



Article

## The Influence of Traditional Culture on Character Development in Ordinary World

Yundao Xie<sup>2</sup>, Yidan Zhang<sup>3</sup>, Xizhe Ji<sup>4</sup>, Yuping Ren<sup>5</sup>, Junfeng Wang<sup>1</sup>, Jinghui Jiang<sup>1</sup>, Enqi Dai<sup>1</sup>, Ziyue Wang<sup>1</sup>, Wenjie Jin<sup>1</sup>, Shiming Tang<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hangzhou Normal University, 311121, China

<sup>2</sup> Zhejiang University of Technology, 310014, China

<sup>3</sup> Hangzhou Wenhui Middle School, 310005, China

<sup>4</sup> Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics, 311222, China

<sup>5</sup> Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, 310018, China

**Abstract:** Ordinary World, set against the backdrop of a period of social transformation, deeply integrates traditional culture into its character construction. In rural society, hierarchical rules govern interpersonal relationships; mutual assistance among the Sun family and their neighbors highlights the characteristics of rural culture. Marital and romantic ethics reveal the profound impact of traditional concepts on women. Traditional virtues permeate characters' behaviors, embodying the brilliance of humanity. The shaping of the Sun brothers embodies the "Kua Fu spirit," demonstrating national characteristics through their pursuit of both material and spiritual goals, devotion to collective interests, and self-discipline. Upholding a sense of compassion, Lu Yao portrays the fate of grassroots characters, criticizing backward ideas through empathy and understanding, while presenting poetry and hope within the ordinary world. This endows the work with profound ideological connotations and touching power, allowing readers to deeply appreciate the infiltration of traditional culture in character shaping and the unique charm of the novel..

**Keywords:** Ordinary World; character construction; traditional culture; rural ethics; Kua Fu spirit; compassionate heart

---

Ordinary World is a panoramic novel that presents the development of contemporary urban and rural life in China during a period of great social transformation. It unfolds a magnificent and far-reaching historical scroll while at the same time composing a stirring and turbulent

Citation: Xie Y, Zhang Y, Ji X, Ren Y, Jiang J, Dai E, Wang Z, Jin W, Tang S. Title The Influence of Culture on Character Development in Ordinary World. J. Soc. Sci. Res., 2025, 3 (3), doi: 10.58531/ijssr/3/3/1

ISSN/© By the Author(s) 2025, under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>)

symphony of social change. Set against the sweeping backdrop of the decade between 1975 and 1985—the era of transformation—the novel portrays the profound shifts of Chinese society at the dawn of reform and opening up. Focusing its lens on the most ordinary “world of the common people” on the Loess Plateau, the work delicately depicts the destinies of its characters, seamlessly blending the essence of traditional culture with the pulse of the times. Through character construction, the novel deeply explores and integrates the ethical codes of rural society, views on marriage and love, traditional virtues, and even the spiritual legacy of national mythology. Each character carries cultural genes while simultaneously bearing witness to social progress, enabling the work to transcend time and space and to voice the touching resonance of an era. The author, Lu Yao, was himself a writer deeply attached to the Loess land. He begins the novel with the dedication: “I respectfully dedicate this book to the land and the years where I have lived,” expressing the life experiences and emotions granted by the Loess Plateau, and responding to the nourishment that rural culture provided for his spiritual world. Both the era and the author left in this work a cultural imprint that belongs uniquely to this land.

### **1. Tracing the Origins: The Extraordinary “Literature as the Vehicle of the Dao” Behind Ordinary World**

“Literature as the vehicle of the Dao” (wen yi zai dao) is one of the core traditions of Chinese literature, signifying that literary works exist to carry and convey ideas, values, and social ideals. Lu Yao’s *Ordinary World* is among the most remarkable contemporary embodiments of this tradition. Its “extraordinariness” lies in the fact that the “Dao” it carries is not lofty rhetoric hanging high above the political stage, but rather a spirit of the age and a radiance of humanity deeply rooted in the soil and woven into the lived experiences of ordinary people. Lu Yao’s “Dao” is not empty preaching, but rather something melted into Sun Shao’an’s sweat, Sun Shaoping’s books, Tian Xiaoxia’s gaze, and He Xiulian’s daily chatter. It tells us: no matter how times change or how arduous life becomes, the pursuit of dignity, the yearning for ideals, the perseverance in kindness, and the respect for labor will always remain the eternal spiritual light that sustains our journey. The “Dao” borne by *Ordinary World* is precisely the grand future that every struggling yet extraordinary ordinary individual aspires to. This paper traces and analyzes the following dimensions:

#### **1.1. The “Dao” of the Era: Reflecting Rural Progress in the Early Reform Period**

The most immediate “Dao” of *Ordinary World* is its role as a portrait of a turbulent era of transformation and a chronicle of the fighting spirit of a generation. Historically, the novel spans from 1975 to 1985, a crucial turning point in contemporary Chinese history, covering the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution and the comprehensive launch of reform and opening-up. With remarkable courage and foresight, Lu Yao captured this grand era of transition—filled with both pain and hope. The “Dao” here is embodied in breaking shackles and calling for change.

The novel begins by depicting Sun Shao'an, as production team leader, taking enormous risks in adopting the household contract responsibility system, artistically recreating the arduous yet inevitable beginnings of China's rural reforms. This highlights the spirit of "emancipating the mind and seeking truth from facts"—the "Dao" of the era.

From the perspective of the urban-rural dual structure, Sun Shaoping's trajectory represents countless rural youths yearning to leave the land and enter the city. Through hard labor as a porter and miner, he never abandoned his pursuit of a richer spiritual world and broader horizons, exemplifying the respect for individual value and the call for social justice—the "Dao" of fairness.

Accompanying the pains and rebirth of society, the novel does not shy away from the problems brought by reform, such as Tian Futang's frustration, Jin Junwu's confusion, and the fickleness of human hearts in the early waves of the market economy. At the same time, it depicts the budding of new forces: township enterprises, private businesses, and the spread of new ideas. This panoramic record highlights the "Dao" of development—emerging from pain, advancing through exploration.

### 1.2. The "Dao" of the Spirit: Celebrating the Lofty Aspirations of Ordinary People

If the historical context provides the stage for the "Dao," the depiction of ordinary people's spiritual lives forms the heart and soul of the novel's "Dao." Lu Yao draws the "Dao" away from grand narratives and anchors it in individual destinies, giving it stronger emotional appeal.

Lu Yao once said: "People would rather pay attention to the trivialities of a mediocre movie star's life than to the turbulent inner world of an ordinary person." His purpose was to give voice to these "ordinary people."

The novel reflects Sun Shao'an's responsibility and commitment. As a typical representative of Chinese peasants, he shoulders the burden of the family. His struggle is grounded, aiming simply to give his family a better life. He relinquishes his love for Tian Runye, choosing He Xiulian, who could share hardships with him, embodying the realism, tenacity, and sense of duty of traditional peasants. He represents the pragmatic "Dao" of rooting oneself in the Loess land and watering hope with sweat.

