

# The Writing of Cities in Anyi Wang's Work *Fu Ping*

Zifeng Meng

Huaqiao University, Xiamen, Fujian, 361021, China

**Abstract:** *With the rapid development of Chinese society, the process of urbanization has accelerated significantly, and cities have become an important carrier of people's lives. Against this background, urban writing in literary works has become one of the most important ways to study urban cultural changes and social psychological changes. As a famous female writer in contemporary China, Anyi Wang works not only deeply reflect the history and reality of the city, but also show the complex relationship between individuals and the city. Fu Ping is a long novel written by contemporary writer Anyi Wang, which tells the life experience of Fu Ping, a girl from the countryside of Yangzhou, in the big city of Shanghai. The novel depicts with delicate strokes how Fu Ping finds herself and chooses to live on her own during this time. Through Fu Ping's perspective, readers are able to see the living condition and spiritual world of Shanghai's underclass. This paper will explore the characteristics and connotations of urban writing in Wang Anyi's work by analyzing her novel Fu Ping in detail and revealing the influence of the urban environment on the fate of individuals. The urban writing in Fu Ping not only shows the unique features of the city of Shanghai, but also deeply reveals the challenges and opportunities faced by underclass women in the urban environment. Through her delicate depiction of urban space and personal storytelling, Anyi Wang demonstrates the profound impact of the urban environment on the psychology and destiny of individuals, and at the same time reflects the author's unique insights and deep concern for urban culture.*

**Keywords:** *Anyi Wang; urban writing; Fu Ping; The fate of the underclass*

## 1. Introduction

Anyi Wang is an outstanding writer in contemporary Chinese literature, enjoying a great reputation in Chinese and even world literature for her unique creative style and profound ideological connotations. Born in 1954, she has become one of the leading figures in Chinese literature with a series of excellent novels and essays since she began publishing her works in the 1980s. Anyi Wang's works are known for their delicate emotional depictions and profound social insights, covering a wide range of areas such as urban life, family ethics, and personal growth.

Her creations not only reflect the complexity and changes of her personal emotional world, but also show the profound changes of Chinese society through the stories of each vivid character. *Fu Ping*, one of Anyi Wang's masterpieces, was first published in 2000. Through the life trajectory of the main character, *Fu Ping*, the novel vividly demonstrates the great changes in the city of Shanghai in the second half of the 20th century, as well as the intertwining of personal destinies. The image of *Fu Ping* and her experience is not only an important milestone in Anyi Wang's personal writing career, but also a microcosm of the development of Chinese urban literature.

This work is not only of great literary value, but also deeply reflects the cultural characteristics of the city in the context of the times, providing rich materials for the study of urban writing in Anyi Wang's works. As the first full-length novel written by Wang Anyi in the new century, *Fu Ping* tells the story of how a country girl from Yangzhou came to Shanghai from the countryside and finally moved away from Shanghai. In this novel, the writer creates a series of flesh and blood of the underclass, including the group of foreign nannies represented by "Grandma", the shantytown residents along Suzhou Creek represented by "Uncle Daliang Sun", and the disabled mother and her son represented by "The Disabled Mother and Her Son". Disabled mother and son are the slum dwellers. These immigrants are materially deprived, but they live with a positive and optimistic attitude<sup>[1]</sup>.

The novel focuses on the growth of *Fu Ping*, delicately depicting her struggle, struggle and transformation in the city. From the initial confusion and helplessness, to gradually learning to be independent and self-reliant; from the unfamiliarity and rejection of the city, to gradually integrating into and understanding the city's cultural heritage; from the doubt of her own self-worth, to finally finding

her own position and direction, Fu Ping's journey is full of hardships and difficulties, but also full of hope and light. Fu Ping also explores the fate of individuals in the midst of social change. With the change of the times, the boundary between the city and the countryside is gradually blurred, but the differences and contradictions between the city and the countryside still exist. The story of Fu Ping unfolds against this background<sup>[2]</sup>.

