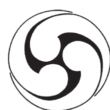
Reading *Wang Wenxing*

critical essays

editors

SHU-NING SCIBAN | IHOR PIDHAINY



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Author's Preface

READING AND WRITING

Wang Wenxing
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Reading and writing, it ought to be said, can never be separated. First, you need to be able to read before you know how to write. In general, you need to be able to read slowly (*mandu* 慢讀), reading every character carefully, before you truly read and truly know the core meaning of the words and sentences. After having accepted the need to read slowly, how does one read the quality of writing? Once one reads slowly, one can learn that the style of "a calm energy and a leisurely spirit, its form flowing in a slow and natural manner" is beauty, and its opposite is inferior. In this preface I cite several examples to explain and offer as proof of these statements, respectively detailing and discussing what slow reading is and the style of "a calm energy and a leisurely spirit, its form flowing in a slow and natural manner." As space is limited, for the convenience of explanation I draw my examples exclusively from classical Chinese poems. This preface was originally a talk at a workshop, at which due to time limitations I only read the first half. Here I've added the second half for publication to provide the complete picture of that talk.

Looking back, I've always felt that it is better to say that I am a reader rather than to say that I am a writer. This is not only because, considering things over time, I have spent much more time reading than I did writing (it is like that now, but it has been even more

so over the course of my life)—but also because reading basically cannot be separated from writing. Reading, indeed, is the source of writing. Even more so, before one can judge what kind of writer an author is, one must first examine what kind of reader he is. Thus, to say that I am a writer is not as good as saying that I am a reader.

I go so far as to recognize that I came extremely late to becoming a reader. It was not until I was in the first year of university that one day I had an awakening, and only then did I become a true reader. Before this, I had already become determined to study literature, but what I read was done hastily, like swallowing a date without chewing; was done cursorily, like glancing at flowers while riding a horse—when I was interested, I would stop and read a lot but, uninterested, I would view the flowers while riding the horse, surveying ten lines of writing in a glance. I had to wait until I was in the first year of university when one day I had my awakening. I recall that day very clearly. I was sitting beneath a coconut tree on the campus of Taiwan University, reading a book, an English translation of Maupassant. Reading near the end of the first paragraph of one chapter, I suddenly thought, as if out of nowhere: for the famous writers of the past, a piece of writing required so many sentences; a sentence required so many words. One cannot read them as if they lacked any flavor, as I had previously been reading them. Each word of this piece of literary writing certainly had a deep meaning, and each word had its unique purpose. To read and feel only that it was flavorless, the fault ought to lie with me and not the writer. So I reread this short passage in a way that I read one sentence and stopped to think about this sentence. Although I did not feel this passage was more colorful in my second reading of it, I began to understand that this manner of reading was not without interest, and indeed could overflow with flavor. From then on, I read all things in this manner, with the result that I was able to grasp many more hidden and beautiful meanings than I had before. Naturally, after this I read much more slowly. Prior to this, I would take just ten days to digest a narrative, but afterward a narrative of some three hundred pages would often require three months before I completed it. But I felt lucky for having my awakening beneath the tree, because only in this way was I able to digest the books I read. By this

time, when reading great works, I was truly able to understand what made them essentially beautiful and good (*meishan* 美善). Only then was I able to truly read several volumes—perhaps several dozen volumes—of good books. I had an awakening under the coconut tree, and although it was not like the awakening of the Buddha under the Bodhi tree, which saved humankind and helped all human beings, while my own was small and just saved myself, nevertheless I greatly rejoiced over it.

With this kind of reading, one ought to be able to encompass every aspect of the artistry of the narrative. By slowly reading a work as if it were under a microscope, the characteristics of the main actors, the psychology of what is said and what is done, the description of background scenery and objects, the meaning of symbols, the depth of its philosophical thought, the architecture of the structure, the beauty of the style—all become manifest: there is nothing that cannot be discovered. What I gained most from this was recognition of the beauty of style. To judge whether a style is beautiful depends on whether the rhythm of a sentence is good. Of course one ought to include whether the selection of individual words is elegant, however, word choice is a basic component, and any beginning reader is able to recognize this, whereas the rhythm of a piece is usually not within the reach of a beginning reader. It requires the reader's application of slow reading to discern it. After I had the experience of reading slowly, I got the rough impression that the world could be divided into two types of literary styles: the beautiful and the ugly—the beautiful being characterized by a calm energy and a leisurely spirit (*qidingshenxian* 氣定神閒), its form flowing in a slow and natural manner (*congrongbupo* 從容不迫); the ugly being rushed and harried (*huanghuangzhangzhang* 慌慌張張), its form moving like chickens flying and dogs leaping (*jifei goutiao* 雞飛狗跳). Surprisingly, style does not definitively determine the success of a narrative. Often there are styles that are not sufficiently leisurely, but on the whole one can say the narrative is well written. In general, though, one can say that when the form is good this will guarantee that the success of a narrative is not inconsiderable. So at that time I believed the beauty of the style was the basic passport for a good writer, and I still believe that today. So with

this rough two-part law—the leisurely and natural as beautiful, chickens flying and dogs leaping as ugly—which writers did I select as good and beautiful stylists? At that time, in second year and continuing through my third year and then up to my graduation in fourth year, the results of my selections were these: there was Maupassant, Flaubert, Loti, Tolstoy, Conrad, and Hemingway. At that time I adored Dostoevsky and Chekhov, but did not select them among the stylists. Today, some fifty years later, as I look back, I still feel that my choices were quite right. Today I still firmly uphold Flaubert and Conrad. Of course, I am able to add numerous other writers as well. The list of authors I've arranged above are all Western writers—I did not list Chinese authors. When I was in my second, third, and fourth years of university, I knew very few Chinese vernacular writers on account of the banning of books under the government's imposition of martial law. Only with great difficulty was I able to find some old "forbidden books" at the book stalls on Guling Street. I deeply felt that Lu Xun and his younger brother, Zhou Zuoren, could be included. But the very best person was Feng Zikai. Because I recognized few of the vernacular writers after the May Fourth movement, I turned toward ancient poetry and prose in my search and, in spite of everything, I felt that Du Fu should be listed as the top stylist—even surpassing the stylists of the May Fourth era. It was fortunate that I discovered Du Fu, for this was the most important event in my process of reading. I had the greatest esteem for the style of calm energy and leisurely spirit, and a slow and unhurried manner, and though Western authors were numerous, I was still unable to find even one Chinese author with a pure Chinese style to worship fully. But then I read Du Fu. Although Du Fu did not write prose essays (*sanwen* 散文) (there are a few occasional pieces of parallel prose which are not considered very good), his poetry—poetry that had a calm energy and leisurely spirit and was slow and unhurried—was enough. It was sufficient to serve as my model. Because of this, from then on there was not a day when I did not read Du Fu's poetry. Even today I read him. I've chanted his complete works three times, and when I randomly select one of his poems, I chant it joyfully without becoming tired of it. I place Du Fu's poetry at the top of the list of Chinese literary forms. But it is poetry, not prose. Now as for

prose, I mentioned Feng Zikai and Zhou Zuoren (and I can also add Yu Dafu), but who among the classical Chinese stylists are to be selected? Classical Chinese also ought to have calm energy and leisurely spirit and flow in a slow and natural manner. As for classical Chinese of the Yuan, Ming, and Qing periods, I later discovered that there were many who might be selected, but to promote one as an outstanding hero who could match up with Du Fu, I put forth Su Che. Definitely after old Du it is the younger Su—Su Che. The poetry of Su Dongpo (Su Che's elder and more famous brother) is good, his lyrics are good, and his prose also is free, bold, and unrestrained, but in general I feel his *yang* spirit is too rich (*yangqi taisheng* 陽氣太盛). As for the question of calm energy and leisurely spirit in a slow and natural manner—look to his younger brother, Su Che. Although I have not read his complete works three times, I have read through them carefully once. Therefore, in summary, I can say that my ideal ancient Chinese stylists, whom I have continually worshipped and followed, are Du Fu and Su Che. As for May Fourth and beyond, it is Feng Zikai. There is always Feng Zikai. Both Ye Shaojun and Xia Mianzun are close to him, but it is always Feng Zikai.