The novel praises Sun Shaoping's ideals and transcendence. He is like a spiritual "ascetic." Even in his harshest days as a porter and miner, he insisted on reading, thinking, and discussing life and ideals with Xiaoxia. His struggle was not merely for material survival, but for spiritual richness and independent personality. He represents the idealistic "Dao" of looking to the stars even when grounded in dust.

The work celebrates the glory and dignity of labor. Whether in the fields, on construction sites, or in the depths of the mines, labor is endowed with exalted significance. It is not a cursed burden, but the only path to creating value, realizing oneself, and earning dignity. Sun Shaoping found belonging and self-worth in the coal mine, the highest tribute to the "Dao" of dignity through honest labor.

### 1.3. The "Dao" of Conduct: Saluting Kindness, Love, and Compassion

The reason *Ordinary World* transcends its era and moves countless readers lies in its profound revelation of the most universal and radiant aspects of human nature—love, kindness, compassion, and sacrifice.

**Love beyond utilitarianism:** In an age of material scarcity and incomplete ideological emancipation, interpersonal relations in the novel reveal beauty that transcends material interests. It presents multiple forms of love: the regretful yet tender first love between Sun Shao'an and Tian Runye, lost to reality; the enduring and resilient marital love of Sun Shao'an and He Xiulian; the transcendent soul-level love of Sun Shaoping and Tian Xiaoxia, cutting across social divides; and Jin Bo's unrequited, persistent yearning for the Tibetan girl. Together, these stories compose a complex symphony of emotions, sacrifice, fulfillment, and perseverance.

**The warmth of kinship and community ties:** Sun Yuhou's silent, profound love for his children, Sun Lanhsiang's consideration and sacrifice for her family, and the mutual aid among the villagers of Shuangshui in times of crisis form the warm background tone of the novel. This simple affection based on kinship and locality serves as a vital strength against hardship, embodying the ethical "Dao" of mutual care and human warmth.

**The power of kindness and compassion:** Tian Xiaoxia epitomizes kindness and idealism. She not only loved Sun Shaoping but also cared for the fate of the marginalized. As a journalist, she ran to the frontlines of flood relief and sacrificed her life to save others, pushing altruistic kindness to its peak. Her existence was like a beam of light, illuminating Sun Shaoping's world and touching readers' hearts, embodying the altruistic "Dao" of humanitarian care.

#### 1.4. The "Dao" of Literature: The Simplicity of Realism

From the perspective of literary history, the "extraordinariness" of *Ordinary World* also lies in its inheritance and transcendence of literary tradition. In the mid-1980s, China's literary scene was swept by modernist and postmodernist trends such as the "avant-garde" and "root-seeking literature," with many writers pursuing formal innovation and linguistic experimentation, distancing themselves from reality and the masses. Lu Yao, however, chose to go against the tide, adhering to the most traditional and straightforward method of realism, firmly believing that the mission of literature is to reflect reality, care for life, and inspire people.

In his pursuit of epic purpose, Lu Yao consciously emulated the methods of 19th-century critical realist masters such as Balzac and Tolstoy, striving to reflect an entire era and nation through the fate of a single family and a single village. This panoramic narrative structure endowed the novel with epic qualities.

In his pursuit of writing for the masses, Lu Yao explicitly stated that his works were for "the broadest base of grassroots readers." His language is plain and earthy, his characters familiar "everymen" that readers could recognize in daily life. This populist stance enabled his work to resonate widely and truly realize the "vehicle" function of "literature as the vehicle of the Dao"—carrying and transmitting the Dao to the people.

Under the illumination of idealism, although the novel is full of hardship, its overall tone is uplifting. While portraying the cruelty of reality, Lu Yao never relinquishes faith in ideals, brightness, and the future. Tian Xiaoxia's death, though tragic, leaves behind an immortal spirit; Sun Shaoping's perseverance in the mines itself constitutes a victory. This idealism elevates the work beyond mere realist documentation, granting it profound spiritual appeal. Thus, the "extraordinary literature as the vehicle of the Dao" behind *Ordinary World* employs the most ordinary stories to carry the most extraordinary spirit of the times; it uses the most common characters to embody the highest human values; it adopts the most traditional methods to fulfill the most fundamental literary mission.

## **2. Theoretical Framework: The Cultural Representation of the Differential Mode of Association and Rural Ethics**

Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*, along with numerous books and films reflecting China's rural society, collectively depict a cultural landscape in which the differential mode of association functions as the spatial structure, "rural ethics" as the moral core, and "renqing" (human sentiments), "mianzi" (face), and "guanxi" (relations) as the logic of interaction. The law of concentric circles determines "how one positions oneself in relation to others": a dynamic expansion of concentric ripples from inside to outside, from kin to strangers. Rural ethics provides the answer to "what counts as right behavior." Rooted in the land, regulated by *li* (ritual propriety), it emphasizes stability, continuity, and collective interests. The theory of interpersonal relations reveals the "codes of specific interaction." Through the exchange of *renqing*, the negotiation of *mianzi*, and the operation of *guanxi*, the machinery of society is lubricated and kept in motion. Only by understanding this cultural genome and cognitive inertia can we grasp the behavioral patterns and value orientations of traditional Chinese society. The following depictions of traditional society in literary works, and their theoretical elements, offer a lens to examine the deeply rooted "law of concentric circles" and "rural ethics."

### **2.1 Core Theory: The Differential Mode of Association**

In *From the Soil*, Fei Xiaotong describes interpersonal relations in traditional Chinese society as resembling ripples on water when a stone is thrown in. Every individual is the center of circles of social influence, and whoever is touched by the ripples becomes connected. The center is the "self," not in the Western sense of an autonomous individual, but rather as a node embedded in the network of family and kinship. One's value, rights, and obligations are determined by one's position within this network. The scope of circles is flexible: it can expand to "all under heaven as one family," or shrink to "each sweeps the snow before his own door." The boundaries between public and private, self and group, are blurred. Moral standards vary depending on relational distance: toward family, fellow villagers, and acquaintances, one must uphold *renqing* and righteousness; toward strangers, colder or even utilitarian principles may apply. This explains why Chinese society has both deep internal loyalty to family and the so-called phenomenon of being "a sheet of loose sand."

The operation of concentric circles reflects this differential mode. The first circle is the family (core circle). In *The Good Earth*, land is Wang Lung's most central "private property," the foundation of his existence and the basis of his family's survival. All his struggles are for protecting and expanding this estate. O-lan is Wang Lung's most loyal inner-circle member. She endures hardship and labors silently, serving as the family's core productive force. Wang Lung treasures her when poor, but marginalizes her after becoming wealthy, turning instead to Lotus. This shift is not merely a change of heart but a reorientation of circle priority—once he enters a "higher" circle, O-lan, representing "the soil" and "labor," loses value in his new hierarchy. Wang Lung's sons are extensions of the family circle. Wang Lung toils to send them to school, hoping they will bring honor. Yet, after receiving modern education, their circles extend toward the city, commerce, and modernity, creating conflict with their father's attachment to land. Their disdain for the soil and desire to sell it symbolize the disintegration of the traditional concentric circle structure.

