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# Narrative Creation from 'Chuntai' to 'Jishun': Ge Fei's Ascending the Spring Terrace

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## Abstract

**'Chuntai' and 'Jishun' are creative neologisms coined by Ge Fei based on preceding texts. The novel positions 'Chuntai' as the core narrative field of worldly phenomena of all beings and 'Jishun' as the spiritual narrative locus where characters break free from worldly constraints and realize the authentic essence of existence; together, they constitute a dual narrative chain of reality and illusion, entrapment and liberation. This article first clarifies the textual connotations and progressive narrative relationship of the two central images 'Chuntai' and 'Jishun,' then emphasizes how Ge Fei, through tailored narration, constructs a narrative chain transitioning from the secular 'Chuntai' to the spiritual 'Jishun,' elucidating the inherent adaptive logic by which narrative creation serves spiritual writing. Finally, aligned with Ge Fei's individual creative context, it summarizes the literary value of this narrative creation and distills its practical implications for creative writing in contemporary novels. This article attempts to overcome the limitations of existing research that separate form and theme, restoring Ge Fei's original creative intent to bear reflection on the era through narrative creation.**

## Keywords

**Ge Fei; *Ascending the Spring Terrace*; Narrative Creation; Chuntai; Jishun.**

## 1. Introduction

In the developmental genealogy of contemporary Chinese avant-garde literature, Ge Fei is a highly representative scholar-writer. Reviewing his more than thirty years of creative practice, a clear dual-threaded pattern runs throughout: firstly, the continuous advancement in exploring and innovating narrative forms, from the labyrinthine absence narration in early works such as Labyrinth Boat and Brown Bird Flock, to historical writing integrating traditional narrative patterns in the *Jiangnan Trilogy*, and then to the popular narrative transformation close to urban daily life in Invisible Clothes and Moonset Deserted Temple, he has never ceased absorbing, transforming, and creating various narrative resources and techniques from both Chinese and Western traditions; Secondly, it consistently upholds a humanistic foundation, continuously capturing the survival conditions and spiritual traumas of ordinary people amid social transformation, rejecting purely textual games detached from reality. Two creative lines grow in parallel and empower each other, forming Ge Fei's distinctive writing trait, which is centrally displayed in the new work *Ascending the Spring Terrace*

*Ascending the Spring Terrace* published in 2024, is Ge Fei's comprehensive work integrating narrative experience and directly addressing the symptoms of the contemporary era. The novel anchors its narrative at Shen Zhou United Technology Company, No. 67 Chuntai Road, Beijing, gathering four outsiders originating from rural areas with vastly different circumstances through subtle interconnections within the same workplace space. It employs a biographical-style structure with separate chapters, combined with narrative means such as nonlinear time, shifts in multi-perspective narrative person, and a fusion of traditional storytelling and Western

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metafiction, weaving a network of intertwined yet independently evolving character fates. The entire work employs ‘Chuntai’ as a narrative vessel for worldly existence, while embedding ‘Jishun’ as a narrative moment for spiritual breakthrough within each character’s life trajectory, forming an explicit narrative clue leading from worldly predicament to existential clarity, making it a representative text that highly unifies Ge Fei’s narrative creation and realistic writing.

To date, academic research on *Ascending the Spring Terrace* has produced multilayered results, roughly divided into four categories. The first pertains to the study of narrative artistry, with scholarship primarily focusing on the novel’s synchronic jigsaw puzzle structure, bead-style arrangement, polyphonic multivocal point of view, the integration of folk storytelling, and metafictional features[1]; The second concerns philosophical interpretation, where researchers often draw on Byung-Chul Han’s Merit Society and Heidegger’s existential theory to elucidate spiritual themes in the text such as individual alienation, interpersonal estrangement, and existential nihilism[2]; The third aspect involves the analysis of character groups, emphasizing the lived experiences of individuals with varying identities including small-town youth, grassroots laborers, intellectuals, and urban women[3]; The fourth section interprets the imagery and conducts a comparative analysis between Chinese and foreign texts, focusing on the connotations of the ‘Chuntai’ imagery or cross-textually comparing this work with those by overseas writers[4]. Existing studies, while providing a robust textual foundation for this paper, generally exhibit clear limitations: most treat narrative form and spiritual themes separately, either analyzing narrative techniques in isolation or interpreting the era's predicaments independently, lacking an integrative argument demonstrating their intrinsic connection. Few existing studies inquire whether Ge Fei’s entire narrative creation system is specifically designed to present the worldly impasse of ‘Chuntai’ and to lay the foundation for the Spiritual Pathway exemplified by ‘Jishun.’ From the bustling worldly sphere of ‘Chuntai’ to the fleeting clarity of Jishun’s sudden enlightenment, what narrative means construct this narrative chain? How does formal creation assume the central function of spiritual reflection? Existing scholarship still fails to adequately respond.