## **2. Anyi Wang and the Urban Narrative of Shanghai**

### ***2.1 Anyi Wang's life and creative experience***

Born in 1954 in Shanghai, Anyi Wang is a writer who is well known in contemporary Chinese literature. Her creative career began in the early 1980s, and she has published a large number of novels, essays and articles. Anyi Wang's background and literary achievements are as follows.

Anyi Wang has a deep connection with the city of Shanghai, and many of her works are set in Shanghai, showing the city's landscape and social changes through different perspectives. One of her masterpieces is *Fu Ping*, a novel that vividly shows the intertwining of social changes and personal destinies in the city of Shanghai in the 1960s, 1964-1965 to be exact, through the life trajectory of the main character, Fu Ping. Anyi Wang's emotions towards Shanghai contain both a deep attachment to her hometown and reflect a profound reflection on the city's development. Through her delicate depiction of urban details and personal storytelling, she shows the profound impact of the urban environment on the lives of individuals at the bottom of the hierarchy, and at the same time conveys the author's unique insights and deep concern for urban culture<sup>[3]</sup>.

### ***2.2 Shanghai's Historical Changes and Cultural Characteristics***

As one of the most representative international metropolises in China, Shanghai has a deep historical heritage and unique cultural qualities. Since the opening of the port in the mid-19th century, Shanghai has rapidly grown into an international business center, attracting talents and capital from all over the world. In the process, Shanghai has undergone a major transformation from a traditional agricultural society to a modern industrial society, resulting in a diverse and integrated cultural identity.

In 1842, the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing marked the beginning of Shanghai's rapid modernization as one of the five ports of commerce open to the outside world. Shanghai gradually became a major international trade center. By the beginning of the 20th century, Shanghai had become one of the largest financial centers in the Far East, attracting large amounts of domestic and foreign capital and talent. The city not only had a well-developed banking system and stock market, but was also home to many multinational companies. During the Anti-Japanese War, although Shanghai experienced serious damage, the post-war reconstruction work was carried out rapidly, enabling Shanghai to revitalize itself. During this period, Shanghai not only regained its economic strength, but also continued to maintain its leading position in international trade and finance. After the implementation of China's reform and opening-up policy, Shanghai witnessed a new round of rapid development. In particular, the development of the Pudong New Area in the 1990s marked a major step forward in Shanghai's development into an international metropolis. The construction of the Pudong New Area has not only greatly enhanced Shanghai's economic strength, but also made it one of the most competitive financial centers in the world.

Shanghai has a very characteristic multi-faceted and integrated cultural atmosphere, retaining the traditional features of the Jiangnan water town and absorbing elements of Western culture, forming a unique sea culture. From traditional alley culture to modern international art exhibitions, Shanghai's cultural life is colorful, full of innovation and vitality. Whether it is historical opera performances or contemporary art exhibitions, they can all be found in Shanghai. This multicultural fusion is not only reflected in the field of art, but also in daily life, such as food and clothing, which adds to the unique charm of Shanghai. We can see that Shanghai is not only a vibrant city, but also a model of cultural diversity and openness in China. Shanghai's historical changes and cultural qualities are the important foundation of its becoming an internationalized metropolis. From the early opening of the port to the new chapter since the reform and opening up, Shanghai has always maintained its unique charm and development vitality, and has become a model of urban development in China and the world.

### **3. Urban space and the fate of characters in *Fu Ping***

#### **3.1 Background Setting and Character Profiles**

The novel *Fu Ping* is set in Shanghai between 1964 and 1965, an important turning point in China's social history - the eve of the Cultural Revolution, an era of undercurrents and an increasingly complex social atmosphere. Shanghai, an international metropolis known as the "Paris of the Orient", is not only famous for its unique geographical location, prosperous economy and profound cultural heritage, but also for its complex and changing social structure and rich and varied cultural atmosphere, which becomes a broad stage for the development of the novel's plot.

In the context of this era, people's daily lives have also begun to be affected to varying degrees. Freedom of speech is restricted, and collisions and exchanges of ideas become cautious. However, it is in this environment that the light and dark sides of human nature are infinitely magnified, and the relationships between people become more subtle and complex. *Fu Ping*, a girl from the Yangzhou countryside who comes to Shanghai to seek a new life, not only brings new vitality and color to the city, but also makes herself the best viewpoint to observe this era and feel the changes in the city<sup>[4]</sup>. In the novel *Fu Ping*, the image of the heroine *Fu Ping* is profound and distinctive, she is not only a character, but also the epitome of countless urban drifters in that era.

