scattered", "poetic", "the fever of essays" and "the true feelings". In 1992, Jia Pingwa put forward the concept of "great prose".

Chinese prose creation has been at a low ebb since the 1930s. In the 1960s, the representative figures such as Yang Shuo, Qin Mu and Liu Baiyu appeared in the prose. The prose in this period became "the spirit of 'literature being a vehicle of Confucian ideas' that strengthens the group consciousness but weakens the individual consciousness, the expression method of expressing one's will by relying on things (including borrowing scenery to express one's feelings), and the structural form of 'three blocks'", which led to the narrow theme of prose creation, the depreciation of real character and the monotony of artistic form and style. Some prose overemphasizes ideological content and political standards, while ignoring the artistic beauty of prose; Or replace "self" with "knowledge" and lose the lyrical self-nature. Prose has completely become a kind of coordination, a kind of occasion, an image of a bitch, full of "ah" characters, exclamation marks, flowered fists and embroidered feet, posturing. In the 1980s, prose was widely depressed. In the 1990s, China entered a period of rapid transition from planned economy to market economy, and the phenomenon of "prose fever" appeared again for people's needs to express their feelings and thoughts. Although the previously hoarse, object-chanting prose was spurned, there appeared a kind of sweet, greasy and vain work, writing small feelings, trivial things and flowers and plants. As everyone knows, the truth has not been restored. Just then, Jia Pingwa stood up and shouted: "True feelings" and "great prose". He appeared as a prose revolutionary.

In order to reverse the decline of prose, Jia Pingwa and his colleagues took an active part in applying for an issue number of prose, and finally *Beautiful Essay* was published in September 1992. The purpose of Jia Pingwa's publishing "*Beautiful Essay*" is to advocate the restoration of the true feelings of prose, call for a big atmosphere, make the prose vivid, and make an effort to truly prosper China's prose creation [2]. In 1992, he said in the "*Introduction to Beautiful Essay*": Our magazine squeezed in, in an attempt to make a sound of shout: shout to sweep away the flamboyant wind, shout to abandon the old language and outmoded style, shout to prose the sense of reality, epic, true emotion, shout to all the real prose, shout to the prose of this era that really belongs to us! [3]. This article is a programmatic article of Jia Pingwa's great prose view. The concept of "great prose" can be said to be a "revolution" of Chinese prose which was deteriorating in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Jia Pingwa's remarks on prose creation include thinking about the relationship between prose and self, prose and life, prose and society, etc. Specifically, freedom, personality, true feelings of life, sense of history and aesthetic feeling are the six key words of Jia Pingwa's prose value theory, of which true feelings are the soul.

## 2 Re-understanding the Concept of Prose

What is prose? In 1988, in view of the abuses of prose at that time, Jia Pingwa thought that prose must be reformed in the article "*Prose Creation in the New Era*". He thought that efforts must be made from two aspects: A. To understand that this "false, boastful and empty talk" is because there is no real feeling, and the real feeling is not a humble and trivial feeling. Small-mind can't make a difference, so it is necessary to open up the theme of prose, to practice the atmosphere, to have a big realm, and to find one's own induction and experience of the universe. B. To continue the tradition of the ancients and open up new ideas. Prose can't get bogged down in the "false, boastful and empty talk" mud in content and form, nor can it return to the ancient frame. We should have the courage to enter the authentic and go out of the authentic and be exceptional. [4].

In 1992, he said in the "*Introduction to Beautiful Essay*": Calling *Beautiful Essay* does not mean engaging in aestheticism at all, but we can declare that we advocate beautiful articles! [5]. "The history of Chinese and foreign literature has proved: the true feelings are there, the articles are flourishing, floating and false, and the articles are declining. The reason why there are the literary masters in the history of literature, and the reason why the literary masters appear is that in every period when the world style is floating, the style of writing is flowered and the legs are embroidered, there are the literary masters who get rid of the stale and return to the real feeling of life and the human spirit" [6].

He was dissatisfied with the state of prose at that time, the narrow concept of prose, the smaller and smaller scope of the subject matter of prose, and the paler and paler connotation. He thought that it was necessary to "restore the original appearance of prose, which is carelessly, free and easy! Prose is all the articles" [7].