Having said all this, it is essential for me to add that writing and reading cannot be separated; however, reading is even more important than writing. As for how to read, once more one must read every character and read slowly before it is true reading. It is not like swallowing dates without chewing; reading superficially deceives oneself and others (I'm sorry if this is too bluntly put). I think I also ought to explain how one reads slowly. I probably ought to select a narrative and demonstrate it, but any narrative would be too long, and I would not be able to manage it in this limited space, so I will select a couple of ancient poems and use them to explain clearly—this being far more appropriate. The poems I've selected are unfamiliar, and so will be easier to interpret precisely because they are unfamiliar and everyone's impression will be fresh and pure, and the feeling will be relatively deep and clear. However, as for literary style, particularly that of "calm energy and a leisurely spirit, with form flowing in a slow and natural manner," they do not necessarily do it justice. Nevertheless, to understand the meaning of their language, a slow reading ought to be able to bring out the poems' fullness. This is

slow reading's most important objective. I use two Han poems as examples—both are short. The first is "Kuyu guo he qi" 枯魚過河泣 (A dried-up fish departs from the river, wailing).

These four lines go:

枯魚過河泣 Kūyú guò hé qì，
何時悔復及 héshí huǐ fù jí。
作書與魴鱮 Zuòshū yǔ fángxù，
相教慎出入 xiāngjiāo shèn chūrù (could be read as *chūyì*)。

A dried-up fish departs from the river, wailing,
When will his regret reach its end?
He writes a letter to the bream and silver carp,
Teaching them to be cautious in their comings and goings.

This is a fable poem, or it might even be called a fairy tale (*tonghua* 童話). This kind of fairy tale poem or fairy tale story always has a moral lesson as its purpose, and this poem is the same. Its meaning is to exhort one to be discreet in all matters, giving appropriate consideration to the present and the future to avoid a sudden disaster there will be no opportunity to regret. Poetry critics through the ages have all agreed that this is a poem about regret.

We can make a careful slow reading of this poem, word by word. First, the title of the poem—most ancient poems did not have a title, so later on people took the first line and used it to name the poem, thereby creating the title.

The dried-up fish (*kuyu*) is not a regular fish dried in the sun. It refers to a fish that is in a net and out of the water—a fish caught by men. Crossing (*guo*) the river does not mean going across the river, rather, it means departing from the river: crossing (*guo*) means going (*qu* 去) and leaving (*li* 離). The meaning of the first line is a fish, caught by a man, is departing from the river, crying on the bank of the river. What is he crying over? He is crying about not being able to regret past mistakes. "When will his regret reach its end?" is equivalent to "when will he realize his full regret?" The question is, when will this regret ever be

matched? In other words, he recognizes that his regret will not be matched again. So in the following sentence he surprisingly writes a letter to his boon friends—his boon friends being a bream and a silver carp—warning them that when they swim to and fro, they need to be careful about their ingresses and egresses, so as not to swallow a fishhook and end up like he is now. This poem is fantastical and belongs to fantasy literature. Moreover, fantasy that is unbelievable, for the fish not only is able to cry, repent, and realize his mistake but is also able to wield a brush and write a letter—indulging in fantasy so as to cause one to burst out laughing; that is to say, this fantasy reaches the domain of comic representation. This level of fantasy is quite distant from reality. Its purpose is to produce a new reading for one's eyes, to avoid listening to and sighing over the hackneyed and overwrought phrases of a moral lesson, but instead make the moral interesting and exciting. This is indeed the intrinsic purpose of this poem's use of fantasy in its style of writing. This poem uses its wonderful imagination to bring life to its preaching.

Let's look at the second poem, "Shangliutian xing" 上留田行. *Shangliutian* should be read as a place name; *Shangliutian xing* is thus "Song of Shangliutian":

里中有啼兒　Lǐ zhōng yǒu tíér (could be read as *tíyí*)，
似類親父子　sìlèi qīn fùzǐ (could be read as *fùjǐ*)。
回車問啼兒　Huí chē wèn tíér (could be read as *tíyí*)，
慷慨不可止　kāngkài bùkě zhǐ (could be read as *jǐ*)。

In the district a boy is crying,
They appear like father and son.
I turned my cart and questioned the crying boy,
Worked up he goes on, unable to stop.

First, we need to pay attention to reading the characters' pronunciation. There are some line endings that require a change in pronunciation. The character for boy (*er*) should be read *yi*. The characters *zi* and *zhi* can either be changed or left the same. If changed, then *zi* should be read *ji*.

The reason is because ancient pronunciation was not the same as it is today; ancient pronunciation had more dialectal sounds. For those who do not read ancient pronunciations, several of the rhymed words will not rhyme. Of course, we cannot be certain exactly how ancient pronunciations were read, but from the characters' rhyming sound we can infer how some characters need to be changed when read.

With this in mind, I amend the earlier poem, "A Dried-up Fish Departs from the River, Wailing." There is a character that needs its reading to be changed. That is the very last character, the *ru* character of *churu*, which ought to be read *yi*. Reading it as *yi* allows it to rhyme with the earlier characters *qi* and *ji*.

Now let's take a look at "Song of Shangliutian."

The line "In the district a boy is crying" denotes that in a certain district in Shangliutian there is to be seen a boy who is crying. The second line says that beside him there is an adult who appears to be his father; the two should be father and son. Seeing the son crying in such a heart-rending manner, I thus stop my cart and ask the boy why he is crying in such a heart-breaking manner: this is the third line. Afterward I learn why: the crying boy tells in stops and starts that he is mistreated by his stepfather, crying bitterly in a continuous and unstoppable flow of tears. This is the fourth line.

In this poem one must pay the most attention to the second line. In one reading, "They appear like father and son" indicates that the adult is the child's elder brother; the parents are both dead and the elder brother does not love his younger brother but mistreats him. In another reading, the adult is his father, and only the wife is dead, so the father does not love his son. Neither of these two interpretations is in accord with reason, so we prefer to choose the interpretation of the stepfather. As for the fourth line—"worked up he goes on, unable to stop"—some have said it refers to the man in the cart turning back, who after hearing this, sighs without end. But if it refers to the crying child, it is even more coherent—the whole poem focuses on the bitterness of the child alone: the poem's structure is seamless. The one returning in his carriage doesn't say a word, and the pity is even more subtle, for it avoids the extremes

of emotion and, on the contrary, fits the principle that less is more when expressing feelings.

The slow reading of these two Han poems clearly explains the idea of slow reading that I always advocate. It can help one discover the source of my writing, and is also helpful in understanding my writings.

How to go from a reading to an understanding of literary style and realize the excellence of "calm energy and a leisurely spirit, with its form flowing in a slow and natural manner" and use examples to explain this—this is perhaps rather difficult. As for using a narrative, on account of its great length being an obstacle, this is not possible. If one were to take a poem as an example, or take two or three poems from Du Fu as examples (although in reality the explication of literary style is still very difficult), literary style could be said to be like an antelope hanging by its horns (in a tree), leaving no trace to be found.[1] But I still think that I would just like to babble on for a while and give it a try, open up Du Fu's poetry by selecting the poem "Chengdu fu" 成都府 (Chengdu prefecture) to discuss the ins and outs of Du Fu's literary style. "Chengdu Prefecture" is not one of Du Fu's famous poems that are often heard and recited, and because it is not a famous piece we will not become bored when we read it exhaustively, nor become indifferent. Just like the two earlier Han era poems we discussed, this is clearly not a familiar work, so our reading and impression will be fresh, our perception precise, and so for this reason I have selected "Chengdu Prefecture."[2]

翳翳桑榆日	Yìyì sāngyú rì，
照我征衣裳	zhào wǒ zhēng yīshang。
我行山川異	Wǒ xíng shānchuān yì，
忽在天一方	hū zài tiān yīfāng。

1. Translator's note: This is a Chan Buddhist image that refers to great literary art that betrays no trace of the writer's effort.