#### **3.2 Multi-layered presentation of urban space**

In *Fu Ping*, Anyi Wang, with delicate strokes and profound insight, shows the complexity of the city of Shanghai through the eyes of the protagonist, *Fu Ping*, with the most notable being the stark contrast between the prosperous and the underclass.

##### **3.2.1 Depiction of Huaihai Road**

When *Fu Ping* first arrived in Shanghai, the first thing she stepped into was the famous Huaihai Road. This is her first impression of Shanghai, and also the initial vision of the city in her mind. In the novel *Fu Ping*, the depiction of Huaihai Road does not only stay on the surface of its prosperity and sophistication, but through the unique perspective of *Fu Ping*'s character, it digs deeper and reveals a more real and simple life behind this street. The Huaihai Road that *Fu Ping* sees is not just a visual feast, but a multi-dimensional and multi-layered social picture, which contains profound social observation and insight into human nature.

Entering Huaihai Road is like traveling into a fantastic world of light and shadow. On both sides of the street, skyscrapers stand like giants, their facades glittering with the unique luster of metal and glass under the night lights, modern and elegant at the same time. The skyline of these buildings is a magnificent picture of the city. The windows along the street are the finishing touch to this visual feast. Each window is meticulously arranged as if it were a miniature stage, displaying the latest fashion items, exquisite handicrafts and a wide array of merchandise that will keep you coming back for more.

By witnessing the labor scenes and daily life of these grassroots, *Fu Ping* felt an unprecedented sense of closeness, as if she had found a bond with the city. This sense of closeness did not come from the desire for material enjoyment or following fashion trends, but from the understanding and respect for the lives of ordinary workers. *Fu Ping* saw people who were also working for a living, and their hard work, resilience and simplicity made her feel that she was not alone. This emotional resonance gradually eliminated any sense of separation and alienation that might have existed when she first arrived in the city, making her more willing to integrate into this new environment.

This observation of *Fu Ping* also triggered a deep reflection on the social reality. Under the prosperous appearance, how many unknown hardships and efforts are hidden? The progress and development of the city cannot be separated from the contribution and sacrifice of every ordinary person. What *Fu Ping* sees and feels reminds us to pay attention to those social groups that are often neglected, and to think about how to make the fruits of urban development more equitably benefit everyone. At the same time, it also reflects the author's concern for human nature and the pursuit of social justice. Through the perspective of the character of *Fu Ping*, the author conveys his deep sympathy for the survival of the disadvantaged groups and his deep call for social justice.

The depiction of Huaihai Road in *Fu Ping* is not only a visual depiction of a busy street, but also a profound exploration of social reality, human nature and the essence of urban life. What *Fu Ping* sees and feels allows us to appreciate the beauty of the city while not forgetting to pay attention to those who

quietly pay attention, and to think about how to jointly build a more harmonious and just society.

### 3.2.2 *Shantytowns with a simple human face*

However, as Fu Ping's life in Shanghai deepens, she gradually steps out of that prosperous dreamland and into another corner of the city - the shantytown. Here, on the other side of Shanghai, is a stark contrast to the bustling sophistication of Huaihai Road. In the shantytown, low houses are closely connected, narrow alleys and lanes are winding, and the air is filled with a unique flavor of life. Although the living conditions are hard, the people here show a rare and precious human flavor. They support each other and face the hardships of life together. Here, Fu Ping witnessed the mutual help among neighbors and felt the warmth and simplicity that is hard to find in the busy city. This warmth, like a fresh spring, nourished her dry heart and gave her a deeper understanding of the city.

In the shantytown, Fu Ping seems to have traveled to a very different world, which is far away from the dazzling neon lights and constant flow of people on Huaihai Road, but has a different kind of vitality and warmth. Although the buildings here are simple, they are arranged in an orderly manner, and each half-open door hides an ordinary but true story. The occasional rising smoke from the rooftops and the silhouettes of distant skyscrapers intertwine to form a complex cityscape, making one wonder about the diversity and complexity behind the city.