The second circle is the clan and neighbors (secondary circle). The House of Hwang is the dominant family in Wang Lung's community, an object of his admiration and emulation. His ties with the Hwangs—marrying O-lan from them, buying land from them—are both economic acts and attempts to integrate into a higher circle. During flight to the southern city, Wang Lung and O-lan join a temporary circle of fellow villagers from the north. They share information and sympathy as "strangers in the same plight." Yet upon returning home, the circle dissolves automatically.

The third circle is the outside world (beyond the circles). In the southern city, Wang Lung and O-lan face entirely unfamiliar circles: rickshaw-riding elites, foreigners with high noses and deep eyes. For them, these were "people of another world." Between them, no renqing existed—only stark relations of employment, exploitation, and survival. O-lan's discovery of jewels from these "outsiders" ultimately enabled Wang Lung's upward mobility.

Other works reflect similar dynamics. In the film *To Live*, the fortunes of Fugui's family revolve entirely around the family circle. Despite the turbulence of civil war, land reform, or the Great Leap Forward, his core goal remains "to live" and let his family survive. His attitudes toward Chunsheng and the township chief also shift depending on whether they are comrades (inner circle) or cadres responsible for his son's death (outer circle). In *The Story of Qiu Ju*, Qiu Ju's lawsuit essentially seeks to defend her family's dignity within the village circle. She demands not monetary compensation, but acknowledgment of "justice" from the village chief, the local authority figure. When she suffers a difficult childbirth, the chief rescues her regardless of prior conflict—instantly restoring her into the "kinsfolk" circle of rural sentiment, leaving her puzzled and conflicted.

## 2.2 Rural Ethics: Agrarian Civilization

Rural ethics serve as the internal moral norms and behavioral codes that sustain the operation of the concentric-circle principle. They are deeply rooted in agrarian modes of production. Land constitutes the foundation of survival, serving as a repository of wealth, status, and emotional attachment. Generations of people settled in one place, forming a stable and

familiar social environment. This stability provides the basis for the formation of a “society of acquaintances.” Unlike the rule of law, which relies on codified statutes and coercive force, the rule of propriety (li) depends on tradition, custom, and moral education. People’s behaviors are constrained by a set of unwritten rules, known as li, which maintain social order through moral guidance, public opinion, and internalized ethical consciousness. Fei Xiaotong referred to this as a “lawsuit-free” society, in which most conflicts were resolved or mediated by li before ever reaching formal legal channels.

In Pearl S. Buck’s *The Good Earth*, rural ethics are vividly manifested through the almost devotional reverence Wang Lung holds for the land. During harvest, he experiences profound joy. When he scoops up the soil and feels its warmth, he experiences an unparalleled sense of security and abundance. The land is not merely a means of production but a “divine” presence in his life. In times of famine, he remains steadfastly committed, refusing to abandon the land even when survival becomes impossible. After attaining wealth, he immediately returns to the countryside, purchasing more land as his first action. The land serves as his ultimate safeguard against all risks. On his deathbed, his only obsession is the land itself; he refuses to be carried upstairs, insisting instead on lying upon it, sensing that “the land is beneath me.” This symbolizes the cycle of life—being born, growing, and dying in the same soil.

With respect to propriety and human sentiments, Wang Lung’s marriage to O-Lan follows the traditional customs dictated by “parents’ orders and matchmakers’ words.” O-Lan’s value is primarily measured by her ability to bear sons (to continue the family line) and perform labor (to create wealth)—core ethical expectations for women in rural society. In terms of filial piety, Wang Lung dutifully supports his father even when he is no longer able to work, exemplifying the central ethical principle of xiao. Regarding human sentiments and social prestige, Wang Lung experiences great “face” when the elder of the House of Hwang visits after he has acquired wealth. This “face” functions as social capital, symbolizing his elevated position within the rural social hierarchy. His interactions with neighbors also adhere to the logic of reciprocal obligations, reflecting the principle of “courtesy in return” that underlies rural ethical conduct.

Other works depict similar patterns. In the film *White Deer Plain*, Bai Jiaxuan, as the clan patriarch, firmly upholds the rule-of-propriety order. He presides over the ancestral hall and revises village regulations, using Confucian ethics to govern the behavior of the entire *White Deer Plain*. His conflict with Lu Zilin fundamentally reflects a clash between traditionalist ethics and opportunistic pragmatism. The tragedy of Tian Xiao’e arises precisely because her actions directly challenge the rural society’s core ethical expectations regarding female chastity and social order. In *That Mountain, That Man, That Dog*, the perspectives of two generations of rural postal workers tenderly reveal the ethics of human sentiment in village society. The postal workers’ role goes beyond delivering letters; it sustains the emotional bonds within this society of acquaintances. Every letter and remittance carries the story of a family, embodying li and qing. Although the son initially fails to understand his father’s dedication, after completing the postal rounds, he comes to grasp the significance of the work—it is the act of preserving the emotional connections among people in this land.

### 2.3. Cultural Theory: Interpersonal Interaction

The principles of concentric circles and rural ethics ultimately find expression in concrete interpersonal interactions, giving rise to a uniquely Chinese cultural pattern of behavior. Within these interactions, *renqing* (human sentiments) functions as a compound concept, referring both to genuine emotions and to a form of social resource—a debt that can be stored, exchanged, or owed. Inside the circle, people maintain and strengthen relationships through practices of “giving *renqing*” and “repaying *renqing*,” which serve as informal social contracts. *Mianzi* (face) refers to the prestige, status, and respect that an individual gains within social circles. It is simultaneously a form of social evaluation and a resource that can be pursued, granted, or damaged. Whether one “gives face,” “withholds face,” or “loses face” becomes a decisive consideration in social exchange. *Guanxi* (relations) denotes the specific ties formed through kinship, locality, or shared occupation within the differential mode of association. It is often the crucial pathway for acquiring resources and solving problems, such that “getting things done” frequently depends not on formal rules but on *guanxi*.

In *The Good Earth*, these dynamics are vividly illustrated. In terms of *renqing*, when Wang Lung is in the southern city, a fellow villager tells him he can earn a living by pulling a rickshaw—an act of “giving *renqing*.” Later, when O-lan suffers a difficult childbirth, Wang Lung appeals to a wealthy lady whom he had once helped, and she provides assistance—an instance of “repaying *renqing*.” Such exchanges constitute the survival logic of a rural society transplanted into an unfamiliar urban environment. Regarding *mianzi*, Wang Lung’s greatest source of prestige derives from landownership and his rise to the status of landlord. He discards coarse homespun clothing for silk and takes the beautiful Lotus as a concubine—all gestures designed to display his success and safeguard his “face.” He also begins to look down upon neighbors who continue to toil in the fields, believing himself to occupy a higher level of prestige. As for *guanxi*, Wang Lung’s initial ascent is rooted in his ties with the House of Hwang, from whom he acquires both his wife and his first parcel of land. Later, he deliberately cultivates relationships with urban merchants, hoping to integrate his sons into commercial circles. These efforts demonstrate his reliance on, and construction of, an expanding network of relations to elevate his family’s social standing.