2. Translator's note: For another translation into English, see William Hung, *Tu Fu, China's Greatest Poet* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1969), 1:159.

但逢新人民　Dàn féng xīn rénmín，
未卜見故鄉　wèi pǔ jiàn gùxiāng。
大江東流去　Dàjiāng dōng liúqù，
遊子去日長　yóuzi qù rì cháng。

曾城填華屋　Céng chéng tián huáwū，
季冬樹木蒼　jìdōng shùmù cāng。
喧然名都會　Xuānrán míng dūhuì，
吹簫間笙簧　chuī xiāo jiān shēng huáng。

信美無與適　Xìn měi wú yǔ shì，
側身望川梁　cèshēn wàng chuān liáng。
鳥雀夜各歸　Niǎo què yè gè guī，
中原杳茫茫　zhōngyuán yǎo mángmáng。

初月出不高　Chūyuè chū bù gāo，
眾星尚爭光　zhòng xīng shàng zhēngguāng。
自古有羈旅　Zìgǔ yǒu jī lǚ，
我何苦哀傷　wǒ hékǔ āishāng。

As day darkens, the sun sets upon mulberry and elm,[3]
It shines upon my traveler's clothing.
I've traveled across strange reaches of mountains and streams,
When suddenly I find myself along a distant stretch of the sky.

But now I only meet brand new people,
And cannot predict when I'll see those from my hometown.
The great river eastward flows,
While I have traveled for a long time.

The city walls are filled with beautiful mansions,
In the winter season the trees are green.
Loud is this famous grand metropolis,
Gourds and reeds mix among the flutes.

3. Translator's note: Mulberry and elm are a common reference to evening.

Although truly beautiful, I have nowhere to go,
So I lean forward and gaze at the bridge over the stream.
Birds at night each return home,
But the Central Plains are distant and boundless.

The new moon has not yet reached a great height,
The many stars still strive for honor.
From ancient times, others have lived far from home,
Why should I bitterly grieve?

This poem is from Du Shaoling's poetry,[4] and though it is not a representative work, nevertheless it is a good composition; among his emotionally restrained poetry, it can be considered a beautiful and flawless composition. The impression one gets upon reading this poem is that of "gentle intonation" (*yudiao rouhe* 語調柔和). Among the twenty lines, the two which least accord with the overall tone are "The city walls are filled with beautiful mansions" and "Gourds and reeds mix among the flutes." These lines depart from the colloquial nature of the poem and, moreover, they radiate upon the colloquial tone something that feels slightly closer to classical language (*wenyan* 文言), being more concentrated (*nongsuo* 濃縮) and somewhat more compact (*jincou* 緊湊). Strictly speaking, perhaps the first line, "As day darkens, the sun sets upon mulberry and elm," is similar in being concentrated and a little compact, but the hazy warm glow of the setting sun neutralizes the compactness and concentration, for the line still has an overall effect of gentleness of tone; this line: "As day darkens, the sun sets upon mulberry and elm," still matches and agrees closely with the overall poem. The first impression I mentioned—the gentle tone—serves as one aspect of the above-mentioned "moving with a calm energy and a leisurely spirit, with form flowing in a slow and natural manner." I am not saying that "moving with a calm energy and a leisurely spirit, with form flowing in a slow and natural manner" is equivalent to a gentle tone; what I am saying is that "moving with a calm energy and a leisurely spirit, with

4. Translator's note: Du Fu's alternate name was Shaoling.

form flowing in a slow and natural manner" can have a variety of dissimilar aspects, such as "stomping feet full of burning passion" (*fenli daofa* 奮力蹈發), "a sustained bitter lament" (*aitong yuheng* 哀慟逾恆), and any other form that does not become "rushed and harried, with a form like chickens flying and dogs leaping." Today I especially selected "Chengdu Prefecture" to illustrate "moving with a calm energy and a leisurely spirit, with form flowing in a slow and natural manner" only because a gentle tone is easiest to represent it. Below we'll also discuss the other strengths of "Chengdu Prefecture." During this discussion we'll be able to approach other aspects that assist and complete "moving with a calm energy and a leisurely spirit, with form flowing in a slow and natural manner." Indeed, all aspects of "moving with a calm energy and a leisurely spirit, with form flowing in a slow and natural manner" can be sufficiently represented by selecting three or four examples. To determine the distinguishing characteristics of the lines, we need to examine them one by one from the top. We've already discussed the opening line, "As day darkens, the sun sets upon mulberry and elm," while the second line, "It shines upon my traveler's clothing," states that this late sun shines upon my traveler's clothing. The lines "I've traveled across strange reaches of mountains and streams, / When suddenly I find myself along a distant stretch of the sky" say: I've traveled a distant road to come here, experiencing countless unique scenes of mountains and streams, while now, suddenly, not knowing how, I find myself in a remote region. The next lines, "But now I only meet brand new people, / And cannot predict when I'll see those from my hometown," mean that I took one road and came to this place, but the new people I meet speak a different dialect and have different customs. Indeed, everything is different from the people of my hometown, and I do not know when I'll be able to return to my hometown. "The great river eastward flows, / While I have traveled for a long time." The great river refers to the Min River—the Min River rushes eastward day and night, while I as a traveler float along this day, which is unfortunately as long-lasting as the rushing flow of this river's water. From "I've traveled across strange reaches of mountains and streams" to "While I have traveled for a long time" consists of three couplets, comprising six lines, and all are written in a gentle tone,

tranquil and indirect (*pingjing weiwan* 平靜委婉). This strength has been discussed already, but these three couplets have an additional good quality: that is, each couplet is a matching couplet (*duiju* 對句). These couplets may not be perfectly matching character by character; however, the meaning of the first line of each couplet and that of the second line match well. The reader perceives only that these lines are lucid and natural, not that they are matching couplets. This is the strength of being completely natural (*hunran tiancheng* 渾然天成). These three couplets are both gentle in tone and display no trace of the workmanship involved,[5] making each a perfectly flawless matching couplet. On account of this, each is worthy of our admiration and appreciation. Next comes, "The city walls are filled with beautiful mansions, / In the winter season the trees are green." "The city walls are filled with beautiful mansions" states that looking out from Du Fu's perspective, gorgeous mansions are packed within the city walls. One explanation for *cengcheng* is "high mountain," another is "temple" and yet another is "outer city wall." I have selected outer city wall. "In the winter season the trees are green" means that Chengdu is in the south and even when entering it in deep winter the trees are still green. "Loud is this famous grand metropolis, / Gourds and reeds mix among the flutes" says that I am now here in Chengdu, a famous capital city, taking part in a lively banquet. At the banquet there are flutes and reeds. The four lines from "The city walls are filled with beautiful mansions" to "Gourds and reeds mix among the flutes" solely describe Chengdu. These four lines contain the main theme of the poem, and so the poem is titled "Chengdu Prefecture" and its inner section naturally focuses on Chengdu Prefecture. The focal point is the ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth lines—the exact center of the twenty lines of this piece—and is the heart of this poem. In this, one can see how Du Fu emphasized his structure.