In 1995, in "*A Seven-day Talk with Mu Tao*", Jia Pingwa once again comprehensively expounded what "great prose" was. He said: Literally, the word "big prose" seems unreasonable, but it is overkill, mainly because it strongly shows our pursuit and advocacy. Specifically, first, it emphasizes the true feelings of prose, which has its real sense of life, history and beauty; The second is to emphasize the expansion, and perhaps also to restore the subject area. Prose should not be understood as those who chant things and express feelings, but should be enlarged [8]. He emphasized the aesthetic feeling of prose. He thinks that "great prose" is "all good articles". "All articles that are not beautiful and tasteless are not within the concept of 'big prose'". The meaning of "big prose" is by no means all articles that can't fit into other styles [9]. "Great Prose" is not a shelter for many styles other than novels, poems, plays and stories.

Judging from the connotation of "great prose", Jia Pingwa emphasized the true feelings of prose, its sense of life, history and beauty. Judging from the extension of "Great Prose", Jia Pingwa thinks that besides the articles expressing one's own feelings, essays, on-the-spot notes, reports, letters and briefs, prefaces and postscripts, sketches, diaries, interviews, memoirs, and even prescriptions of Chinese medicine should be included in prose [10].

### 3 Freedom and Individuality of Prose

Chinese old prose has been shrouded by far-reaching feudal state system, social tradition and patriarchal clan system. The May 4th Movement shook the solid foundation of the traditional order, centering on the awakening of “human discovery”, taking the words that have broken the shackles as their use, and abandoning the old prose view of advocating for saints. Modern prose creation has three characteristics: modernity, authenticity and freedom. In 1988, Jia Pingwa talked about the freedom and individuality of prose in “*Prose Creation in the New Period*”. Jia Pingwa said: Prose is the art of flying and swimming. It is free and unfettered. But all art died of freedom and was born of restraint. How to explain this contradiction? Speaking of prose freedom, there are two aspects: 1) Freedom of mind. 2) Freedom of form. The freedom of prose is not self-indulgence. The reason why it is art has its artistic rules, that is, its constraints [11].

Jia Pingwa doesn't agree with the theory of “the form is scattered but the spirit is not scattered”, nor does he agree with the instrumental theory of prose. He thinks that the essence of prose is the expression of emotion and the transmission of ideas. In 1988, Jia Pingwa talked about the function of literature in the essay “*Prose Creation in the New Era*”. He said, “I think the function of literature is multifaceted... As for prose, I always think that it is the most irregular, free and emotional style that you feel you should write [11].

Jia Pingwa also talked about the interdependence between the freedom, individuality, and true feelings of prose. Jia Pingwa said in “*Prose Creation in the New Era*”: Prose is the freedom of the soul, that is to say, it is suitable for writing, that is to say, it is necessary to promote individuality. It is the life of individuality art..... Through people and things to make public your induction of the universe, make public your experience of life. If you have your unique feelings and experiences, you will inevitably revise and transform the people and things you want to write, then you will have your own material selection and perspective for the people and things you want to write. Of course, this process also needs another kind of “adaptability”..... A person with character can have true feelings [12].

A history of Chinese prose, strictly speaking, is a history of the existence and loss of individuality, and a history of the loss and return of feelings. The reason why every literary master appears in every era is that every literary master recovers after losing true feeling, and is a person who turns the situation around. From Han Yu to Liu Zongyuan to Su Dongpo to Zhang Dai to Gui Youguang to Yuan Zhonglang to Zhu Ziqing, etc. Of course, the recovery of emotion and the reconstruction of personality are not only a cycle of ancestors' tradition, but also a kind of innovation of thinking to a certain extent. The literary master in Chinese and foreign literature is born out of an old blood, just as everyone is using stone tools, and one who uses an iron spear is the literary master. Everyone uses broadswords and spears, and one person uses guns, and he is the literary master [12].

In 1995, Jia Pingwa said in “*A Seven-day Talk with Mu Tao*”: The high state of prose is like this: unrestrained, disorderly, from the heart, powerful and profound. I highly admire this kind of prose state [13].

## 4 The True Feelings of Prose

In the 1980s, there was a discussion on “true feelings” in literary circles. The discussion that prose must be “true feeling” began in the late 1920s. Yu Dafu believes that “the value of art lies entirely in a real word” [14]. Around 1980, the famous writer Ba Jin published essays such as “*Telling the Truth*”, “*Writing the Truth*”, “*Three Arguments about Telling the Truth*” and “*Telling the Truth No.4*” in succession. Mr. Ba Jin said, “My so-called ‘telling the truth’ is nothing more than ‘giving my heart to readers’, saying what is in my heart, what I believe and what I have thought about” [15]. This is Mr. Ba Jin’s backwash and dissatisfaction with the “false, boastful and empty talk” articles that have prevailed since the “Cultural Revolution”. As early as 1962, “*The preface of Selected Prose Features (1962)*”, edited by writer Zhou Libo, emphasized that “describing real people and real events is the primary feature of prose. ... Prose must never rely on fiction. This is the main difference between it and novels and dramas.” Qin Mu said, “We should write in a realistic attitude, oppose fraud, whitewash peace, cover up contradictions and cheat” [16]. Since modern times, the authenticity of prose has been regarded as the cornerstone and principle of prose creation.