Viewed through the lens of cultural theory, the principles of concentric circles and rural ethics essentially embody a collectivist cultural orientation. Personal identity, value, and purpose are deeply embedded in the family, clan, and other collective units. This sharply contrasts with Western individualist culture, which emphasizes personal rights, freedom, and individual achievement. The eventual betrayal of the land by Wang Lung’s sons may thus be interpreted as the intrusion of individualist values into a traditionally collectivist framework. Considering the distinction between high-context and low-context cultures, anthropologist Edward T. Hall identified Chinese culture as a prototypical high-context culture. In such a context, much of the information is conveyed not through explicit verbalization but through shared cultural codes and tacit understandings, including notions such as *renqing*, *mianzi*, and the “hidden rules” of social exchange. Communication tends to be implicit and circuitous. By contrast, Western societies lean toward low-context communication, relying



heavily on explicit language and written contracts. In *The Good Earth*, the relationship between Wang Lung and O-lan offers a prime example: romantic dialogue is rare, but their tacit bond is expressed through shared labor, silent endurance, and unspoken devotion—an archetype of high-context communication. From the perspective of Talcott Parsons's structural functionalism, the concentric principle and rural ethics served as essential mechanisms of social integration in traditional Chinese society. They clarified roles, rights, and obligations, provided stable normative codes of conduct, and enabled a vast agrarian society to sustain order and continuity over long periods. Land, family, and clan together constituted the structural pillars that ensured the endurance of this social system.

### **3. Cognitive Study: The Influence of Rural Ethics on Characters**

#### **3.1 Interpersonal Relationships in Rural Society**

In *From the Soil*, Fei Xiaotong observes that rural China is a quintessential “society of human sentiments” and a “society of acquaintances.” The closed nature of village life made people intimately familiar with the individuals and affairs within their circles, and their conduct followed the principle of concentric circles—governing social exchanges with tacit, mutually recognized rules. Within this framework, interactions were orderly and consistent. In *Ordinary World*, Lu Yao first constructs a prototypical “rural society,” where interpersonal networks are governed by an invisible law of circles. At its core lie kinship and locality, forming concentric social structures radiating outward from family to clan to village. Lu Yao insightfully reveals that on the barren, information-poor Loess Plateau, such circle-based relationships of mutual aid and trust served as the bedrock of individual survival and dignity. The village of Shuangshui projects the traditional features of rural China: villagers are familiar with one another, engage in mutual help, and collaborate in communal affairs. For example, during Sun Shao'an's wedding, neighbors came to assist—some slaughtered pigs and sheep, others decorated the venue—fully reflecting the spirit of mutual assistance characteristic of an acquaintance society. Information, too, was collectively shared, transmitted mainly by word of mouth: news of new policies, such as the household contract responsibility system, spread first from Party secretary Tian Futang, and then circulated through villagers' casual conversations in the fields and homes. Even Sun Shaoping's grandmother learned about reforms through her neighbors' chatter.

Mutual assistance among neighbors highlights the warmth and resilience of rural culture. Shuangshui is not an idyllic utopia; it is rife with poverty, jealousy, and disputes. Yet in times of crisis, the spirit of “watching over and helping one another” would emerge with force. Whether it was the selfless support of Jin Bo's family during Sun Shaoping's high school years, the unpaid help of villagers when Sun Shao'an built his brick kiln, or the complex cooperation and rivalry among village cadres like Tian Futang and Jin Junwu—all reveal the centrality of *renqing* (human sentiments) and *mianzi* (face) in rural society. These ties went beyond simple exchanges of interest, forming a community consciousness rooted in shared moral and emotional bonds developed through long-term cohabitation. Through his depictions of such daily interactions, Lu Yao not only reconstructed the authentic ecology of

rural life but also unveiled the deep influence of traditional culture in shaping individual behavioral patterns and value orientations.

The Sun family epitomizes this concentric-circle logic. As the eldest son, Sun Shao'an's life choices were defined from the outset by the traditional ethic of "the elder brother is like a father." He abandoned his studies without hesitation to shoulder the burden of the family—a manifestation of filial piety in its highest form. His relationship with his father, Sun Yuhou, was one of silent yet profound solidarity, grounded in shared labor and responsibility. When deciding to marry He Xiulian, his primary concern was not romantic passion but whether the new member could integrate into the household and help support the fragile family. This collectivist mode of thinking—prioritizing the family unit—was a natural extension of rural cultural ethics.

The Sun family's bonds extended even to its weakest members. Sun Yuting, consumed by revolutionary zeal yet selfish and destitute, became a heavy burden on the family. Nonetheless, the Suns repeatedly lent him aid: borrowing money on his behalf, giving him their only cave dwelling for a wedding, sharing homegrown tobacco, and even sending white flour as a gesture of respect when Shao'an married Xiulian. Beyond immediate family ties, assistance was also mediated by wider networks: Shao'an used his school connections to free his brother-in-law from labor reform and secure loans, while Shaoping relied on distant relatives to find work in the city.

Thus, the interpersonal relationships in *Ordinary World* serve as a concentrated reflection of Chinese rural culture. Through depictions of both solidarity and strife, Lu Yao demonstrates that the fabric of village society was not built solely on economic exchange but on enduring moral obligations, emotional bonds, and collective consciousness.

### 3.2. Unconscious Traditional Marriage and Romance Ethics

The female characters in *Ordinary World* can be categorized into traditional, transitional, and modern types. In the realm of marriage and romance, the novel openly depicts the profound influence and constraints of traditional beliefs, particularly on women. Most of the major romantic relationships in the work serve as stages where tradition and modernity, ideals and reality, collide, reflecting the pain and transformation of marital ethics during this period of social transition.

The marriage between Sun Shaoan and He Xiulian exemplifies the traditional "men outside, women inside" model, yet within this ordinary framework, it also nurtures subtle forces that transcend tradition. He Xiulian is frugal and hardworking, saving money during their wedding to buy quality cloth for Shaoan's clothing. After marriage, she works diligently alongside her husband to support their modest household. She cares for him in every aspect of daily life, reserving the best food for him and almost always following his guidance in household matters, striving to support him in every possible way. Although she once tried to assert her own wishes by requesting a separate household, she ultimately yields whenever Shaoan shows displeasure. Despite her desire to "no longer passively accept others' leadership and occasionally express her own voice," she ultimately compensates for her

husband's masculinity. These traditional women devote themselves entirely to their families, sacrificing their own interests without expectation of reward, embodying admirable and authentic qualities in daily life. Yet, they regard their husbands as the center of their existence, positioning themselves as their husband's adjunct, clearly unable to transcend the ideological constraints of traditional female roles, which limits the expression of women's subjectivity and personal value. He Xiulian embodies traditional virtues: diligence, kindness, resilience, and unconditional love and support for her husband. Upon marrying into the Sun family, she immediately becomes the household's pillar, laying the foundation for Shaoan's endeavors through her sweat and life.

However, Lu Yao does not portray her as a mere symbol of a selfless "ideal wife and mother." She has her own emotional needs, feels jealousy at Shaoan's excessive dedication to the household, and occasionally suffers under the pressures of daily life. Her greatness lies in her understanding and endorsement of Shaoan's ideals, integrating personal happiness fully into the collective family struggle. Her character not only celebrates the sacrificial spirit of traditional women but also subtly evokes compassion for the cost of that sacrifice.

Tian Runye represents the transitional type of female character. Educated and ambitious, she yearns for a free and equal marriage and boldly pursues love. Her tragedy, however, vividly illustrates the harm that traditional norms inflict on women. Her childhood romance with Shaoan is ruthlessly crushed by the prevailing belief in "matching social status and family background." Under family pressure, she is forced to marry Li Xiangqian, a man she does not love, resulting in a painful, mutually unsatisfying marriage. Runye's struggles and compromises reflect countless women striving to survive in the space between entrenched traditional ethics and emerging modern consciousness. Her fate represents Lu Yao's poignant critique of backward and rigid marital norms. Although her intellectual awakening is fueled by a movement toward female autonomy, she was ultimately raised in Shuangshui Village, where traditional views were deeply rooted, and urban life does not entirely eradicate these ingrained beliefs. "The spirit of sacrifice rooted in Runye's bones is an iron cage she constructs for herself." Facing her father-in-law's "political crisis," she sacrifices her own happiness to meet her family's expectations; after marriage, she remains unhappy, constrained by public opinion and social pressure, unable to resort to legal means for divorce. She is unfortunate, trapped between ideals and reality, unable to fully control her own destiny.

Tian Xiaoxia represents the most idealized, "perfect" woman in Lu Yao's work. Beautiful, intelligent, kind, well-read, socially aware, and sincere, she brings a passionate vitality to ordinary life. Her romance with Sun Shaoping exemplifies a radical rebellion against and transcendence of traditional marital norms. Their love bridges the vast gaps of urban-rural divide, class, and social status, founded on shared spiritual pursuit and idealism. As a representative of the modern, educated woman, Tian Xiaoxia is independent, confident, and courageous, actively pursuing love without being constrained by societal judgment. Her relationship with Shaoping is a dialogue of equal souls rather than a match of material conditions. This love shines like a brilliant light in *Ordinary World*, symbolizing the author's affirmation of modernity and autonomous romance. Yet, Lu Yao's profundity lies in not

allowing this idealistic love to reach perfect fulfillment. Xiaoxia's unexpected death expresses both lamentation over the unpredictability of fate and the fragility of idealism against harsh reality, prompting readers to reflect on the enduring tension between tradition and modernity, ideals and reality.

From another perspective, the depiction of modern female characters also reflects Lu Yao's idealism. Figures like Tian Xiaoxia exist largely to highlight Sun Shaoping; her beauty, kindness, thoughtfulness, and independence function as a powerful foil that celebrates him. In this sense, Tian Xiaoxia is paradoxically erased by traditional marital thought.

The traditional ethic of "husband as the head of the wife" confines many female characters in the novel. Women endure love with difficulty, silently suffer, and patiently obey. For example, Sun Lanhua, meek like a lamb, bears physical and emotional burdens inflicted by her husband, single-handedly supporting the household, yet never considers leaving him or accepting another partner, blindly tolerating abuse while waiting for her husband to "return to virtue." Similarly, the traditional emphasis on "matching social status and family background" explains why the Sun brothers cannot remain with the Tian sisters, why Shaoan and Xiulian mutually support each other, why Runye eventually accepts Xiangqian's love, and why Shaoping, after Xiaoxia's death, chooses to care for Hu Ying, the widow of his class monitor. Even though modern female characters such as Tian Xiaoxia appear, Lu Yao's portrayals of traditional women are more grounded and profound. His evident emotional preference for traditional female roles reflects a deep, sincere identification with rural women's simplicity and resilience.

#### **4. Theoretical Sublimation: the "Kuaifu Spirit" and the Image of the Sun Brothers**

Wang Sisi analyzes the Chinese myth of "Kuaifu Chasing the Sun" and identifies three traditional national spirits embedded within it: pursuit, sacrifice, and endurance of suffering[[[] Wang Sisi. The Myth of "Kuaifu Chasing the Sun" and the Construction of the "Sun Brothers" Image—Rereading Lu Yao's Ordinary World[J]. Journal of Ningxia University (Social Sciences Edition), 2024, 46(04):84-92.]] These three national spirits are also vividly reflected in the Sun brothers. Most notably, Lu Yao elevates the brothers' struggles into a modern embodiment of the "Kuaifu Spirit." The myth of Kuaifu symbolizes a heroic persistence in pursuing an unattainable goal, a relentless chase for light and ideals. This spiritual core finds a perfect modern interpretation in the Sun brothers' lives.

##### **4.1 Pursuit**

The spirit of pursuit, as expressed in the line "The road ahead is long and has no ending; yet I will search high and low," originates in a stage of life even earlier than that portrayed in Li Sao. In early human survival, Kuaifu, as the "head of the tribe," relentlessly pursued his beliefs, exploring solutions for the tribe's survival. Similarly, Sun Shaoan, through expanding his personal landholdings and establishing a brick factory, embodies the new-generation Kuaifu, the emerging leader of Shuangshui Village. He must break with traditional modes of production and explore new paths of struggle to lead the community out of hardship.

Pursuit is not limited to material endeavors; it also encompasses a quest for the spiritual world. Sun Shaoping represents the Kuafu of the peasantry in the spiritual realm during the pre- and post-reform periods. Despite enduring the physical hardships of working in the city, he reflects, “At such moments, he did not even consider why he had to endure such suffering. Was it for that one jiao and five cents? One could say yes, or one could say no. He believed this was simply his life.” Even when faced with the grim realities of rural deprivation and the harshness of urban life, Sun Shaoping persists in following his ideals, continually exploring and striving.

“The road ahead is long and has no ending; yet I will search high and low”—this millennia-old verse still shines with truth today. It injects profound historical resonance and an indomitable spirit into the grand narrative of rural revitalization. In practical terms, rural revitalization is a great march, long and full of challenges. However, as long as one remains clear-eyed in facing the arduous reality of the “long road ahead,” and maintains the passion for exploration through actions of “searching high and low,” respecting natural and social laws, relying on the people, innovating courageously, and persevering over time, it is possible to forge a uniquely Chinese path to rural revitalization—bringing prosperity to agriculture, beauty to the countryside, and wealth to the farmers, thus turning this grand vision into reality.

## 4.2 Sacrifice

From the myth of “Kuafu Chasing the Sun,” it is evident that Kuafu offered himself as a sacrifice to an unknown, mysterious force, seeking the protection of deities and ancestors, thereby securing greater chances of survival for his tribe. This can be interpreted as the ethical connotation of sacrificing one’s life for righteousness—exchanging one’s own wellbeing for the survival and benefit of the collective or others.

When Sun Shaoan allocated pig feed plots, he risked public criticism while distributing land to the commune members and was ultimately reprimanded by the full-time cadres of the commune. Even after earning sufficient money working in brick hauling in the former X County, he continued to operate a brick kiln to help the entire village prosper, even taking loans to expand the factory, which eventually led to his own bankruptcy. “These near-saintly acts of dedication are, in essence, a narrative variant of the sacrificial archetype in which Sun Shaoan functions as the ‘offering.’”

The story of “Kuafu Chasing the Sun” serves as a profound and tension-filled metaphor. It calls for ideals as lofty as pursuing the sun and steadfastly striving for collective prosperity. One must embrace the Kuafu spirit, investing ambition, perseverance, and selfless dedication into great endeavors. Lessons from failure must be internalized, and progress should be pursued in a scientific, collaborative, and sustainable manner to avoid repeating the fatal mistake of dying of thirst. The ultimate pursuit is the creation of enduring value—transforming efforts into a legacy of well-being for future generations, allowing the sunshine of fairness and justice to illuminate the land and the fruits of development to benefit countless people. In contemporary life, “Kuafu Chasing the Sun” is no longer merely an ancient heroic

myth, but a spiritual totem and guide for action in the new era's journey toward shared prosperity. Sun Shaoan is both a "sun-chaser" and a "planter of peach trees," sowing fields of vitality for himself and posterity in the pursuit of the sun's light.

#### 4.3. Endurance of Suffering

Endurance of suffering is most prominently manifested through self-inflicted physical or mental hardship, which brings a sense of fulfillment or spiritual exhilaration. As the tribal leader, Kuafu could have prioritized access to abundant food, yet he chose to endure pain, finding spiritual satisfaction and solace through self-torture.

This "voluntary hardship" as a collective unconscious gene is deeply embedded in the national spirit. Sun Shaoan, as the production team leader, engages personally in all tasks, and as a brick kiln owner, works alongside villagers, deriving spiritual comfort from enduring hardship. Similarly, Sun Shaoping refuses his brother's invitation to run a brick kiln together and instead labors alone in Huangyuan, moving bricks and digging coal, experiencing spiritual elevation through physical suffering: "Even if it was harder than being a farmer, as long as he lived like a man for his whole life, he would be satisfied."

"Enduring hardship first, contributing to urban-rural development" is a hymn for contemporary strivers. It conveys that great undertakings begin with dreams and are realized through hard work. The gaps between urban and rural areas must be bridged by the sweat of dedicated individuals; regional imbalances must be addressed through the wisdom of the committed. Every striver willing to "endure hardship first" is a hero driving transformative change across China. Their presence forms the most inspiring landscape of the Chinese land, and their spirit motivates others to participate in the grand project of national rejuvenation, jointly painting a magnificent vision of urban-rural prosperity and shared wealth.

#### 4.4 Sublimation

Sun Shaoan's "chasing the sun" occurs on the material level. His "sun" represents the dream of lifting his entire family out of poverty and the grand ambition of transforming the impoverished landscape of Shuangshui Village. Like Kuafu, he runs tirelessly across the Yellow Earth with remarkable perseverance. Opening a brick kiln, facing repeated failures, and rebuilding again and again from the ruins, his struggle is filled with the harsh realities of life and physical toil, yet he never gives up. This relentless pursuit of improved material conditions embodies the enduring and resilient survival will of the Chinese nation. His dedication is primarily a devotion to family and collective interests, reflecting the collectivist spirit in traditional culture of "worrying before the world worries" (xian tianxia zhi you er you).

Sun Shaoping's "chasing the sun," in contrast, is spiritual. His "sun" is the vast ocean of knowledge, the expansive external world, and the ultimate quest for self-worth and the meaning of life. Unwilling to be bound by the land like his brother, he ventures outward, working from day laborer to coal miner, enduring extreme physical hardship while persistently studying, reflecting, and engaging in intellectual exchange with Tian Xiaoxia.

His pursuit transcends material concerns, aiming at spiritual freedom and the perfection of human character. This process of self-cultivation and striving for spiritual fulfillment amidst adversity vividly embodies the Chinese spirit of progress captured in the classical maxim “As Heaven maintains vigor through movement, a gentleman should constantly strive for self-improvement” (tian xing jian, junzi yi ziqiang bu xi).

The two brothers—one rooted in the soil, the other gazing at the stars—together form two complementary aspects of the “Kuaifu spirit,” illustrating the Chinese nation’s ceaseless struggle in both material and spiritual dimensions.

Set against the Loess Plateau of northern Shaanxi, *Ordinary World* portrays the struggles of ordinary people such as Sun Shaoan and Sun Shaoping, vividly reflecting the long-suppressed but finally eruptive national pursuit of prosperity in the early years of China’s reform and opening-up. This pursuit is multidimensional: materially, it manifests as a desire for basic sustenance, wealth creation, and improved living conditions; spiritually, it manifests as respect for knowledge, defense of dignity, realization of personal value, and aspiration toward an ideal world; socially, it manifests as breaking through old institutional constraints, challenging urban-rural barriers, and exploring shared prosperity.

The novel conveys a profound yet ordinary national spirit, encompassing self-reliance, arduous struggle, perseverance, and enduring hope for life. This is the fundamental reason why *Ordinary World* inspires countless readers. It emphasizes that every individual striving for a better life in ordinary roles is writing a chapter that is not only their own but also contributes to the collective “extraordinary” narrative of the nation.

## **5. Reflection on the Work: Understanding and Compassion**

To grieve for the world, lament the difficulties of the times, and feel sympathy for the suffering of the people is a profound and widespread emotional experience among traditional Chinese literati. It encompasses concern for the livelihood of the populace, society, nature, and history. A compassionate heart directs its gaze toward the lower strata of society, deeply sympathizing with the hardships of ordinary people, and extends to all living things, appreciating seasonal changes and the cycles of life and death. In reflecting on history and the present, it criticizes social injustice and marvels at the vicissitudes of life. Expressions such as “Within the wealthy households, wine and meat rot, while bones freeze to death on the road” convey concern for people’s suffering; “the green flourishes while the red fades” evokes tender care for nature; “the swallows at the halls of the old Wang and Xie families fly into the homes of ordinary people” reflects on the impermanence of prosperity and decline.

When Lu Yao wrote *Ordinary World*, he carried a fervent heart of compassion. This compassion is not cheap sympathy but a complex blend of deep understanding, tolerance, and critique. He fully immerses himself in the lives of the lower-class characters he depicts, breathing with them and sharing their fates. He understands Sun Shaoan’s limitations and helplessness, why he dares not accept Runye’s love; he comprehends Tian Futang’s private motives and calculations as a rural cadre, yet also his deep desire for the village’s development; he even understands the jealousies and gossip of fellow villagers, recognizing these as authentic human responses within a specific social environment. This

“understanding” frees the characters from flat stereotypes, rendering them three-dimensional and vivid.

Lu Yao, an emotionally rich writer, invests both warmth and passion in *Ordinary World*, pouring forth goodness and love. As Wang Xiaoxia notes, “The emotional attitude in *Ordinary World* can be described as considerate” [[Wang Xiaoxia. *A Light Illuminating Reality and the Human Heart: On the Considerate Emotions and Attitudes in Ordinary World* [J]. *Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Literary Review*, 2024,(06):100–107.]]. Here, “considerate” is understood as carefully gauging the feelings and circumstances of others, providing attention and care. This near-compassionate consideration shapes the vividly human characters of the novel. Lu Yao’s empathy toward his characters and his advocacy of a positive emotional stance exemplify the traits of humanitarian literature.

Characters such as Sun Shaoping, who forms a new family with Hu Ying and her children; Sun Shaoan, flourishing in his career; Hou Yuying, who, though once bullying others in middle school, grows up to find happiness; and Hao Hongmei, now with Runsheng—these countless individuals, scattered across distant lands, find their own forms of happiness. Even if like a “moon with flaws,” it still shines clearly. Sun Shaoping, who longs to leave the countryside in pursuit of a broader spiritual world, ultimately returns to the coal mine, becoming an ordinary miner. This is not a failure of ideals but a deeper return—realizing self-worth in the harshest conditions. Yet this process is fraught with struggle against destiny. Lu Yao’s “compassion” lies in his refusal to judge. He does not criticize Shaoan’s pragmatism, nor does he harshly censure Runye’s perceived weakness. He narrates quietly and with deep feeling, allowing readers to perceive the unavoidable constraints each character faces in the torrents of history. This understanding-based empathy forms the cultural foundation of compassion for the world, revealing that every struggling soul deserves to be seen and respected.

### 5.1 Compassion as Praise

At the core of “compassion” is concern for humanity. The greatest achievement of *Ordinary World* lies in its ability to discover the brilliance and warmth of human nature even in the darkest and most barren lands. This compassion constitutes a genuine praise for the vitality of life. Resilient life force is the novel’s central spiritual essence. Sun Shaoan is the pillar of his family and the leader of his village. In his lexicon, there is no word for “giving up.” When his brick kiln collapses and he is burdened with debt, he wipes away his tears and starts again, driven by love for his family and responsibility to the villagers who follow him. His resilience originates from profound familial love and a sense of duty.

Shaoan combats material scarcity and spiritual emptiness through study. Even in the most dangerous coal mine, he persists in reading and contemplating the meaning of life. His perseverance represents a steadfast adherence to ideals and dignity. It demonstrates that while one may be materially poor, one’s spiritual world can be extraordinarily rich.

### 5.2. Benevolence as the Underlying Tone



Selfless and devoted kindness is ubiquitous throughout the novel, forming a warm, comforting undertone. Sun Yuhou quietly bears everything with paternal love, using his broad shoulders to shield his children from hardships. His guilt over Shaoan's dropping out of school, his support for Shaoping's ventures beyond the village, and his unwavering care for Lan Hua all embody the most genuine and profound paternal love of Chinese farmers.

Tian Fujun exemplifies an ideal and responsible cadre with a sense of public-mindedness. He is deeply concerned for the people, passionately drives reforms, and devotes himself tirelessly to the development of the Huangyuan region. He represents the era's hope, a "greater-self" spirit that transcends personal interest in pursuit of social progress. Jin Bo's fraternal bond with Shaoping, spanning social status and distance, and his devoted affection for a Tibetan girl, reveal the pure and romantic dimensions of human nature. The novel celebrates the broad-mindedness and tolerance of people; even Jin Junwu, a once antagonistic figure toward the Sun family, demonstrates neighborly solidarity at critical moments. This nuanced understanding of human complexity and multiplicity renders the novel's world more authentic and credible, further reflecting the author's spirit of compassion.

### 5.3. Positivity and Aspiration

The core value of the "grieve-for-the-world" culture lies in finding greatness within the ordinary and in living an extraordinary life in a world of the ordinary. The novel offers the highest praise for labor. Whether it is Shaoan's sweat in the fields or Shaoping's coal-stained toil underground, labor is imbued with a sacred significance. Work is the fundamental path to creating value and realizing the self. Through labor, people find their place and gain dignity. This respect for labor represents the most authentic cultural essence of the Loess Plateau.

The novel also exalts spiritual transcendence. Shaoping's reading, Xiaoxia's ideals, and Runye's acceptance and care for Li Xiangqian all reflect human achievement on the spiritual plane. Even when the body is constrained, the mind, emotions, and soul can soar freely. This embodies the positive and uplifting aspect of the "grieve-for-the-world" culture: it acknowledges suffering but believes in the human capacity to overcome hardship through spiritual strength.

The novel emphasizes collective warmth. The small social unit of Shuangshui Village is full of human connection: celebrations and funerals, neighborly assistance, familial disputes, and reconciliation. These mundane daily events form a tightly knit community. When individuals encounter misfortune, the collective provides support and comfort. This attachment to "home" and "rural roots" reflects a deep-seated cultural psychology in Chinese people and serves as a haven against the storms of the external world.

Lu Yao goes further, sowing seeds of love in the soil of suffering and offering light and hope. The marital tragedy of Li Xiangqian and Tian Runye is a painful and silent torment—one side constrained, the other obstinate. Through dialogue, Lu Yao directly expresses gentle and profound sympathy for Li Xiangqian: "At times like this, we truly feel a pang in our hearts. We can understand his unspeakable feelings..." Similarly, he refrains from harsh judgment

of Tian Runye, who is equally afflicted: “We care for her because, in reality, she is a pitiable person—even though, comparatively, her husband Li Xiangqian may be more so.” In these two fundamentally good-hearted characters, we glimpse Lu Yao’s empathetic compassion, a heart that resonates with the suffering of others.

Of course, understanding does not mean endorsement. Beneath this tone of compassion, Lu Yao maintains a clear critical consciousness. He critiques the rigid household registration system that constrains people, the “matching of social status” concept that stifles love, the narrow and conservative mentality of small-scale farmers, and the oppression of ordinary people by power. His critique is gentle yet powerful, not through radical slogans but through the tragic unfolding of characters’ destinies, enabling readers to perceive the dangers of backward thinking naturally and profoundly.

It is precisely this interplay of “understanding and empathy” with “critique and reflection” that allows *Ordinary World* to illuminate hope even while portraying suffering. It demonstrates that even in the most ordinary and difficult lives, there is love, dignity, ideals, and unyielding perseverance. The ability to discover poetry in hardship and greatness in the ordinary constitutes the novel’s core charm. Readers come to deeply appreciate that traditional culture is not a burdensome weight; its ethical virtues, spirit of struggle, and humanistic concern, once reshaped by modernity, remain a spiritual force that sustains the lives of countless people.

#### 5.4. Aspiration for a Better Life

The “compassion for the world” culture depicted in *Ordinary World* is a grounded form of humanism. It does not dwell on abstract philosophical concepts, but focuses on the most ordinary laborers on the Loess Plateau. It “grieves” their suffering because it deeply understands the weight of their hardships; it “pities” their plight because it sincerely admires the resilience, kindness, and love that emerge from their struggles. Although Lu Yao critiques some of the peasants’ backward ideas, his criticism is generally mild and tempered by understanding. He demonstrates a sympathetic awareness toward those who suffer. Even if they exhibit certain flaws—such as superstitious beliefs or resistance to new ideas—Lu Yao neither harshly condemns them nor obsesses over exposing human failings. He understands that their ignorance and backwardness are not due to a lack of hard work, but rather to complex, often immutable factors.

Although their material conditions are scarce and life is often harsh, they continue to follow the ethical codes of rural society and maintain a rich inner world. Regardless of the era or circumstance, the aspiration for a better life, responsibility toward family, dedication to love, and insistence on dignity are universal. This conveys that being ordinary does not mean being mediocre, and experiencing hardship does not equate to despair. Every ordinary person who lives earnestly and struggles diligently deserves to be celebrated. Through a heart of compassion, Lu Yao creates a world of ordinary people imbued with moving poetry and rich social meaning.

## 6. Conclusion: Promoting Excellent Culture and Telling China's Story Well

Ordinary World has endured across generations and continues to move readers because Lu Yao successfully merges a grand narrative of the times with profound cultural depiction and meticulous character portrayal. Using traditional culture as the warp and the changes of the era as the weft, he weaves a majestic yet warm tapestry of the national spirit. The struggles of the Sun brothers, the mutual assistance within rural society, and the joys and sorrows of traditional marriage together form a “world of the ordinary” full of cultural texture and vitality. In this world, readers not only glimpse the footprint of an era, but also witness how a nation, grounded in deep cultural heritage and indomitable spirit, moves forward steadily and resolutely in the torrent of history. This is the most valuable intellectual and artistic gift that Ordinary World, as a classic, offers to its readers.

Ordinary World presents the world with a real, three-dimensional, and comprehensive image of China. Its status as a model for “telling China's story well” lies in its perfect alignment with the core elements of a “good story.”

First, the narrative centers on ordinary lives, evoking global resonance. The key to telling China's story is not the label “China” but the quality of the story itself. Ordinary World tells the story of ordinary people struggling in the currents of history to change their fate, pursue ideals, and realize self-worth. This pursuit of dignity, love, effort, and ideals is a set of values and emotions shared across humanity. Readers, regardless of nationality or cultural background, can see their own reflections in Sun Shaoan's perseverance and Sun Shaoping's persistence, and feel the brilliance and power of human nature. Such “empathy” serves as a bridge across cultural divides.

Second, the story is rooted in China's reality, presenting a vivid historical tableau. Set in the Loess Plateau during the early years of China's reform and opening-up, it depicts an era of intense transformation. Through the divergent life paths of Sun Shaoan and Sun Shaoping, the work vividly portrays urban-rural progress, individual aspirations, and the collision of social values. Conflicts between tradition and modernity, conservatism and openness, love and social hierarchy, are depicted with sharp realism. This realism renders the “China story” credible and emotionally engaging, earning the reader's empathetic response.

Finally, the protagonists are “ordinary people,” highlighting the greatness of Chinese citizens. Telling China's story is not only about heroes and celebrities, but also about the countless ordinary lives. The protagonists of Ordinary World are farmers and ordinary workers. In their “ordinary” struggles, we witness the most valuable qualities of the Chinese people: resilient perseverance, creative labor, and proactive responses to poverty and adversity.

The story also emphasizes aspiration for knowledge and ideals: even under harsh conditions, Sun Shaoping persists in reading, demonstrating a spiritual strength that transcends material limitations. It conveys profound patriotism and sense of responsibility, such as Sun Shaoan repeatedly sacrificing personal gain to help the entire village prosper. Through the “extraordinary” struggles of these ordinary people, the world sees an image of hardworking,

intelligent, resilient, and hopeful Chinese citizens—far more persuasive than any grand narrative alone.

**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## References:

1. Lu Yao. Ordinary World, Volume 3[M]. Beijing: Beijing October Literature & Art Publishing House, 2017.
2. Li Anxu, Yang Xinyuan. May Every Flower on the Yellow Earth Never Wither: An Analysis of Female Images in Life and Ordinary World[J]. Yangtze Novel Appreciation, 2023,(28):19–22.
3. Yang Shaofeng. On the Female Images in Ordinary World[J]. Famous Works Appreciation, 2024,(23):137–140.
4. Wang Sisi. The Myth of “Kuaifu Chasing the Sun” and the Construction of the “Sun Brothers” Image: Rereading Lu Yao’s Ordinary World[J]. Journal of Ningxia University (Social Science Edition), 2024, 46(04):84–92.
5. Wang Xiaoxia. A Light Illuminating Reality and the Human Heart: On the Considerate Emotions and Attitudes in Ordinary World[J]. Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Literary Review, 2024,(06):100–107.
6. Lu Yao. The Ordinary World [M]. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 2005.
7. Li Xing. At the Intersection of History and Reality: A Discussion on Luo Yao [M]. Xi'an: Shaanxi People's Publishing House, 1992.
8. Li Jianjun. Lu Yao's Unfinished [M]. Xi'an: Shaanxi People's Publishing House, 2018.
9. Xing Xiaoli. Lu Yao Biography [M]. Xi'an: Shaanxi People's Publishing House, 2015
10. Peter Conn, Pearl S. Buck: A Cultural Biography (Cambridge University Press, 1996)
11. Elisabeth Croll, The Wisdom of the Earth: The Cultural Legacy of Pearl S. Buck (Routledge, 2019)
12. Paul A. Doyle, Pearl S. Buck (Twayne Publishers, 1980)
13. Spencer, Jonathan, “Pearl S. Buck and the Chinese Peasant: The Politics of Cultural Translation.” Journal of American-East Asian Relations, vol. 12, no. 3-4, 2003, pp. 217-236.
14. Ling, Amy, “Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry.” MELUS, vol. 15, no. 4, 1988, pp. 3-16
15. Hsia, C. T., “Pearl Buck and the Chinese Novel.” The China Quarterly, no. 20, 1964, pp. 118-130.
16. Said, Edward W., Orientalism (Pantheon, 1978)
17. Hutcheon, Linda, A Poetics of Postmodernism (Routledge, 1988)
18. Bordwell, David, The Cinema of Pearl S. Buck (University of Wisconsin Press, 2004)
19. Fei Xiaotong, From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society. Translated by Gary G. Hamilton & Wang Zheng, University of California Press, 1992.
20. R. David Arkush, Fei Xiaotong and Sociology in Revolutionary China. Harvard

University Press, 1981.

21. Stephan Feuchtwang, *The Anthropology of China: China as an Ethnographic and Theoretical Critique* Bloomsbury, 2020.
22. Liu Shouying, "Rural Revitalization and Chinese-Style Modernization" (*Management World*, No. 1, 2023)
23. Li Shi et al., "The Goal and Realization Path of Common Prosperity" (*Economic Research Journal*, Issue 5, 2022)
24. Li, Xiguang & Liu, Kang (Eds.), *China's Media Go Global*, Routledge, 2018.
25. Pan Jiaen, et al. (2023). Zhejiang's Practice of Chinese Rural Modernization as Seen through the "Thousand Villages, Ten Thousand Households" Project. *Chinese Rural Economy*, (1), 2-17. / Publicity Department of the Zhejiang Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China. (2023). *A Documentary of the 20th Anniversary of the "Thousand Villages, Ten Thousand Households" Project*. Zhejiang People's Publishing House.
26. Yu Liangliang (2021). Research on the Mechanism and Path of Empowering Farmers' Happy Life through Digital Rural Construction *Chinese Rural Economy*, (8), 2-20.