Here, Fu Ping witnessed the deep friendship between neighbors. Whenever a family encounters difficulties, whether it is financial constraints or inconvenience in life, there will always be neighbors to lend a helping hand, selfless help. They do not ask for return, only because of the simple and sincere emotional ties between each other. This spirit of mutual help, in Fu Ping's view, is the most valuable treasure behind the city's prosperity, which makes this seemingly insignificant corner full of love and hope.

The existence of the shantytown adds a touch of warm and profound color to the novel *Fu Ping*. It is not only the turning point of Fu Ping's personal destiny, but also a vivid interpretation of the multi-faceted nature of the city of Shanghai. Through Fu-Ping's perspective, Wang An-Yi skillfully shows the tension and fusion between prosperity and underclass, modernity and tradition, materialism and spirituality in the city of Shanghai. She lets readers see that even in the most inconspicuous corners, the light and warmth of humanity can blossom; even in the fast-changing times, the simple and sincere emotions can still be upheld and passed on. Such a depiction not only makes the novel more full-bodied and three-dimensional, but also guides readers to think more about human nature, society and culture.

Through Fu Ping's perspective, Anyi Wang's succeeds in skillfully blending and contrasting the many levels of the city of Shanghai, including the prosperous and the underclass, the modern and the traditional, the material and the spiritual. This multi-level presentation not only gives readers a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of Shanghai, but also triggers thoughts on deeper issues such as human nature, society, and culture.

## 4. From Huaihai Road to shanty towns

After being rejected by the "old Shanghai" and Huaihai Road, Fu Ping, a young girl from the countryside, finds her way back to her long-lost uncle, Daliang Sun. Daliang Sun appeared in front of Fu Ping as a hard-working and simple man with a slightly stooped figure. Years of picking laborers, like a heavy burden, not only bent his spine, but also made him look even shorter, but this hard work has given him a kind of unspeakable toughness and strength. His hands are covered with thick calluses, which are the traces carved by the years and sweat, and each line records his persistence and dedication to life.

Walking in such an environment, Fu Ping's heart was touched by an unspeakable emotion, and she began to observe the people on this land more carefully, with both helplessness towards life and unyielding hope in their eyes. And all this seems to lay the background for the new chapter of her life that is about to unfold.

"The camps here, because of the miscellaneous and lowly beach will inevitably give people the impression that they are salacious. However, when you understand, you will know that they are not dirty at all. They labored honestly for food and clothing, and there was not a penny they didn't earn by the sweat of their brow. So underneath all this mundane, menial labor lies a down-to-earth, healthy, self-sufficient streak. They flow from all kinds of details." This narrative skillfully interweaves author Anyi Wang's profound insight with the inner experience of the novel's protagonist, *Fu Ping*, to build a scene that is both realistic and rich in emotional depth. With the wisdom of an observer, Wang An-Yi foresees

that the shantytown of “Mei jia qiao” will inevitably leave a “dirty” impression in the eyes of outsiders, but then she delves into Fu Ping's perspective, revealing a very different world - a world full of the reality of life, and a place where life is full of truth and truthfulness, and where the world is full of life. This place is full of the truth and simplicity of life, without the need for ostentatious decoration, with its own unique charm of “down-to-earth, healthy, self-respect and self-sufficiency”, which coincides with Fu Ping's resilient and easy-going character.

Fu Ping's life also seems to be destined for a wandering journey. She may move from one family to another and from one city to another, but her inner resilience and love of life will be just like a duckweed, which will find its own place wherever it is, grow quietly, and blossom into its own splendor. When the river of destiny finally leads her to the “right family”, she will be deeply rooted there, and continue to write a chapter about growth, love and homecoming with her own story.

## 5. Artistic Value and Social Significance of *Fu Ping*

Fu Ping has demonstrated extraordinary artistic value in the field of literature, especially in the niche of urban writing. With her keen observation and profound literary skills, Anyi Wang's delicately sketches the appearance and changes of Shanghai, an international metropolis, in the period preceding the special period of the Cultural Revolution. She does not only limit herself to depicting the physical space of the city, but also digs deeper into the cultural significance and humanistic feelings behind these changes.