Looking globally at the literary scene, Nobel laureates such as Kazuo Ishiguro and Olga Tokarczuk are also skilled at using complex modern narratives to bear the weight of profound human nature and reflection on the times, achieving an organic unity between narrative technique and humanistic concern. This creative trajectory possesses universal literary value, and *Ascending the Spring Terrace* exemplifies the realization of this creative model by a domestic avant-garde writer. This article centers on the narrative creation from ' Chuntai ' to 'Ji Shun' as its core thread, initially defining the narrative connotations of the two core images ‘Chuntai’ and ‘Ji Shun,' and clarifying their contrasting and progressive textual relationship; the second step systematically demonstrates how various narrative creations establish the narrative pathway from 'Spring Terrace' to ‘Ji Shun,' elucidating the logic of creative adaptation between form and spiritual writing; Finally, through a longitudinal comparison of Ge Fei’s creative developments across different periods, the study positions the transformative significance of *Ascending the Spring Terrace* and distills its referential value for contemporary long-form creative writing. This article aims to move beyond the conventional research approach that treats form and content as separate issues, seeking to restore the creative logic through which Ge Fei completes era-writing based on narrative creation.

## 2. The Narrative Construction of ‘Chuntai’ and ‘Jishun’

The entire narrative structure of *Ascending the Spring Terrace* is established upon the paired, oppositional, yet progressive core imagery of ‘Chuntai’ and ‘Jishun.’One represents the ordinary, clamorous realm of secular existence, while the other signifies the moment of ontological

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enlightenment beyond the mundane; one forms the narrative starting point, the other the narrative conclusion, together establishing the narrative framework of the entire novel. Clarifying the textual connotations and narrative connections between the two is foundational to interpreting Ge Fei's narrative creation logic.

## 2.1. 'Chuntai': As a Display Platform of Worldly Desires

'Chuntai'possesses a dual narrative significance: first as a concrete physical space, and second as a reconstruction of classical humanistic imagery. From the aspect of physical reality, No. 67, Chuntai Road, Shenzhou United Technology Company serves as the unified narrative hub of the entire novel. Shen Xinyi, Chen Kemin, Dou Baoqing, and Zhou Zhenxia come from different places and gather here, successively working together; this space involves all their past experiences. The novel adopts a chaptered structure akin to the historical-biographical style, with four chapters corresponding to the life stories of four protagonists. These four narrative threads unfold in parallel, like four independent jigsaw pieces, separated yet intersecting within the same workplace space, collectively composing a depiction of an estranged mode of existence in which different individuals are simultaneously connected and isolated in the era of interconnectedness of all things.

From the perspective of its imagery, 'Chuntai' originates from Laozi: 'The multitude is bustling and joyous, as if enjoying a grand feast, like ascending a terrace in spring.'[5] This original phrase suggests that when people indulge in prosperity and chase worldly desires, it is like climbing a high terrace to appreciate spring. Ge Fei reconfigures this classical image and explicitly names this terrace 'Chuntai.' What is visible from this terrace? Naturally, it is 'spring.'Here, 'spring' broadly signifies a vibrant life force, and it is a theme Ge Fei has consistently devoted himself to depicting: desire.

The technology company at No. 67 Chuntai Road connects the four protagonists. Shen Xinyi arrives last, yet her story is narrated first. What is her greatest desire? Throughout her life, she seeks to escape her mother and the fate of sexual violation. She was neglected by her mother in childhood and sexually assaulted in adolescence. She went from Jiangnan to study at a university in Beijing, wanting only to escape everything about her hometown. The outcome? Because her mother demanded she repay her brother's debt, she was forced to become the lover of a mysterious powerful figure (only a different form of 'being raped'), and love was shattered in the process. Can she break free from her mother? In her gazes upon several decisive moments involving her mother, she discovers that her mother is the one with the most vigorous vitality. Driven by her own desires, her mother runs frantically back and forth, ultimately empty-handed and unaware that her life is nearing its end. Amid her heartache, Shen Xinyi thereby attains her own 'Jishun' moment. She does not wish to become like her mother. Then who will she become? Can she break free from the fate of being 'raped'? Why does she recount this story to Yao Qin? If she continues working at this company, Yao Qin may come to represent her future, while Chen Kemin, who persistently harasses her, is clearly that 'rapist.'Alternatively, if she can reverse the fate of being 'raped,' Chen Kemin might entrust the company to her. Everything depends on whether her desire for 'spring' is strong enough to continue 'enjoying' atop the 'Chuntai.'