The structure is very even (*tingyun* 亭勻), with a smooth symmetry. This also explains how in moving the narrative forward, Du Fu arrived at the aspect of "moving with a calm energy and a leisurely spirit, with form flowing in a slow and natural manner." Let's look at the second half

5. Translator's note: Literally, "one does not see the ax handle."

of this poem. The thirteenth and fourteenth lines go: "Although truly beautiful, I have nowhere to go, / So I lean forward and gaze at the bridge over the stream." That is to say, the scenery is beautiful. Chengdu's natural scenery and culture are equally good. This being the case, I came to this place as an outsider, and now gaze at the rivers and bridges of the distant road that lead to my hometown. The stream refers to the Min River, for if he returns home, in the north, he must first leave Sichuan, following the Min River, and then the Yangtze, for he must go along the Yangtze River once again going north. Next, "Birds at night each return home, / But the Central Plains are dark and boundless." That is, the sun is setting in the west and the birds have returned to their evening nests. I alone have no home to return to, and gaze northward at the Central Plains, but only see their boundlessness in the distance. The next lines are: "The new moon has not yet reached a great height, / The many stars still strive for honor." That is, it is just when the western sun has set; just before this, the color of the sky darkened a little and the new moon has just risen but it is not high in the sky. At the same time, when you look carefully in the part of the sky distant from the moon, faint starlight can be seen, so it still has not reached the time when the moon is full and the stars are extinguished by moonlight. Then follows: "From ancient times, others have lived far from home, / Why should I bitterly grieve?": I truly believe in my heart that since the distant past, all throughout time, travelers have been forced to wander because of the chaos of war or because of work, so I am not particularly special in this, so why should I consider suffering on account of it? Of the poem's twenty lines, I believe the best ones are: "The new moon has not yet reached a great height" and the three lines that follow. All the lines of the poem except "The city walls are filled with beautiful mansions" and the following three lines, are good, because they all have the effect of a gentle tone, but "The new moon has not yet reached a great height" and its following three lines, in addition to having the excellence of a gentle tone, have other points of excellence as well. Let's first talk about the couplet that begins "The new moon has not yet reached a great height." What is best about these two lines is the tightly wrought (*jinjin kouzhu* 緊緊扣住) description of time in the poem, not only describing the scen-

ery to be seen in every direction—the moon and stars—but closely following the passing of the time of dusk, writing with strict realism of the passing seconds. We said that the first line, "As day darkens, the sun sets upon mulberry and elm," described the time when the sun set in the West. Through the first sixteen lines of singing and chanting, I believe there were pauses when he thought, looked about, sighed, and so on, and I suppose there had to be delays and prolongations until the sun had set, the evening sky was dark, and the half-moon had risen. So the two lines beginning "The new moon has not yet reached a great height" represent a moment of unawareness that, having narrated the passing away of the sun in the West, implicitly described the gradual coming of dusk. This narration is masterly. Not only does it hide in its gentle tone, but the lines "The new moon has not yet reached a great height, / The many stars still strive for honor" have yet another outstanding feature: these two lines also have a meaning to their symbolism that goes beyond the surface level. The meaning of the imagery of these two lines is conveyed obliquely and not developed in a direct manner, so that one can choose to take these images into consideration or not. The meaning of the images is political. The new moon roughly indicates the coming to the throne of an emperor, Suzong (r. 756–762), replacing Xuanzong (r. 712–756). The meaning is that the position of Suzong, on first establishing his rule, is still not very high or firm, hence the line: "The new moon has not yet reached a great height." The many stars are either an image of the power of his enemies An Lushan (703–757) and Shi Siming (d. 761) or the various generals in the palace who did not listen to orders. In summary, these two lines appear to have an implied meaning. This explanation does not at all obstruct the earlier hidden meaning of the passing of time, nor does it block the primary effect of the gentle tone, so long as all of the meanings do not hinder each other. Nor does it tarnish any explanations. On the contrary, many more explanations would only increase the richness of the poetry, and this would allow one to derive even more enjoyment from it. This is connected with the two lines, "The new moon has not yet reached a great height, / The many stars still strive for honor," which go beyond gentle tone to become a probing discussion between the two merits of an oblique depiction of time and

flourishing political imagery. Below, we read two more lines from "Chengdu Prefecture" worthy of exploratory reading—those being the last two lines of the poem: "From ancient times, others have lived far from home, / Why should I bitterly grieve?" These two lines do not depict scenery, nor do they narrate events. They are not symbolic in meaning, nor are they philosophic. Instead, they are a kind of absolute nonsubstance (*duan fei shiti* 斷非實體) speaking to something completely empty and nonexistent (*chunwei xumang de suoyun* 春偉虛茫的所云); that is to say, what they depict are feelings, and these feelings are depicted densely and purely. Moreover, there is the effect of a continuous, never-ending reverberation (*yuyin raoliang* 餘音繞樑). So this couplet has a high level of aesthetic sensibility. This aesthetic sensibility of continuous, never-ending reverberation clearly has two sources. First, it has its source in these two lines of graceful music—these two lines of music have the effect of a continuous, never-ending reverberation; second, it is the position these two lines occupy, the last two of the poem's twenty lines, and on account of this these two lines bring the poem to a close but cause you to feel there is still something more. This is the long-lasting effect of a continuous, never-ending reverberation. "From ancient times, others have lived far from home, / Why should I bitterly grieve?"—the continuous, never-ending reverberation of these two lines is clearly a feature of gentle tone. Moreover, one can even say that it is continuous with its meaning not yet exhausted, being many times more gentle in tone than the normal aspect of gentle in tone.

Having discussed the gentle tone of Du Fu's poetry, with the example of "Chengdu Prefecture" used to map out an explanation of the style of "calm energy and a leisurely spirit, with its form flowing in a slow and natural manner," I intend to select another poem by Du Fu—examining a tone that differs from gentle to explain the style of "calm energy and a leisurely spirit, with its form flowing in a slow and natural manner."

This is Du Fu's poem "Bo Xueshi maowu" 柏學士茅屋 (Scholar Bo's cottage).

碧山學士焚銀魚　Bì shān xuéshì fén yínyú，
白馬却走身岩居　Báimǎ què zǒu shēn yán jū。

古人已用三冬足　Gǔ rén yǐ yòng sān dōng zú，
年少今開萬卷餘　Nián shào jīn kāi wàn juàn yú。

晴雲滿戶團傾蓋　Qíng yún mǎn hù tuán qīnggài，
秋水浮階溜決渠　Qiūshuǐ fú jiē liū jué qú。
富貴必從勤苦得　Fùguì bì cóng qínkǔ dé，
男兒須讀五車書　Nán'er xū dú wǔ chē shū (could be read as xū)。

The scholar of blue-jade mountain burned his silverfish insignia,
And fled on a white horse to live in solitude atop this cliff.

The ancients were ready for service after three winters,[6]
Though young, by now he's read more than ten thousand volumes.

White clouds in a clear sky fill his door, like the meeting of friends,[7]
Autumn water flows over steps, like a flood from the canal.

Riches and honors must be obtained through hard work,
Boys ought to read five carts of books.

This is a poem of regulated verse. Its basic meaning is that scholar Bo, who lives on a green mountain, has renounced his fifth-grade position as an official and does not cherish the idea of government service. Indeed, he now prefers not to seek officialdom, but to ride a white horse and retire to this mountain to live a long time. These are the first two

6. Translator's note: This is a reference to Dongfang Shuo of the Western Han dynasty, who wrote Emperor Wu a letter that stated: "At thirteen (twelve) years I began to study; after three winters my letters and history were sufficient to be used (by the emperor at court)." See *Hanshu*, "Biography of Dongfang Shuo."