In Anyi Wang's works, Shanghai's urban space is no longer a single dimension of prosperity or decay, but is endowed with a deep aesthetic of secular life. She keenly captures the details of life hidden behind crowded streets and busy daily routines, which are strung together like pearls to form a vivid and real picture of citizens' lives. Her Shanghai is no longer an ivory tower or a criticized ruin, but a secular city full of vitality, fireworks and humanity.

Therefore, in Anyi Wang's writing about Shanghai, what we see is not only the physical space of the city, but also the social relations, cultural veins and people's emotional world that the city carries. Through her delicate portrayal of daily life, she reveals the most essential aesthetic experience of survival in Shanghai's urban space - a kind of aesthetics of life that reveals the truth in the mundane and hides philosophy in the trivial. In her writing, every street scene, every conversation, every living scene in Shanghai becomes a window to show the vitality of the city and humanistic feelings, so that readers can not only feel the pulsation of the city, but also deeply understand the true meaning and beauty of life in the process of reading.

Through the story of Fu Ping, we can see all the challenges and dilemmas faced by ordinary people in the process of urbanization: the conflict and integration of cultures, the identification and construction of identities, the pressure and hope of life ..... At the same time, the novel shows how these ordinary people seek breakthroughs in the face of adversity, and how they adapt to this rapidly changing world. This positive and upward spirit is not only a celebration of individual vitality, but also an affirmation of the power of the people in the process of China's urbanization.

Anyi Wang's creation is not only a reproduction and inheritance of the socialist literary heritage, but also a profound excavation of contemporary social reality and the depth of human nature. Through the “contrast” between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in Shanghai and her delicate depiction of the “old life”, she has constructed a real and philosophical literary world, which contributes a valuable artistic treasure to the development of contemporary literature.

## 6. Conclusion

Through delicate strokes and profound insights, the novel *Fu Ping* has shown the multi-layered and multi-dimensional image of the city of Shanghai. In this international metropolis known as the “Paris of the East”, prosperity and hardship, glamor and darkness coexist, constituting a complex and real picture of the city.

Shanghai in *Fu Ping* is a multi-dimensional image of the city, with its bustling and gorgeous streets as well as its hard-living underclass; its internationalized cultural atmosphere as well as its deep historical heritage. Through Fu-Ping's perspective and delicate strokes, Anyi Wang's closely links these two seemingly distinct worlds, revealing the hard labor and social inequality behind the city's prosperity, as well as the diverse charms and unique flavor of the city of Shanghai.

The story of Fu Ping is a vivid reflection of the contradictions and conflicts between urban and rural areas in the process of contemporary urbanization. On the one hand, the prosperity and opportunities of the city attract countless rural youths like Fu Ping to flock to the city, where they aspire to find a better life and realize their self-worth; on the other hand, the barriers and indifference of the city make them face great challenges and difficulties, and many of them struggle to survive on the edge of the city, and find it difficult to truly integrate into this new environment. This kind of contradiction and conflict is not only reflected in the difference in material level, but also more profoundly reflected in the separation and alienation in spiritual level.

Through the in-depth portrayal of the character of Fu Ping, the novel triggers readers to think deeply about the differences between urban and rural areas, the process of urbanization, and the fate of individuals. The novel reveals the great divide between the city and the countryside, and how this divide affects and shapes the fate of individuals. At the same time, it also reminds us to pay attention to those groups marginalized in the process of urbanization, and to think about how to promote the integration and balanced development between urban and rural areas by means of policies, education and culture, so that more people can share the fruits and benefits of urbanization.

In conclusion, this paper reveals the characteristics and connotations of urban writing in Wang Anyi's novel *Fu Ping* through a meticulous analysis of her work, which provides a new perspective for understanding the urbanization process in contemporary China and its impact on individual life. Future research can continue to deepen and expand on this basis to show the unique charm of Chinese urban culture in a richer and more comprehensive way.

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