At first, Shen Xinyi's workstation at No. 67 Chuntai Road belonged to Dou Baoqing. However, when she inquired of Chen Kemin about Dou Baoqing, Chen Kemin recounted his own story instead. Dou Baoqing was originally Zhou Zhenxia's driver; after his disappearance, Chen Kemin became Zhou Zhenxia's driver, so Chen Kemin likely also occupied that workstation. Among the four characters, Chen Kemin is the one with the strongest worldly desires. At this point, it is necessary to critique the narrative language in Chen Kemin's chapter. Although the entire novel employs various perspectives and points of view, Ge Fei's overly literary language remains consistent as a whole. The other three chapters can barely conform to this style, but Chen

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Kemin's chapter feels somewhat awkward, as if Chen Kemin's 'vulgarity' is constrained by the 'beauty' of the literary language and cannot be vividly expressed. This, however, is a digression; returning to Chen Kemin's desire, it was initially nothing more than 'getting promoted and receiving a raise to marry a wealthy and beautiful woman.'The aim of 'marrying a wealthy and beautiful woman' was brought forward due to his mother's arrangements, and his wife Jingxi became the driving force in his life. Having such a beautiful companion made him even more determined to work hard and earn money. After several failed business ventures followed by a return to poverty, he finally met a benefactor in life (without whom he would not have divorced Jingxi, thus the novel states 'good is also bad'), Zhou Zhenxia. From there, he steadily rose through the ranks and salary increases to become the successor at No. 67 Chuntai Road. He was completely unable to resist the wealthy and beautiful women he encountered along the way and repeatedly cheated, leading Jingxi to despair and leave. By the time he was full of regret and began to question his own existence, that quiet glow of Jingxi had long since become unattainable. Chen Kemin's lifetime of 'unrestrained indulgence' was fully displayed on Chuntai. He was infertile, yet Zhou Zhenxia highly admired his life force and designated him as his successor, which also carries profound implications.

Dou Baoqing's lifelong desire was revenge, and after accomplishing it, like Zhou Zhenxia, he essentially became a 'retired' man. Everything he did afterward was simply waiting(just as Zhou Zhenxia did):for death. Therefore, his Jishun moment is very close to Zhou Zhenxia's, as we will discuss in detail later. His brief intimacy with Zheng Yuanchun was precisely the reason he was arrested. 'Chun' had become untouchable for him.

From the moment Zhou Zhenxia appears, he is already an old man close to death, seemingly cut off from desire. But by the fourth chapter, we unexpectedly see slight ripples on still water and smoke rising from the old house: he falls in love with his friend's widow, Yao Qin. Why? This is precisely the manifestation of his strongest 'will to live.' His entire life can be described as a Chuntai struggle between the will to live and the will to die. This powerful businessman, endowed with a melancholic temperament and sent to a temple as a child to be fostered, developed an obsessive fondness for silence and solitude. This can be seen as the imprint of the will to die upon him, to the extent that he is fundamentally incapable of maintaining a normal family life (his wife's adultery is thus not entirely unexpected). According to his own account, it was his close brother Jiang Chengze, who possessed an intense will to live, who saved him, 'He had to acknowledge that it was Jiang Chengze's fervent passion, burning like fire, that continuously warmed his cold and frail life.'[6] Without Jiang Chengze, he would have long since withdrawn from this swirling world of mortal dust. But does Jiang Chengze truly exist? Could he be another self? At the very start of this chapter, the author indicates that Zhou Zhenxia's life is 'a dream in a brick kiln,' 'a kaleidoscope awakening across different times and spaces,' and that Shen Xinyi, Chen Kemin, and Dou Baoqing might all be one and the same,Zhou Zhenxia himself. Why? The cycle of birth and death, the coming and going of spring,is this not the most ordinary scene atop the Spring Terrace?

'Chuntai'thus becomes a display platform for contemporary society's worldly desires and constraints, carrying the novel's realistic observation. 'Chuntai' is both a workplace and a life arena; the author deliberately emphasizes strengths and avoids weaknesses, not actually writing about workplace matters, but focusing on the connections and turning points in *characters' everyday relationships. What is trapped on 'Chuntai' are human desires and actions,* as well as the relationship entanglements that result from them.