7. Translator's note: Literally, "White clouds in a clear sky fill his door, uniting like wagon covers touching." Wagon covers were umbrellas that officials suspended over their carriages to protect them from the elements. When they encountered another official (friend), their covers would touch and this became a metaphor for the meeting of friends.

lines: "The scholar of blue-jade mountain burned his silverfish insignia, / And fled on a white horse to live in solitude atop this cliff." The next two lines are: "The ancients were ready for service after three winters, / Though young, by now he's read more than ten thousand volumes." This is to say that when the ancients read books, they read for three years before they were ready to serve and work as an official. Our amazing young Scholar Bo, however, has already read to the full more than 10,000 volumes. "White clouds in a clear sky fill his door, like the meeting of friends. / Autumn water flows over steps, like a flood from the canal." This is a way of describing the living conditions at Scholar Bo's retreat: one large group of white clouds after another gathers at his gate, filling up his entrance. "Wagon covers" convey the meaning of meeting by chance. By autumn—that is, now—on account of the flooding rain, the water of the mountain overflows its channels until it drowns his stairs. "Riches and honors must be obtained through hard work, / Boys ought to read five carts of books." That is to say, there is no shortcut to be found for success and honor in one's life; it is one part plowing and weeding (i.e., hard work) and one part harvesting (i.e., success). An ambitious man must intensively read five carts of books; only then can he become outstanding and render service to the Son of Heaven (emperor) one day. The meaning is that Scholar Bo is studying hard, and eventually the day will come when his talents are recognized and he will enter the court and take up an important position. The character *shu* (book) from this sentence ought to be pronounced—as the previous word was read—*xu*. Ah, to make rhymes like these—the sound and rhythm of the two lines and one couplet are sweet and beautiful.

The best feature of the poem "Scholar Bo's Cottage" is the modulation of intonation (*shengdiao yiyang gaodi* 聲調抑揚高低) and the clarity of the rhythm—it is very mellifluous. The remarkable feature of the modulation in this poem is that it has an infectiousness that allows the reader to experience the great delight and buoyancy of Du Fu's spirit at the time he wrote this poem. Moreover, this poem's mood of elation and feeling of ecstasy (*shencai feiyang* 神采飛揚) equally emerge from the style of "calm energy and a leisurely spirit, with its form flowing in a slow and natural manner." Perhaps it is appropriate to amend this

slightly: changing one word from "calm energy and a leisurely spirit, with its form flowing in a slow and natural manner"—replacing "calm energy and a leisurely spirit" with "calm energy and a sufficient spirit (*shenzu* 神足)" to achieve a more accurate description of this poem. At root, though, there is not a great difference between "calm energy and a leisurely spirit, with its form flowing in a slow and natural manner" and "calm energy and a sufficient spirit, with its form flowing in a slow and natural manner." Yes, "Scholar Bo's Cottage" is a poem of "calm energy and a sufficient spirit, with its form flowing in a slow and natural manner." On the whole, one may say there is a little in this poem that goes against "calm energy and a sufficient spirit, with its form flowing in a slow and natural manner" and that is lines five and six: "White clouds in a clear sky fill his door, like the meeting of friends. / Autumn water flows over steps, like a flood from the canal." These two lines are a little close to human artifice, exhibiting a certain ornateness, which harms the spirit of the writing, not reaching what all the other lines reached: "a mood of elation and feeling of ecstasy." The reason the other lines are able to succeed in putting forth "a mood of elation and feeling of ecstasy" is entirely because they are written with the clarity of conversation (*yibai ruhua* 一白如話) and innate effortlessness (*huncheng tianran* 混成天然). This kind of "clarity of conversation and innate effortlessness" is, naturally, the other side of "calm energy and sufficient spirit, with its form flowing in a slow and natural manner," exchanging one sort of explanation for another. The second and third lines: "The ancients were ready for service after three winters, / Though young, by now he's read more than ten thousand volumes," not only have the clarity of conversation, spoken naturally, but also form a beautiful couplet, with not one incorrect character or one poor pairing. This being the case, since it strictly adheres to the rules of prosody concerning antithesis, and has the clarity of conversation, spoken naturally, who would say it is not by way of "a calm energy and a *sufficient* spirit, with its form flowing in a slow and natural manner" that it achieves this, and not because "a calm energy and a *leisurely* spirit, with its form flowing in a slow and natural manner"? Additionally, we can also discuss the last two lines, "Riches and honors must be obtained through hard work, / Boys ought to read five

carts of books." These two lines are already in the style of maxims, teaching and guiding tirelessly, urging those who come after to read more poetry and essays, and have been used throughout history as proverbs to exhort students. These two lines take an immortal place not only because the reason (*li* 理) of what is being said is good but also because their sentiments (*qing* 情) are good—the sentiment of the poem's kind-hearted words of advice is good. That in which the sentiments are good and that in which the reason is good allow both aspects to be seen uniquely in relation to the style of "calm energy and a leisurely spirit, with an easy and natural manner." They also make us, the readers, realize that even in a "mood of elation and feeling of ecstasy" the poet can still achieve the style of "calm energy and a leisurely spirit, with an easy and natural manner."

Let me attach a couple of superfluous lines. Regardless of how "Scholar Bo's Cottage" came to possess "a mood of elation and feeling of ecstasy," seemingly for no special reason, within the poem itself I cannot determine why Old Du was roused in this manner of energetic expression. It might mean only that his circumstance and mood were good, and fittingly he wrote this poem, for his "mood of elation" was like this, and it was not Scholar Bo who caused Du Fu to be like this. Now, if Old Du wrote another poem at the same time, and assuming his "mood of elation and feeling of ecstasy" were the same, then we could say it was spoken just like this person, the poetry was like this person, came out of his natural disposition, came out of the sounds of nature—this would be proof.

Du Fu's poetry has various appearances, those of "stately serenity," "suffering unto a desire for death," "loyal to the emperor and patriotic to the country," "zany interest," etc., none of which can be separated from his intrinsically constant style. I hope that the two poems selected here summarize clearly the essentials of his immortal style.

Translated by Ihor Pidhainy

Editors' Preface

Reading Wang Wenxing: Critical Essays is the first book in English that focuses on the writings of Wang Wenxing, one of the greatest language artists in the history of Chinese literature. The current volume consists of fourteen essays, three novel outlines, and three bibliographies. With the goal of presenting a comprehensive picture of contemporary scholarship on Wang Wenxing's works, the authors of these essays have approached Wang's writing from different angles with various methodologies. They are experts in Wang Wenxing studies, sinology, or Chinese linguistics, and several have worked on Wang's writing for decades. Most of the essays, outlines, and bibliographies are being published formally for the first time; the very few reprints that have been included were selected because of their indispensable importance and previous lack of availability. Many of the drafts of the essays, including Wang's "Author's Preface: Reading and Writing," were presented at the conference "Art of Chinese Narrative Language: International Workshop on Wang Wenxing's Life and Works" held at the University of Calgary in 2009.

While this volume was first conceived as an independent book to introduce Wang's writing to the world, it can be read together with *Endless War: Fiction and Essays by Wang Wen-hsing* (also published by the Cornell East Asia Program, Cornell University) which provides a detailed introduction to Wang's life and the development of his writing career, a chronology of his life and a bibliography of his works, in addition to translations of all his short fiction and five essays revealing his views on writing. In addition, Susan Dolling's translation of Wang's first novel, *Family Catastrophe* (University of Hawai'i Press) and Edward Gunn's translation of Wang's second novel, *Backed Against the Sea*, vol.

1 (Cornell East Asia Program, Cornell University) are also available to English readers.

We have adopted the pinyin system to spell Chinese names and other Chinese proper nouns. However, when other spellings of a person or a proper noun are already well known in the English-speaking world, that spelling is used, with pinyin spelling following in brackets the first time the name appears in a piece of writing. For the purpose of introducing research done by Chinese scholars who may sometimes publish in English, the scholars' Chinese names may be presented in pinyin and then followed by the other spellings of their names in brackets. We have decided to use pinyin for Wang Wenxing's name with the earlier transliteration of "Wang Wen-hsing" inserted in brackets following the pinyin spelling when his name appears for the first time in a written text.

Acknowledgments

The publication project of *Reading Wang Wenxing: Critical Essays* was conceived when the editors prepared for the international workshop on Wang Wenxing at the University of Calgary in 2009. Many years have passed since then, and the editors are pleased to see it reach fruition at last. On the eve of publication, the editors feel grateful to many people for their support and selfless assistance. First of all, we would like to express deep appreciation to Wang Wenxing and Chu-yun Chen for their long-term support of this project, in addition to their contributions in writing and assistance with the cover design. During these years, Wang and Chen have been busy traveling all over the world, attending conferences, doing interviews, and being present at award ceremonies; nevertheless, they were always ready to answer the editors' questions and offer all sorts of needed support. Without them, the completion of this project truly would have been impossible.

Second, the editors wish to thank the contributors—our dear colleagues and friends—who shared the same interests with us all these years, working hard on revisions and waiting patiently and trustingly for any progress in our preparation of the final version. Their moral support is much appreciated. Among them, the editors especially thank Te-hsing Shan for granting us permission to republish "The Stream-of-consciousness Technique in Wang Wenxing's Fiction" and "Wang Wenxing on Wang Wenxing." We also want to thank Anita Lin, Emily Wen, and Roma Ilnyckyj for their assistance in compiling the bibliographies.

As the publication is closely related to the "Art of Chinese Narrative Language: International Workshop on Wang Wenxing's Life and Works" held at the University of Calgary on February 19–20, 2009, the editors

thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada; the Taiwan Ministry of Education; the University of Calgary; the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Ottawa; the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Vancouver; the late Dr. Leslie Kawamura, founder and Head of East Asian Studies at the University of Calgary; and friends in the Taiwan and Chinese communities in Calgary for their generous financial support of the conference and the publication of this book. We want also to express our sincere gratitude to the advices and all sorts of support from the colleagues at the University of Calgary including Drs. Nick Žekulin, Susan Bennett, Herminia Joldersma, Xiao-Jie Yang, and Wei Cai, Professor Yu-kun Yang, and Mr. Xianming Zhao.

Throughout these years, Mai Shaikhanuar-Cota, the managing editor of the Cornell East Asia Series, has provided us with invaluable advice on the preparation of the manuscript; her support and assistance behind the scenes are much appreciated. The editors also feel grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions, which we took to heart in preparing the final version of the book.

The editors want to express our sincere gratitude to Ms. Shu-hui Chang and Ms. Chian-hua Liu at the Department of Codification of Cultural Creativity and Marketing, National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, for their assistance in securing permission for the use of Qi Baishi's painting titled "Damo" in the cover design of the book.

Finally, the editors wish to express our sincere gratitude to our dear and longtime friend Fred Edwards for reading the final draft and selflessly assisting us with the proofreading, and to our families for their love and never-failing support over the years while we were working on this project.

Introduction

Shu-ning Sciban

> "Writers should treat language like a goldfish bowl, wiping away any oily stains to make it crystal clear in order to see the living fish within."
>
> —Wang Wenxing

Reading Wang Wenxing: Critical Essays examines the fiction of the internationally renowned language artist Wang Wenxing (also known as Wang Wen-hsing) 王文興 (b. 1939), the most celebrated modernist writer living in Taiwan today. Wang published his first short story in 1958 and continues to be active as a writer. For much of his writing career, his language art was not fully appreciated, but half a century after the publication of his first story, his achievement and devotion to language finally began to receive the recognition and respect that it deserves, nationally and internationally. His first novel *Jia bian* 家變 (Family catastrophe) has been listed as one of the best one hundred Chinese literary works by *Yazhou zhoukan* (Chinese newsweekly) in Hong Kong and one of the best thirty contemporary Taiwanese literary works by the Council of Cultural Affairs in Taiwan. Wang has also received three prestigious awards for his writing: Taiwan's National Award for Arts (Literature Category) in 2009, the Chevalier de L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres from the French government in 2010, and the Huazong Interna-

tional Literature Award, presented to Chinese-language writers, by the *Sin Chew Daily* in Kuala Lumpur in 2011.

Known for the great care he takes in writing his fictional works, Wang has published twenty-three short stories, one novella, one play, and two novels during his career. (He has recently completed a third novel that will be published in 2015.) His low output is directly related to his method of writing, a painstaking process that involves translating the images and sounds in his mind into words or characters that can be reproduced on paper. The entire process, from the moment an idea first appears to the final version submitted to a publisher, is extremely slow. Wang described it during an interview with Te-hsing Shan in 1983, ruefully noting that as a young man he "didn't expect my writing to be so slow." In fact, according to his wife, Jeannette Chu-yun Chen, he writes only thirty characters a day.

Wang's greatness as a writer, however, is not about the slowness of the writing process but the artistic product that comes out of it. The ultimate governing principle of Wang's writing, in my opinion, is "precision" (*jingsheng* 精省). "Our writers," Wang suggests, "have so many things to study—precision is just one, albeit the most important."[1] He goes on to explain: "Words have to be like mathematical symbols, each one having its own function. One word too few, and the piece fall apart. One word too many, and the piece buckles under its own weight."[2] "Words," in his mind, include punctuation marks and every possible typographic device available for a printed text. Wang has dedicated himself to this concept of writing since he was twenty, and it is for this goal of achieving precision that he writes at such a slow speed—those famous thirty characters a day, including punctuation marks.

In the introduction to *Endless War: Fiction and Essays by Wang Wen-hsing* (Cornell East Asia Series 158, 2011), an English-language anthol-

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1. Wang Wenxing, "*Xin ke de shixiang* xu"《新刻的石像》序 (Preface to *New stone statue*), *Xiandai wenxue* 現代文學 (Modern literature) 35 (1968): 218. The translation is by Martin Sulev in *Endless War: Fiction and Essays by Wang Wen-hsing*, eds. Shu-ning Sciban and Fred Edwards (Ithaca, NY: Cornell East Asia Program, Cornell University, 2011), 370.

2. Ibid.

ogy of Wang's short works, I provided a detailed account of Wang's life and writing career, so there is no need to repeat how he developed his style. Instead, aiming at revealing the art of Wang's language as well as the thought expressed through his words—after all, he says, "words control tone, atmosphere and viewpoint"[3]— this volume focuses on critiques of his writing. We briefly describe the reception of Wang's fictional works.

Wang Wenxing's formal career as a writer was launched with the publication of his first short story in 1958, when he was a first-year student at National Taiwan University. His early stories, with the exception of "Long tian lou" 龍天樓 (Dragon inn) in 1965, did not receive much attention from readers. The publication of his first novel, *Family Catastrophe*, in 1972 changed that completely. Despite an initially negative reception from the reading public, academic scholars and critics have since shown great enthusiasm for Wang's unique language and style. The "classical" scholarship of "Wangxue" 王學 (a term that has become popular in recent years as shorthand for "Wang Wenxing studies") was established in the period from the mid-1970s to the 1980s, and included essays by Yan Yuanshu 顏元叔, Ouyang Zi 歐陽子, Hengsyung Jeng (Zheng Hengxiong) 鄭恆雄, Zhang Hanliang 張漢良, Joseph Lau (Liu Shaoming) 劉紹銘, Wai-lim Yip (Ye Weilian) 葉維廉, Leo Lee (Li Oufan) 李歐梵, Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang (Zhang Songsheng) 張誦聖, Ye Shan 葉珊 (also known as Yang Mu 楊牧 or Wang Jingxian 王靖獻), Wu Dayun 吳達芸, Te-hsing Shan (Shan Dexing) 單德興, and Kang Laixin 康來新. The scholarship in this period, which focused mainly on examining Wang's linguistic strategies, particularly in *Family Catastrophe*, and asserted the importance of his fiction from the perspective of Western modernism, established a solid foundation for further study of his writing.

In November 2001, *Zhongwai wenxue* 中外文學 (Chungwai literary monthly) published a special issue on Wang Wenxing that focused on his second novel, *Bei hai de ren* 背海的人 (Backed against the sea), which came out in two volumes in 1981 and 1999. Edited by Lin Xiuling

3. Ibid.

林秀玲 and comprised the most important works in Wang studies from the mid-1990s to the turn of the twenty-first century, this special issue bore witness to the expansion of research interests among scholars. Topics included investigations of story settings and Wang's writing process, discussions of the politics of modernism and modes of modernity, comparisons with Western writers and literature, translators' reflections on their translations of Wang's fiction and translation theory, and Wang's views on classical poetry and architecture. Judged by the tone of the essays, the expansion in research verified a broader acceptance of Wang's writing among academics: the canonization of Wang's works was taking off.

In the West, special interest in Wang's writing emerged in the 1980s. James Shu, Edward Gunn, and Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang are among the pioneer scholars who studied Wang's iconoclasm toward the traditional concept of filial piety, unconventional use of language, innovative prose style, and narratological inventions.[4] Later, Chang made an extraordinary contribution to the establishment of Wang studies in the West with two monographs, *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance: Contemporary Chinese Fiction* (Duke University Press, 1993) and *Literary Culture in Taiwan: Martial Law to Market Law* (Columbia University Press, 2004). In these publications, Chang addresses not only the literary significance of

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4. The pioneering essays on Wang's writing that I refer to here are as follows: James C.T. Shu, "Iconoclasm in Wang Wen-hsing's *Chia-pien*," in *Chinese Fiction from Taiwan*, edited by Jeannette L. Faurot (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 179–93; Yvonne Sung-sheng Chang, "Language, Narrator, and Stream-of-consciousness: The Two Novels of Wang Wen-hsing," *Modern Chinese Literature* 1.1 (1984): 43–55; Edward Gunn, "The Process of Wang Wen-hsing's Art," *Modern Chinese Literature* 1.1 (1984): 29–41. It is worth mentioning that the editor of *Modern Chinese Literature* at the time was Howard Goldblatt, whose contribution to the study of Wang Wenxing can also be seen in his support for the publication of English translations of Wang's three works: *Family Catastrophe*, "Yige gongwuyuan de jiehun"一個公務員的結婚 (The marriage of a civil servant), and "Da feng" 大風 (Strong wind), the latter two of which are included in *Endless War: Fiction and Essays by Wang Wen-hsing*, edited by Shu-ning Sciban and Fred Edwards (Ithaca, NY: Cornell East Asia Program, Cornell University, 2013), 15–25, 153–63.

Wang's fiction, language, and themes, his connection with Western literary modernism, and his influence on other writers, but also the cultural environment in which Wang was raised and continues to work. In addition, since 1990, younger scholars such as Steven Riep, Christopher Lupke, Sandrine Marchand, and myself have conducted research on a wide range of topics, including thematic interpretations, historical and cultural analyses, typographic theory, genetic criticism, and stylistic and rhetoric analyses.

There have also been several large research projects in the field of Wang studies, beginning with two international conferences. The first was the "Art of Chinese Narrative Language: International Workshop on Wang Wenxing's Life and Works," which I organized at the University of Calgary in Canada in 2009; the second, "Enacting Modernism: Wang Wenxing's Works in Performance and Translation," was organized by Kang Laixin and held at National Central University in Taiwan in 2010. They were followed by three major publications: *Wang Wenxing shougao ji*: *Jia bian, Bei hai de ren* 王文興手稿集：《家變》，《背海的人》 (Wang Wenxing's manuscripts: *Family Catastrophe*, *Backed against the Sea*, Xingren, 2010), compiled by Yi Peng, a devoted Wang scholar who emerged in the 1990s in Taiwan; *Endless War: Fiction and Essays by Wang Wen-hsing*, edited by Shu-ning Sciban and Fred Edwards (Cornell East Asia Program, Cornell University, 2011), an English translation anthology that contains all of Wang's short fiction and selected essays in which he discusses his thoughts on writing and literary language; and *Mandu Wang Wenxing congshu* 慢讀王文興套書 (Slow reading Wang Wenxing) (seven volumes), edited by Huang Shuning (Shu-ning Sciban), Kang Laixin, and San-hui Hung (Hong Shanhui) (National Taiwan University Press, 2013). These publications resulted from the lengthy effort to provide manuscripts, English translations, and Chinese-language references to students and researchers.

With the goal of continuing to build the scholarship on Wang's writing, *Reading Wang Wenxing: Critical Essays* was first proposed in the fall of 2007 during initial preparations for the University of Calgary conference in 2009. Originally conceived as a volume of conference proceedings, it grew to include not only papers by the participants but also from

Wang scholars who had not attended. These essays represent the current critical understanding of Wang Wenxing and his narrative art.

In this first English volume of scholarship on Wang's works, *Reading Wang Wenxing* consists of twenty-one items, including the "Author's Preface: Reading and Writing" by Wang Wenxing himself. The rest are grouped into two parts: Part I comprises fourteen scholarly essays; Part II provides appendices to Wang's work, including outlines of his novels and bibliographies of his writings, works of Wang scholarship, and translations of his works.

In his author's preface, an expanded version of his keynote speech at the Calgary conference, Wang provides an explanation of his approach to writing through a demonstration of "mandu" (慢讀 slow reading). He emphasizes literary realism as a fundamental principle and demonstrates his sensitivity to the tone and rhythm of a text. The essay also attests to the development of Wang's strong interest in classical poetry, particularly his appreciation of Du Fu's 杜甫 works. If reading and writing can never be separated, as Wang says, this article ought to provide the reader with clues about the nature of his literary world.

The essays in Part I are grouped under four headings: Social and Cultural Critique, Questions of Style, Reflections on Translation, and Reflections on Wang Wenxing's Life.

Social and Cultural Critique consists of four essays. In "Wang Wenxing and Lu Xun: High-Culture Quest, Enlightenment Rationality, and the Modernist Duality," Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang explores Wang's lifelong practice of modernist aesthetics from a sociopolitical perspective, comparing him with another Chinese literary giant, Lu Xun 魯迅. Chang finds that both writers, though living in different historical eras, share the same spirit in their pursuit of high culture, as reflected in their anti-tradition, pro-Enlightenment stance. Switching from the usual focus on innovation in the linguistic features of Wang's writing, Chang's analysis sheds light on the constitution and formation of Wang's modernist aesthetics and the modernity of his work in which Enlightenment rationality serves as the foundation for the writer's "modernist duality"—the literary configurations of his writing. In the earlier monographs, Chang studied and elucidated the influence of Western modernism on Taiwan-

ese literature, which included the relationship between Wang's writing and modernism. While clarifying the similarities in the cultural dispositions and literary configurations shared by Wang and Lu Xun, this essay situates Wang within the context of Chinese and East Asian modernization in the twentieth century.

Like Chang, Ihor Pidhainy in "Archetypes in Wang Wenxing's Early Fiction: Insecure Intellectuals and Dangerous Women" also deals with a larger issue in Wang's writing: character typology and gender. Probing Wang's early short stories, Pidhainy specifically examines the images of two common character types—young boys and mature women—and their relationship with each other. He finds that the former usually take on the characteristics of either weak intellectuals or bullying antagonists, whereas the latter are destructive and domineering. As he delineates the individual character of each type, Pidhainy also offers deep readings of each story. The broad picture of the character archetypes drawn in the essay helps clarify Wang's views and concerns about human nature and relationships, not only in his early but also in his later works.

Whereas Pidhainy studies women in general, Darryl Sterk, in "Screwed by Fate? The Prostitute and the Critique of Liberalism in *Backed Against the Sea*," studies the role of prostitutes and the thematic significance of prostitution in *Backed Against the Sea* from sociopolitical and socioeconomic perspectives, as well investigating Wang's liberalism, foregrounding his criticism of capitalism. This is a topic that has not been explored much in Wang studies, despite the fact that Wang's social criticism has been evident from the very beginning of his writing, in stories such as "Yitiao chuiside gou" 一條垂死的狗 (A dying dog, 1958), his second published story, written at the age of just nineteen. Sterk's essay indeed offers a fresh outlook on Wang's writing.

Jane Parish Yang's "Leaving Home: Foreshadowing, Echo, and Sideshadowing in Wang Wenxing's *Jia bian*" is a close examination of the plot design of *Family Catastrophe*, with particular focus on the use of the techniques of foreshadowing and sideshadowing in the revelation of the perplexing and tangled father–son relationship in the novel. In her intriguing and detailed analysis, the complicated relations between whole

and part and between theme and plot become clear, revealing the meticulous design of the novel.

The second section of Part I, "Questions of Style," consists of five essays, focusing on Wang's literary technique. This section begins with Wai-lim Yip's "Wang Wenxing: Novelist as Lyric Sculptor." Though Wang is not famous for writing poetry, he does stress poetized prose in modern literature when he says that "the language of modern fiction, without exception, meticulously follows the language of poetry."[5] Investigating Wang's lyricism, as defined by Edgar Allan Poe, Yip puts Wang's writing in line with Western modernist literature and argues that the essence of Wang's fiction is the poetic lyricism of high modernism. He uses "Xiawu" 下午 (Afternoon, 1959), "Muqin" 母親 (Mother, 1960), and "Da feng" 大風 (Strong wind, 1961) to demonstrate the three methods Wang uses to "arrest" the reader's attention at key poetic moments in his stories.

Placing Wang Wenxing within the history of Chinese literature, my essay "*Family Catastrophe* and Its Connection with Traditional Chinese Literature" probes several configurations of *Family Catastrophe*, illustrating Wang's use of two common structural features in traditional Chinese literature—the fourfold structure (exposition-development-transition-conclusion) and the introductory function of the beginning section. This essay challenges the previous view of Wang Wenxing as an artist of *quanpan xihua* 全盤西化 (wholesale Westernization) and encourages a reconsideration of the influence of Chinese literature on Wang's writing, particularly as his prose published over the past decade reveals his study and appreciation of classical Chinese literature.

5. Wang Wenxing, "*Xiandai wenxue lun* xu"《現代文學論》序 (Preface to *Criticism of modern literature*), *Xiandai wenxue lun—Lianfu sanshi nian wenxue daxi pinglun juan*, vol. 3《現代文學論—聯副三十年文學大系評論卷 3》 (*Criticism of modern literature—anthology of literary criticism selected from the Literary Supplement of Lianhe Daily News in the past thirty years*) (Taipei: Lianhe bao, 1980), 33–40. This essay was reprinted as "Qianlun xiandai wenxue" 淺論現代文學 (A brief discussion on modern literature) in *Shu he ying* 書合影 (Books and films) (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe, 1988), 187–93. The quotation is on p. 189. The English translation is by Christopher Lupke in *Endless War: Fiction and Essays by Wang Wen-hsing*, p. 374.

Inspired by the complexity of the linguistic structure of Wang's novels, Wei Cai's "The Use of *Liheci* in *Family Catastrophe*" studies the employment of *liheci* 離合詞—words consisting of two morphemes that can be used with or without other constituents inserted in between—with a special focus on their morphological structure and the patterns of their function in Wang's first novel. This essay, the first investigation of Wang's language employing linguistic methodology with quantified data and referential materials, represents a breakthrough in research approach.

Like Wai-lim Yip and Sung-sheng Chang, Hengsyung Jeng has studied Wang's writing for a long time. His first investigation of *Backed Against the Sea*, vol. 1, was published in 1986. In "Harmony, Counterpoint, and Variation in *Backed Against the Sea*," a continuation of that initial study of the musicality of Wang's second novel, Jeng analyzes the musical structure of both volumes of *Backed Against the Sea* by employing classical musical theory, particularly that pertaining to vocal music and the composition of variations, demonstrating Wang's acoustic design in his writing. As Wang is extremely keen on the musical quality of written language, Jeng gives his full analytical attention to it, brilliantly illuminating the musicality of the novel.

Although Wang's fame rests on his two novels, his early short fiction, though less discussed, is also remarkable, and has been examined by scholars such as Ye Shan, Wu Dayun, and Steven L. Riep.[6] Te-hsing Shan was among this group when he wrote "The Stream-of-Consciousness Technique in Wang Wenxing's Fiction," in which he made a thorough

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6. These scholars have spoken highly of Wang's mastery of writing fiction. Their critiques include Ye Shan 葉珊, "Tansuo Wang Wenxing xiaoshuo li de beiju qingdiao" 探索王文興小說裡的悲劇情調 (Exploring the tragic sentiment in Wang Wenxing's fiction), *Xiandai wenxue* 現代文學 (Modern literature) 32 (1967): 60–67; Wu Dayun 吳達芸, "Wang Wenxing xiaoshuo zhong de zhuangshi jiqiao" 王文興小說中的裝飾情調 (The craftsmanship of embellishment in Wang Wenxing's fiction), *Xin chao* 新潮 (New tide) 19 (1969): 20–28; Steven L. Riep, "A Case of Successful Failure: 'Dragon Inn' and Wang Wen-hsing's Critique of Official History and Anticommunist Literature," *Selected Papers in Asian Studies*, New Series no. 67 (2001): 1–34.

examination of the use of stream-of-consciousness starting with the early works and continuing through the novels. Shan's close readings reveal not only that Wang was able to use this technique in a mature manner at the age of twenty but also that it was essential in the composition of the first volume of *Backed Against the Sea*. Shan's essay was first published in 1985, but due to its importance in emphasizing the Wang's development of this technique from an early stage right through to his maturity, as well as the essay's lack of availability to contemporary scholars, the editors decided to republish it in this volume.

The next section, "Reflections on Translation," contains articles by three translators of Wang Wenxing's fiction in which they discuss their translation theories as well as the pragmatic solutions and strategies they used in dealing with the challenges of translating Wang's works. Sandrine Marchand, translator of *Processus familial* (the French translation of *Family Catastrophe*, published by ACTES SUD in 1999) and many of Wang's stories into French, offers an interpretation of Wang's writing process based on how his consideration of a word's visual and aural aspects influences his placement of text on a page. In "The Poetics of Rhythm in Wang Wenxing's Novels," Marchand sheds light on the writer's use of blank space, an outstanding rhetorical trope Wang is famous for employing, and reflects on her translation of *Backed Against the Sea*. In "Translating and Editing Wang Wenxing," Fred Edwards, a writer, translator, and coeditor of *Endless War: Fiction and Essays by Wang Wenhsing*, writes of his personal experience in translating and editing Wang's stories, delineating the multilayered editing of a translation as well as highlighting the multifaceted challenges faced by a Chinese–English translator. In "Reflections on Translating *Jia bian*," originally a speech given at the international conference on Wang Wenxing at National Central University in Taiwan in 2010, Susan Dolling, translator of *Family Catastrophe* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), provides her translation philosophy and recounts some of the challenges she faced during the course of translating the novel.[7]

7. For an even better understanding of translating Wang Wenxing, these essays should be read along with Edward Gunn's "Bei hai de ren yiji fanyi