Jia Pingwa also followed the principle of “authenticity” of prose. In his “*Diary of Prose*”, he said: Without unique feelings and discoveries in life, he dare not write a word of prose [17].

In 1985, Jia Pingwa said in “*On the Writing of Prose in Children’s Literature-Lecture Notes in the Workshop of Children’s Literature Creation*”: If you are engaged in prose, it cannot be separated from the word “emotion”. What is prose? Like all literary forms, prose is an activity of “true feelings”. ... prose loses its true feelings, and prose disappears. It doesn’t rely on stories to attract people, and typical characters to impress people. It relies on emotional infection and ideological enlightenment. Mr Zhu Ziqing said, “Be naked.” The truer your love is, the more your own and unique it is, the more touching it is and the more recognized it is..... Throughout the history of literature in China, all poets, poets and writers are prose writers. The development of prose has also experienced several ups and downs. First of all, in the era of hundred schools of thought, prose was at its peak, because a hundred schools of thought contended and expressed their true feelings. Later, we slowly lost our love and went to a gorgeous bath, so when we arrived at Han Yu, he started the ancient prose movement, and Han Yu became the literary master. Later, prose lost his true feeling, paid attention to the inflexibility of rhyme, and set off the ancient prose movement by Ouyang Xiu. Later, Tongcheng School, Gonggan School and other schools appeared, all of which started with emotion. When people paid attention to emotion, the literary master appeared. When you lose your feelings, prose will decline. A history of the rise and fall of literature is the history of the rise and fall of true feeling. In the previous period, the reason why people snubbed prose was also here. When prose lost its true feelings, readers became ruthless to prose [18].

## 5 Historical Sense of Prose

Jia Pingwa believes that art must reflect the times [19]. He talked about the sense of history of prose in interviews many times. He regarded the sense of history of prose as

one of the important values of prose and the uniqueness of his prose values. Jia Pingwa regards the sense of history of prose as an important evaluation standard of prose value, and is the first person since modern history. In 1988, Jia Pingwa pointed out in his essay “*Prose Creation in the New Era*”: Prose is the easiest way to express emotions, so it should have a historical meaning [20]. In 1992, Jia Ping-wa emphasized that prose must have a sense of history in the “*Introduction to Beautiful Essay*”; In 1995, in “*Talking with Mu Tao for Seven Days*”, he once again emphasized the true feelings of prose, with its real sense of life, history and beauty ..... [8].

Literature can't get rid of politics. But literature is not a vassal of politics. There is no real art for art's sake, and even if there is, it is boring. But tying art to politics is even more abhorrent, especially for prose. As an era, the era needs art to serve, and art should also reflect this era [19].

Why is the society indifferent to prose now? An important reason is that prose has become a knick-knack that does not touch the society and reflect the times. It is precisely because of the lack of the spirit of the times that readers don't read it, and the author thinks that prose is a small skill and rewrites the novel to show his ability..... Looking at the history of literature and art, every extreme work of each period must reflect the society of that period, that is to say, it has a strong spirit of the times [19].

Jia Pingwa also answered what is the spirit of the times. He said: Of course, it should include political, economic, cultural and other factors. In a word, I think it is the “air” that pervaded that historical stage. It can also be said that it refers to the social mentality of a historical stage. Please note that this mentality is not artificial, but natural, and it is a “trend” [21].

For a long time, we have emphasized the spirit of the times everywhere, but it is artificial. When it comes to the “lack of the spirit of the times” in so-and-so works, most of them refer to things that have no so-called upward light, and they are required to be added to the works. In this way, the works will be false and empty... The reason why I say “social mentality” is mentality or emotion is that light shines everywhere, water flows everywhere, and everyone can experience it [21].

Whether a work is profound or not, the standard is whether it reflects the times... The important point is to find the mentality of the society, the spirit and the potential, and find a carrier to show these things. It can be said that the principles and policies of a period, or even the things advocated by the government in a period, are not the spirit of the times. On the other hand, personal gratitude and grudges and petty feelings cannot be counted as the spirit of the times. The success of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Lu Xun's *True Story of A Q* is precisely the result of a thorough understanding of the society at that time, which captured the mentality and mood of the society. The reason why most of our works are waste products is that we don't realize this [22].

To grasp the spirit of the times, my experience is that we should first change the concept of “life”, stand highly or seek heights by sounding, grasp the society as a whole, and have our own unique feelings. [20]..... Writing about reality doesn't necessarily mean that the literary fortune won't last long. It is precisely that some great works in the history of Chinese and foreign literature have written about reality. It depends on how you write it [20].

## 6 Aesthetic Feeling of Prose

He once talked about his artistic aesthetics in the preface of "*The Sea Breeze Immortal Bone-Selected Paintings and Calligraphy Works of Jia Pingwa*". He said: My experience is that I have my long-established concept of the world and life, and I have my own aesthetics. Therefore, my literary writing and calligraphy and painting, including my collection, are basically a hobby, that is, I must have a modern consciousness, a traditional flavor and a folk flavor [23]. In Jia Pingwa's view, modern consciousness, traditional flavor and folk taste are the three elements that constitute the aesthetic feeling of literature. This kind of aesthetic feeling is also his lifelong artistic pursuit.

Jia Pingwa believes that traditional ancient art and anti-traditional modern art must be comprehensively accepted and freely chosen for our own use [24].

What is the national tradition, what is the spiritual content of the national tradition infiltrated and cultivated by national culture, and what constitutes it? I think, first of all, we should grasp it from the perspective of philosophy. There are three kinds of classical philosophy of China: Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism..... Under the restriction and influence of these three main philosophical systems, Chinese classical literature has its own schools and styles, resulting in unique forms of Chinese poems, paintings and calligraphy, and operas. If we can make a deep and detailed comparison between Chinese poems and foreign poems, Chinese paintings and foreign oil paintings, and Chinese operas and foreign dramas, we can fully see the psychological structure, customs and habits of Chinese, the ways and angles of grasping the whole world, and understand the differences between this nation and other nations. If you can go further to the folk, you will get a richer and more profound impression by making a survey of mountains and rivers, seasonal festivals, weddings, funerals, birthday celebrations, daily life, folk songs, art and dance, and so on..... This culture cultivates the national character, which in turn restricts and expands this culture [25].

Jia Pingwa believes that literary works must keep Chinese style. Jia Pingwa's *Letter to Cai Xiang on April 27th*: Literary works can deeply and accurately grasp the most fundamental things as human beings, and the essence and emotional appeal of the works can only be Chinese flavor and national style, and the form that adapts to the content must be Chinese flavor and national style. At this point, we can learn from Japanese writer Kawabata Yasunari [25]. He believes that Kawabata Yasunari's works are a combination of western modernist creative methods and Japanese national spirit. Therefore, Kawabata Yasunari succeeded.

## 7 Conclusion

Through combing and explaining Jia Ping-wa's basic views on prose, such as individuality and freedom, true feelings, epic feeling and aesthetic feeling, the theoretical system of Jia Ping-wa's prose view has been clearly presented. Jia Pingwa's prose view is the summary of his creative practice experience, and it is also the result of absorbing Chinese and western literary theories and practical experience. Jia Pingwa's prose theory has rich historical connotation and theoretical value. First of all, he put forward the concept of "great prose". His sense of historical responsibility forced him to stand up and shout

for “great prose”. He is the contemporary Han Yu and Ouyang Xiu. He emphasized that prose should be true and the subject should be broad. Prose is the article of everything. Prose is a beautiful article. Secondly, modern prose has modernity, authenticity, freedom, reality, epic and aesthetic feeling, which are the five key words of Jia Pingwa’s prose theory of value, in which true emotion is the soul. In terms of the essence of prose, he thinks that prose is the expression of emotion and the transmission of ideas. Therefore, prose must be true. In terms of creative methods, Jia Pingwa emphasized that modern consciousness should be combined with Chinese tradition and folk taste. On this point, he inherited Wang Zengqi’s literary view, which also constituted the unique aesthetics of Jia Pingwa’s prose. In terms of the function of prose, he believed that art must reflect the times, and he called for the historical value of prose, which was his first initiative. The historical value of prose is an important feature of Jia Pingwa’s prose view. In writing practice, Jia Pingwa’s prose represents the highest achievement of modern prose. Jia Pingwa’s style has reached a perfect state, and Jia Pingwa’s prose inherited and surpassed Shen Congwen’s style; He realized the historical value and aesthetic value of prose in the practice of prose creation. Jia Pingwa’s prose thought has been perfectly embodied in his prose creation practice.

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