## 2.2. 'Jishun': The Moment of Sudden Enlightenment as Spiritual Breakthrough

If 'Chuntai' is the secular narrative field that confines everyone, then 'Jishun'is the narrative outlet where characters break free from worldly shackles and briefly arrive at authentic existence. 'Jishun' is not a fixed physical space, but transient moments of absent-minded gaze

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scattered throughout the lives of the four protagonists; it is a neologism Ge Fei coined by drawing on concepts from existential philosophy and also serves as a spiritual narrative symbol. The novel offers a clear definition of 'Jishun' in Zhou Zhenxia's narrative passages:

It is a wonderful pause that countless philosophers have called 'Jishun,' an extraordinary exception that captivates the soul, a moment of awakening.

At this moment, one no longer worries about the future, no longer suffers from the wounds and humiliations of the past, no longer regrets or feels guilty over the faults gnawing at one's conscience. One is willing to forgive anyone and willing to forget everything. For a time, the curtain of his heart was lifted, and what was hidden behind no longer frightened him; he felt as free as a bird. Unintentional time stretched across all things.

The bright and clear 'present' allowed him to be fully there[7].

After Zhou Zhenxia retired, while laboring in the courtyard, he looked up to see wild ducks in the pond; worldly troubles instantly dissolved, granting a moment of complete inner relaxation—this is the most typical example of a 'Jishun' in the entire book.

Indeed, numerous philosophers have referred to similar moments; Heidegger calls it 'the now is,'[8] while Sartre terms it 'the for-itself moment'[9]; Additionally, Bergson's 'duration of intuition,'[10] Benjamin's 'moment of aura,'[11] Buddhist 'enlightenment in an instant,'[12] and Zhuangzi's 'sitting in oblivion' all point to the same experience of a fleeting instant[13].

Ge Fei does not confine this spiritual moment to a single character but provides Shen Xinyi, Dou Baoqing, and Chen Kemin each with exclusive 'Jishun narrative fragments,' enabling individuals from different social strata and circumstances to briefly transcend the worldly shackles of 'Chuntai,' thus making 'Jishun' a unified spiritual narrative clue running throughout the entire novel.

The completion of this 'Jishun' is essentially realized through 'The Gaze.'Shen Xinyi, Chen Kemin, Dou Baoqing, and Zhou Zhenxia hail from completely different backgrounds, circumstances, and spiritual traumas, yet each possesses distinct scenes of The Gaze and sudden enlightenment; the 'Jishun' experienced by these characters resonate with one another, collectively demonstrating that worldly suffering is universal while spiritual reconciliation is inclusive.

Shen Xinyi has long borne the repressive trauma from her family of origin; part of her Jishun is connected to the memory of gazing with her father in the mountains and countryside. The first chapter of the novel recounts a father and daughter visiting Jizhao Temple: the valley is silent and deserted, and carved on the cliff wall is, 'Since the three nights at empty Sang, no disputes are seen in the human world.' [14] The father sits quietly watching the drifting clouds, temporarily putting aside illness and life's hardships. On the way down the mountain, passing a tea garden, the father stands alone beneath a golden camphor tree, gazing at the distant mountains as worldly troubles dissolve: this is the father's gaze and moment of sudden enlightenment. Years later, Shen Xinyi reminisces on this memory; each time she revisits it, she attains inner peace, and her Jishun continually reappears within the gaze of fragmented memory.

Besides this, Shen Xinyi also gazed at her mother: before the college entrance exam, while nervously reviewing in a hotel and with her mother keeping watch overnight, she gazed at her mother asleep and untidy, perceiving her mother's true aged and exhausted appearance, finally dissolving the long-standing estrangement between mother and daughter;[15] After starting work, when returning home, she unexpectedly encountered her mother carrying chicken manure on her back, covered in dust and resembling an old man; after a prolonged gaze at her mother's rough figure, she released the resentment she harbored within; [16] At the novel's end, mother and daughter bid farewell beneath a camphor tree; aware that her mother's days were limited, she watched her mother's gradually receding back and ultimately achieved complete understanding of her mother. [17]Each occurrence of the Gaze brings forth a

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'Jishun,'allowing suppressed emotions to slowly release and achieving spiritual relaxation at the level of trauma.

Dou Baoqing, burdened with a homicide case and long imprisoned by anger and guilt, finally experiences his Jishun born from a distant gaze upon the panorama of the human world during Escorted Detention. The novel's third chapter recounts that while stuck in traffic during the escort, he gazes at length out of the car window: the loess hills, an elderly woman wrapped in a headscarf, a limping man running, the school playground, an elderly disabled man with white hair practicing walking… the faces of all these strangers unfold sequentially across his field of vision.

You gaze at the figures drifting past before your eyes, idly speculating about their thoughts and imagining their mundane daily lives. Tears quietly overflow from your eyes.

The incomprehensible world you find yourself in gradually begins to become understandable. Things in the world are not inherently that complicated. You are both an individual enduring hardship and suffering in this world, and you are all people as well. [18]

The estrangement of the second-person narrative intensifies introspection; after long observing all living beings, Dou Baoqing comprehends that everyone carries their own suffering, and finally relinquishes hatred, anger, and self-reproach, achieving reconciliation with himself and the world.

This realization was actually expressed right at the beginning of the novel through Zhou Zhenxia's The Gaze. Zhou Zhenxia is someone who habitually uses The Gaze; he also saw the disabled elderly man practicing walking in a wheelchair whom Dou Baoqing saw. His insight is very close to Dou Baoqing's later realization.

Observing the faces of strangers on the street is a habit Zhou Zhenxia has unconsciously developed over many years. Speculating, fabricating, and imagining the fates of these people do not arise from any malicious intent, but rather from a kind of compassion. In this World of mutual imitation, others are also oneself. [19]

As for Chen Kemin, he is deeply caught up in Vanity Fair, spending his days navigating interpersonal favors and utilitarian concerns; his experience of Jishun stems from two layers of gaze. The first layer is the aesthetic gaze towards Jingxi: upon first meeting, he involuntarily fixed his gaze on her for a long time, feeling a pure and gentle joy that briefly freed him from worldly calculations, which is why Jingxi was always able to control him. After he entered No. 67 Chuntai Road, Jingxi finally lost the ability to control him. To wash away his vulgarity, Zhou Zhenxia had him preside over the company's regular philosophy reading group. After encountering the philosopher Schelling's question, 'Why is there something rather than nothing? Why is it not nothing that exists?' he finally felt a slight stirring. Worldly desires temporarily recede, and a philosophical-style gaze induces spiritual awakening, a rare moment of sudden enlightenment. Later in the novel, the speech on 'Burden and Divine Grace' is mentioned, where Chen Kemin looks back on his half a lifetime of toil and, through the gaze of recollection, perceives the fragmentary happiness concealed within suffering, completing a phase of spiritual relief.

## 2.3. The Progressive Narrative Relationship between the Two

The novel, through the distinct gazes and moments of sudden enlightenment of four types of characters, relies on the 'Chuntai to Jishun' narrative chain to achieve a multi-layered thematic sublimation.

First, it reveals the common spiritual dilemmas and potential breakthroughs encountered by contemporary individuals. Whether entrepreneurs, corporate executives, low-level criminals, or urban women, all are deeply trapped in merit involution, past traumas, and interpersonal loneliness, yet all can rely on moments of quiet observation to break free from spiritual shackles,

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demonstrating that transcendence does not require fleeing the world, only a brief release of utilitarian obsession.

Second, it accomplishes spiritual empathy among people. Zhou Zhenxia observes the masses, Dou Baoqing gazes at passersby, Shen Xinyi looks back at family, and Chen Kemin questions himself; all these gazes ultimately culminate in shared compassion, dissolving barriers imposed by class and identity, and arriving at the common recognition that 'others are also oneself.'

Third, to construct a humanistic ideal of the coexistence of refined and popular culture. 'Chuntai' represents secular life and embraces all survival struggles of ordinary people; 'Jishun' signifies a transcendent spiritual realm, not dependent on religious otherworldliness, but concealed within the everyday Gaze. The integration of these two reflects Ge Fei's creative pursuit that appeals to both refined and popular tastes: not separating secular life from spiritual transcendence, seeking inner tranquility within the ordinary world, and providing a gentle Spiritual Pathway for modern individuals lost in the void of the Merit Society.

On the whole, 'Jishun' is not simply a narrative embellishment but the spiritual foundation of Ge Fei's entire narrative creation. All narrative methods such as jigsaw puzzle structures, multi-perspective narrative persons, fragmented time, and the integration of tradition and modernity ultimately serve to fully unfold the worldly constraint in 'Chuntai,' and then, through layers of gaze narrative, deduce the moment of sudden enlightenment, completing the narrative translation from the worldly impasse to existential clarity, thereby achieving a high degree of creative adaptation between narrative form and humanistic theme.

