

Ai Wei: Ningbo Is Exactly One of My Hometowns

On November 6, 2020, Mr. AI Wei, Chairman of the Zhejiang Writers Association, attended Tianyi Pavilion Forum, the main forum of the Sixth Zhejiang Book Fair and delivered a hugely popular keynote speech titled *In Heaven, on Earth: Reading and Living*. Based on his 20-year stay in Ningbo, Mr. AI shared his impression and understanding of the city with great affection and philosophical remarks.

In Heaven, on Earth: Reading and Living

Today's theme of this forum is reading, but as a novelist starting off in Ningbo, I want to talk about my relations with this city first.

I came to Ningbo in 1988 after my college study and since then had been living here for over 20 years. It is fair to say that the most wonderful time in my life was spent in Ningbo. Today, while meeting literary and other friends, they are all used to regarding me as Ningbonese. As usual, I smilingly admit it without any explanation, because in my mind, Ningbo is exactly one of my hometowns.

Till now, I have already written 6 novels and a couple of collections of novellas and short stories, in which a southern city called Yong City is consistently made up. This Chinese character of Yong means forever. Most of my stories happened in Yong City, but readers can definitely imagine it as Ningbo. Actually, this "Yong" thus can be understood as another Chinese character, representing the abbreviation of Ningbo which has the same pronunciation but different morphological form in Chinese. I portrayed places such as Sanjiangkou (Convergent region of Yong River, Yao River and Fenghua River), city moats, Fayuan Alley, Heyi Avenue and Gulou (Drum Tower), as well as the climate, produce, culture and customs of Ningbo. To this beautiful city, I am so thankful for offering me a constant source of imagination.

Here in this reading-themed forum, I would like to say that for a writer like me, Ningbo herself is a thick book worth reading, appreciating and thinking.

Therefore, I would like to talk about the culture and people of this city as far as I understand.

In my feeling, Ningbo in Chinese history has always been a civil society whose cultural ideology is civicism. Entrepreneurship is her remarkable feature. In general, Ningbonese seek cost-effec-



tiveness, quite hard-working, economical and keen on doing business. Amongst the reasons, the very first certainly goes to the geographic position of Ningbo, as she faces the vast and endless ocean. In ancient times, the ocean seemed to be a huge obstacle for humans to expand their living space, but humans are always curious and adventurous. Therefore, to us humans, the ocean can be a way out or no way, embracing high risks as well as vast possibilities. Oceans are always closely related to commerce.

Commerce itself which embraces greater inclusivity but dismisses exclusivity is fluid and open, henceforth in need of interaction and compromise. In this process, a multicultural environment came into shape in Ningbo. As a port city, Ningbo has kept in touch with the outside world since the Yuan Dynasty

(1271-1368). In modern times, Ningbo even turns to play a leading role.

Ningbo is mild and quiet. I think historical events have exerted very limited impacts on Ningbonese, but WANG Yang-ming's scholarship may have left a spiritual legacy to Ningbo which perhaps exerts impacts upon the personality and thinking mode of Ningbonese. I would like to call it "a spiritual event" for Ningbonese, as Ningbonese have more or less benefited from it.

As a speciality of Ningbo, tangyuan (a Chinese dessert made from glutinous rice flour) perfectly matches the cultural personality of Ningbonese, i.e., being enthusiastic, honest, inclusive, open, flexible and most important of all, benevolent. First of all, the flavor of tangyuan is exactly like the enjoyable smell of civil society. Second, the commercial person-

ality of Ningbonese has never been anti-traditional. Instead, Ningbonese attach great importance to education, honouring civilisation, tradition and "Chinese characters".

Technicism and respect for rules — the basis of commercial civilisation — are not only the charm of Ningbo city but also its essential personalities different from other cities.

All the above are my reflection upon reading the city of Ningbo, on the basis of which I built up a fictional world about her.

In the following part I would like to address the meaning of fiction to a city.

However, despite some regrets, Ningbo still maintains much of its own personality; