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# A New Exploration of the Narrative Art Features in Lu Yao's Novel *Ordinary World*

Xinyan Weng, Naiwen Chen

Fuzhou University of International Studies and Trade, Fuzhou, Fujian 350300

**Abstract:** Lu Yao's *Ordinary World* is a significant work in contemporary Chinese literature, offering a profound exploration of rural life and societal changes during the 1970s and 1980s. The novel is distinguished by its steady narrative pace, clear temporal structure, and the use of a unique rural perspective that immerses readers in the protagonist's personal and social struggles. Through a multi-layered narrative approach, the novel intricately weaves the experiences of its characters with the broader historical transformations in China. This paper explores the narrative features of *Ordinary World*, focusing on its narrative techniques, character development, and cultural context, highlighting the emotional depth and societal insights that make it a compelling and enduring work.

**Keywords:** *Ordinary World*; Narrative features; Chinese literature

## Introduction

Lu Yao's *Ordinary World* is widely regarded as one of the most important works of contemporary Chinese literature. Published in 1991, it provides an insightful depiction of rural China during a period of intense social, political, and economic change. Through the eyes of ordinary individuals—especially the protagonist, Sun Shaoping—the novel paints a vivid portrait of the personal and societal transformations that took place during the 1970s and 1980s<sup>[1]</sup>. While much has been written about the novel's exploration of social issues and its portrayal of the rural experience, less attention has been paid to the intricacies of its narrative techniques. This paper aims to delve deeper into the narrative art features of *Ordinary World*, with a particular focus on its narrative pace, temporal logic, spatial perspective, and structural complexity. By exploring these aspects, this paper offers a new perspective on Lu Yao's artistic mastery, shedding light on how his storytelling techniques contribute to the novel's emotional resonance and enduring relevance.

## 1. Narrative Features of *Ordinary World*

### 1.1 Steady Narrative Pace and Clear Temporal Logic

One of the most prominent features of *Ordinary World* is its steady narrative pace and the clear use of temporal logic. The novel's narrative unfolds smoothly, with a consistent use of time markers and tense shifts that keep the story clear and well-structured<sup>[2]</sup>. The story begins in the early months of 1975, and spans a decade, ending in 1985, encapsulating the major social and political changes of China during this period. Lu Yao presents a panoramic view of the dramatic transformation in rural and urban China, detailing the struggles and growth of its ordinary citizens.

The story is divided into multiple parts, with the first part beginning in 1975, when the protagonist, Sun Shaoping, a rural youth, embarks on his high school journey. By the second part, set in 1979, the novel reflects on the sociopolitical landscape shaped by the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee. The narrative is organized with linear time sequences that focus on Sun Shaoping's growth from an innocent teenager to a hardened adult by the end of the novel.

Additionally, Lu Yao makes frequent use of causal conjunctions like "therefore" and "so," which help to emphasize the causal relationships between different parts of the narrative. These phrases reveal not only the surface-level cause-and-effect relationships between events but also offer insight into the deeper narrative logic that guides the progression of the story. Furthermore, Lu Yao's narrative frequently incorporates his own emotional responses to the events, creating a bond between the author, the characters, and the readers, allowing for a shared emotional experience as the story unfolds<sup>[3]</sup>.

### 1.2 Unique Rural Perspective and Strong Regional Color

Unlike many rural-themed novels that present a view from the outside, *Ordinary World* is told from the inside perspective of a rural youth, Sun Shaoping, who is deeply embedded within the rural community. This internal viewpoint adds authenticity and richness to the depiction of rural life, allowing readers to connect with the struggles and experiences of rural characters in a more personal and meaningful way.

Lu Yao's choice of a rural youth as the central narrator allows him to explore themes such as poverty, the blind fervor of collective labor, family conflicts, and even the political struggles within small rural communities. The novel paints a vivid picture of life in rural China, incorporating elements like the harshness of the yellow earth, the traditional cave dwellings, and the rural customs and beliefs that define the community. Through such elements, Lu Yao not only immerses the reader in the world of the countryside but also provides a window into the culture of northern Shaanxi, a region with deep historical and cultural significance.

This rural perspective resonates strongly with readers, particularly those from similar backgrounds, who find themselves relating to the characters' experiences and emotional journeys. The strong regional color, coupled with the rich cultural details, makes *Ordinary World* a unique narrative that invites readers into a deeper understanding of rural life in China during the 1970s and 1980s<sup>[4]</sup>.

### 1.3 Diverse Narrative Angles and Clear Structural Layers

Lu Yao employs a multifaceted narrative approach in *Ordinary World*, making the structure of the novel both complex and engaging. The narrative perspective shifts between multiple viewpoints, including the first-person internal perspective of the protagonist and the third-person external perspective of the omniscient narrator. In particular, the novel's primary narrative angle is that of the third person, where the narrator knows everything about the characters and the world they inhabit.

However, unlike typical omniscient third-person narrators, Lu Yao's narrator is constrained by the characters' understanding of the world. The author uses the traditional narrative structure of the "coming-of-age" story, where the protagonist's journey of growth and self-discovery is revealed gradually. The reader, along with Sun Shaoping, learns about the world and his future as the narrative unfolds. This approach helps the reader experience the protagonist's struggles and triumphs as if they were experiencing them firsthand, making the narrative feel more immediate and intimate<sup>[5]</sup>.

The novel also features multiple narrative lines, including the stories of other characters such as Sun Shaoping's brother, Sun Shaoan, and their relatives, as well as the complex interactions within their family and the larger society. These intersecting narrative threads create a rich and layered structure, allowing for a more detailed exploration of the characters' relationships and their responses to the changing social and political landscape.

## 2. Authorial Intent and Social Context

### 2.1 Subjective Factors: Lu Yao's Cultural Psychology, Emotional Involvement, and Creative Perspective

Lu Yao's unique narrative style and the steady rhythm of his storytelling can be attributed to his own cultural psychology and emotional engagement with the characters and events. The writer's deep understanding of rural life, combined with his own emotional investments, shapes the way he crafts the novel. Lu Yao's experiences as a member of the rural community, as well as his awareness of the larger national transformations, inform his creative approach.

As noted by literary critics, Lu Yao's personal experiences and his connection to the land are integral to the novel's authenticity and emotional depth. His narrative choices reflect a deep, introspective understanding of the rural people's struggles and aspirations, making *Ordinary World* more than just a depiction of rural life—it becomes a reflection of the emotional and psychological complexities of those living through times of profound societal change.

### 2.2 Objective Factors: The Era and Social Transformation

The socio-political changes that unfolded in China during the 1970s and 1980s form the backdrop of *Ordinary World*, and they greatly influence the narrative style and structure. The Cultural Revolution, which lasted from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, had a lasting impact on Chinese society, particularly in rural areas. The upheaval, social instability, and poverty affected the rural population, shaping the characters' identities and their responses to the changes that were gradually unfolding.

The era's cultural and political shifts are reflected in the characters' lives, from their labor in rural fields to their struggles with family expectations and their attempts to adapt to a rapidly changing society. As the story progresses, the characters find themselves on the brink of a new era, one marked by economic reforms and the gradual opening up of China. This historical context provides the novel with a sense of urgency and significance, making it not only a tale of personal growth but also a larger commentary on the transformations taking place in Chinese society<sup>[6]</sup>.

## 3. Narrative Art in *Ordinary World*

### 3.1 Steady Pace and Clear Temporal Structure: An Artistic Display of Flowing Narrative

The narrative pace of *Ordinary World* contributes significantly to the novel's overall effectiveness. The controlled pacing, balanced between periods of tension and relaxation, creates a seamless and fluid narrative that keeps the reader engaged throughout the entire story. Lu Yao carefully modulates the rhythm, ensuring moments of high emotional intensity are followed by quieter reflective passages, allowing the

story to breathe. The consistent temporal structure reinforces the novel's realism, making the world Lu Yao presents feel immediate and true to life. The author's use of time markers and chronological sequences ensures the novel's events unfold naturally and logically, providing clarity and enhancing the authenticity of the characters' experiences. This method of storytelling allows readers to immerse themselves in the unfolding history, making each event feel like an organic part of the narrative progression, rooted in time and place.

### 3.2 The Unique Rural Perspective: Depicting the Richness of Regional Life

The rural perspective in *Ordinary World* is not merely a setting but a key narrative device that infuses the novel with regional specificity and authenticity. By focusing on the inner lives of rural characters, Lu Yao offers a unique insight into the emotional and social fabric of rural China, shedding light on both the hardships and the rich traditions of rural life. This perspective allows readers to witness the complexities of rural society, from familial obligations to social struggles, in a manner that feels grounded and real. Through Sun Shaoping and other characters, the novel portrays the strong sense of identity and community that exists in rural China, while also addressing the limitations and challenges faced by these individuals. This intimate portrayal makes the novel resonate deeply with readers who share similar experiences, while also offering others a vivid and empathetic portrayal of rural life, bridging the gap between different cultural and social backgrounds.

### 3.3 Multiple Narrative Angles and Clear Structure: A Rich, Multi-Layered Storytelling Approach

The varied narrative angles employed in *Ordinary World* contribute to its rich structural complexity, adding depth to the overall storytelling. The shifts in perspective, combined with the multiple narrative lines, offer readers a comprehensive view of the characters' experiences and the social changes they navigate, effectively capturing the multifaceted nature of their lives. Lu Yao uses alternating viewpoints to explore not only Sun Shaoping's personal journey but also the lives of other characters, such as his brother, Sun Shaoan, and their family members<sup>[7]</sup>. This multidimensional approach enriches the story by showcasing diverse responses to the same societal changes, reflecting the complexity of life during that time. The clear structural layers, from the intimate portrayal of individual experiences to the broader depiction of historical transformation, make the novel a nuanced exploration of social dynamics. This approach makes *Ordinary World* not just a coming-of-age story, but a broad reflection on the evolving Chinese society and the interplay between personal and collective histories.

## 4. Conclusions

Lu Yao's *Ordinary World* is a masterful blend of narrative technique and cultural insight, offering an emotionally and intellectually engaging experience. The novel's clear temporal structure and steady pace provide a coherent framework for both personal and societal transformations, while its rural perspective offers an authentic portrayal of life in 1970s and 1980s China.

The choice to narrate the story from a rural youth's point of view adds depth and relatability, especially with the strong regional color that immerses readers in the rural landscape. Additionally, the use of diverse narrative angles and a multi-layered structure enhances the novel's complexity, allowing for a nuanced exploration of both character development and social change.

Lu Yao's personal emotional investment in the characters and the cultural context of the story imbue the novel with authenticity, making it not just a tale of personal growth but also a reflection on the broader societal shifts. Through its combination of narrative form and social commentary, *Ordinary World* stands as a significant work in modern Chinese literature, demonstrating the power of storytelling to reflect the human experience.

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