## 3. From 'Chuntai' to 'Jishun': The Narrative Path

### 3.1. The Jigsaw Puzzle Circular Structure Bears the Worldly Cycle and Instant Breakthrough

The novel abandons traditional linear chronological narrative, adopting a synchronic jigsaw puzzle plus circular closed loop dual structure to complete a panoramic narrative of the 'Chuntai' secular field. From the perspective of narrative theory, this structure aligns with Long Diyong's thematic juxtaposition narrative feature: multiple narrative clues lack strict causal connections and unfold juxtapositionally based on a unified core theme, with all sub-narratives converging on the same spatial carrier, jointly completing the overall semantic expression. [20]

First, the synchronic jigsaw puzzle structure. The novel is divided into four chapters, each narrating the life of Shen Xinyi, Chen Kemin, Dou Baoqing, and Zhou Zhenxia respectively; the four narrative clues proceed in parallel, spatially unified and converging at the technology company located at No. 67 Chuntai Road. Each of the four lives is complete and independently developed, like four pieces of a jigsaw puzzle; taken separately, each depicts hardship and struggle, but once assembled, they fully reveal the 'Chuntai dilemma' of modern life. This parallel narrative precisely corresponds to the survival condition under the Merit Society, where people appear to coexist but are in fact isolated, thereby laying the narrative groundwork for the independently developed 'Jishun' moments that follow.

Secondly, the circular narrative framework. The novel opens with Zhou Zhenxia standing on a street, observing the commuting crowd, and the prologue unfolds the worldly scene of Chuntai's hurried urban life, where everyone carries heavy thoughts; the main text recounts the destinies of four individuals; The postscript returns to the respective situations of the four characters, creating a narrative closure that echoes the beginning and the end. The circular structure dissolves the traditional linear narrative logic of 'beginning — climax — ending,' symbolizing the repetitive cycle of Chuntai's Worldly Constraint, which is difficult to fully escape, while 'Jishun' only represents incidental spiritual fissures emerging within the cyclical everyday, offering no definitive or permanent salvation and reflecting the unresolved spiritual condition of contemporary individuals.

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The synchronic jigsaw puzzle structure simultaneously unfolds four distinct types of Chuntai existential predicaments, fully presenting collective spiritual suffering and demonstrating that internal self-exhaustion and interpersonal loneliness are not isolated individual cases but common features of the era; The circular closed loop underlines the cyclical recurrence of worldly constraint, indicating the impossibility of complete escape and denying any once-and-for-all redemptive resolution. Precisely because the everyday is an endless cycle of spiritual exhaustion, the occasional emergence of Jishun in the text holds unique significance—it constitutes a brief spiritual opening within the cyclical worldly constraint; the circular narrative amplifies Chuntai's oppressive repetition, thereby highlighting the precious clarity of Jishun's fleeting moments, with both depending on the overarching narrative structure to create a narrative counterbalance.

### 3.2. The Dilemma and Sudden Enlightenment of Differentiated Narrative Person Adapting to Polyphonic Characters

Ge Fei assigns a dedicated narrative person to each chapter based on the personality, trauma, and spiritual characteristics of the four protagonists, achieving a stratified writing of the characters' inner worlds through differentiated narrative person. This differentiates the various characters''Chuntai'dilemmas and 'Jishun' realizations, constituting a multi-voiced polyphonic narrative in which multiple subjects within the novel possess independent consciousness and equal discourse. There is no overarching authorial monologue; the spiritual suffering and transcendent experiences of different characters each express themselves, forming dialogical relationships. [21]

The chapters by Shen Xinyi and Zhou Zhenxia employ third-person narrative. Shen Xinyi is introverted and reserved; wounds from her family of origin lie deeply buried in her heart, and she never actively reveals her inner world. The third-person objective and detached external perspective enables the portrayal of her suppressed, unspoken spiritual pain; Zhou Zhenxia is a retired entrepreneur who has experienced the vicissitudes of life, inherently possessing a life perspective of detached observation. The third-person narrative suits his stance of standing at life's end gazing upon humanity. The entire process of his garden observation of water achieving Jishun depends on objective depiction to evoke a serene and transcendent atmosphere.

Chen Kemin's chapters employ first-person narration. Chen Kemin is deeply entrenched in the Vanity Fair, his inner self torn between utilitarian concerns and moral guilt; the first-person narration facilitates a direct exposition of inner contradictions, through which he directly articulates his existential confusion. Amid worldly interactions, a subtle spiritual reflection emerges, corresponding to the character's faint questioning consciousness beneath his secular foundation.

Dou Baoqing's chapters innovatively use second-person narration. The estranged perspective of 'you' creates narrative distance, portraying the character's marginal and lonely condition, unaccepted by the world. The entire text unfolds in the tone of 'you' looking back on a lifetime, with passages of escorted detention overlooking all beings and giving rise to compassionate Jishun segments, which, through the introspective sense of the second person, amplify the spiritual strength of grassroots characters reconciling with the world.

The multi-perspective narrative person is the narrative tool for the stratified writing of 'Chuntai's suffering' and 'Jishun's enlightenment.'Different narrative persons correspond to different forms of suffering and modes of transcendence in characters, enabling both Chuntai's worldly predicament and Jishun's spiritual sudden enlightenment to possess individualized narrative expression, thus avoiding the flattening of collective portrait writing and achieving stratified narrative expression of worldly predicament and spiritual transcendence through polyphonic dialogue.

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### 3.3. Fragmented Memory and Gaze Narrative as the Medium for Sudden Enlightenment

The novel's core narrative scenes generating Jishun are divided into two categories: one is fragmented rural memory, and the other is prolonged gaze towards all worldly things; both are repeatedly interwoven within the Chuntai main storyline through nonlinear time narrative. Shen Xinyi attains peace and forgiveness by recalling past temple events and gazing at her mother; Dou Baoqing dissolves hatred and gains understanding of the world through prolonged gazing out the car window during escorted detention; Zhou Zhenxia reaches clarity and resists fear of death by gazing in the courtyard after labor; Chen Kemin reflects on his life and produces moments of insight by questioning his faint sense of existence. Ge Fei deliberately elaborates extensive detailed descriptions of The Gaze, wherein characters temporarily set aside workplace utilitarian concerns and direct their attention to nature, all living beings, and past memories; the narrative focus shifts from immediate life to a life landscape beyond utilitarian calculation. This pause represents the narrative transition from 'Chuntai' to 'Jishun,' thereby providing narrative space for this form of spiritual sudden enlightenment.

### 3.4. The Storytelling Style and Metafiction Jointly Construct the Presentation of the Secular World and the Sublimation of Philosophical Thought

The storytelling style involves the Narrator speaking directly to the reader, indicating that a story is being told, while metafictional techniques operate similarly by having the Narrator directly engage in dialogue with the reader, revealing that this novel is a work of fiction currently being created. *Ascending the Spring Terrace* begins on the second page with the line, That said, we still need to clarify approximately when the story takes place, thus adopting a dialogical stance toward the reader, which is continued throughout subsequent chapters. What role does this dialogical stance play in the narrative? Chen Pingyuan has pointed out that since the Song and Yuan dynasties, the storytelling style has treated an imagined audience as the dialogue partner, using straightforward communication to bridge the gap between the text and ordinary readers, adeptly depicting everyday urban life and phenomena of all beings[22]. *Ascending the Spring Terrace* inherits the narrative feature of storytelling novels that 'face the audience,' meticulously depicting human emotions through scenes of daily life, character dialogues, and trivial everyday matters, reducing the obscurity of avant-garde narrative, and meeting the realistic writing needs of the phenomena of all beings in 'Chuntai.'

On the other hand, Pu Andy further points out that the storytelling style narrative is actually a rhetorical technique aimed at creating an artistic illusion, making the audience feel as if they are watching the story unfold on stage, thus diverting the reader's attention from vivid, lifelike detail imitation to a broader contemplation of life's meaning. [23] Patricia Waugh's metafiction theory (translated as 'postmodern novel' in Taiwan) expresses a similar view, holding that metafictional techniques fulfill a speculative function by revealing the text's fictitiousness and guiding readers to move beyond the story's surface to reflect on the existential propositions underlying the narrative. [24] This is especially evident in the chapter on Dou Baoqing, as it employs second-person narration and is a text within the text (Dou Baoqing's story comes from an interview transcript by a female journalist). When the narrative advances to the section on Jishun's sudden enlightenment, the narrative perspective shifts to the philosophical level, using the character's contemplation and quiet observation of the scenery to transcend the hatred-laden predicament and to question the essence of existence, suffering, and reconciliation.

Overall, the two dialogues sharing a common origin but deployed differently form a clear chain of meaning: the dialogue directed at the reader in traditional storytelling unfolds the bustling 'Chuntai' worldly constraint, thereby establishing the narrative base of realistic criticism; Metafictional techniques intervene in the text at the moment of Jishun's sudden enlightenment, dissolving the obscurity of realistic narration and elevating spiritual reflection to the

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ontological dimension. Although both take the external form of direct dialogue between the narrator and the reader, their internal functions differ one depicts the worldly, the other meditates on transcendence; arranged sequentially and mutually reinforcing, they jointly construct a narrative trajectory from mundane representation to spiritual clarity, realizing a two-way integration of realistic writing and existential philosophical reflection.

## 4. The Creative Value of Narrative Creation and Its Enlightenment for Contemporary Writing

This complete narrative creation, centered on Chuntai's realistic narration and Jishun's spiritual connotation, represents a hallmark breakthrough in Ge Fei's mature creative stage. It stands apart from both his earlier purely maze-like avant-garde experiments and the historical narration of the *Jiangnan Trilogy,* offering a creative model that contemporary long-form fiction and creative writing can draw upon.

### 4.1. The Classical Value within Ge Fei's Individual Creative Context

In Ge Fei's early years, his avant-garde writing focused on pure experimentation with form; the narrative labyrinth served abstract reflections on human nature, with relatively limited realistic texture; The mid-period *Jiangnan Trilogy* integrated traditional narrative, relying on a century of history to depict human fate; *Ascending the Spring Terrace* closely unites form and content to accomplish a realistic portrayal of modern everyday life, employing tailored narration to embody the spiritual symptoms of ordinary contemporary people, becoming a classic work within his synthesis of technique and philosophy. The work breaks through the barriers between avant-garde narrative and realistic writing, precisely serving contemporary realistic criticism and humanistic reflection, fulfilling the creative ideal of 'meaning assigned by form and expression given to reality.'

### 4.2. Practical Implications for Creative Writing in Contemporary Novels

First, narrative forms reject meaningless flashy techniques and insist on content-customized adaptation. In creative writing, narrative creation should serve the core theme of the text, matching corresponding structures and perspectives according to the realistic dilemmas and character traits portrayed, avoiding the blind accumulation of avant-garde techniques. *Ascending the Spring Terrace* demonstrates that complex narratives such as jigsaw puzzles and multi-perspective narrative persons can naturally fulfill expressive functions as long as they conform to the contemporary needs for collective portrait writing.

Second, realize a bidirectional integration of traditional narrative resources and modern techniques. Traditional narrative means such as local storytelling and the chronicle narrative can alleviate the obscurity of avant-garde literature, while Western modern narrative techniques such as multi-perspective narrative person, jigsaw structure, and metafiction can enhance the text's spiritual reflection depth. Their integration can balance popular reading with spiritual reflection, satisfying both mass reading demands and elite humanistic thinking.

Third, establish a dual-layer narrative structure of 'Predicament – Sudden enlightenment.'When writing contemporary realistic subject matter, one can construct the worldly predicament as the narrative base and introduce the narrative image of brief spiritual transcendence as textual sublimation, thereby preserving humanistic compassion while critiquing the era's maladies, avoiding the textual oppression caused by mere criticism, and achieving a unity of warmth and depth in realistic writing.

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## 5. Conclusion

*Ascending the Spring Terrace* constructs a complete narrative thread through ‘Chuntai' and ‘Jishun,' relying on an integrated set of narrative creation techniques including a circular jigsaw puzzle structure, multi-perspective narrative person, storytelling, and metafiction, accomplishing narrative closure from the depiction of worldly masses to existential sudden enlightenment and sublimation. ‘Chuntai’ embodies contemporary realistic writing themes such as merit involution, interpersonal isolation, and value nihilism, constituting the realistic narrative base of the entire novel; ‘Jishun,’ as a spiritual pause dispersed within the characters’ lives, serves as the spiritual outlet underpinning narrative creation. All narrative means designed in the novel are closely aligned with these two narrative cores.

Compared with Ge Fei’s earlier works, this novel actualizes the practical realization of avant-garde narrative, forging a creative pathway that employs tailored narration to bear reflection on the era, thereby addressing two creative shortcomings of avant-garde literature: detachment from reality and the monotony of techniques in realistic subject matter. This article conducts a close reading focusing exclusively on the narrative adaptation logic of ‘Chuntai to Jishun.' It does not sufficiently address the novel’s linguistic rhetoric or sensory narrative micro-details. Future research may combine narrative practices of similar domestic and international authors to further develop a comparative study of the narrative creation in this work. Overall, the narrative creation system from ‘Chuntai' to 'Jishun' offers a mature and exemplary writing model for how contemporary long-form novels can balance narrative innovation with realistic portrayal.

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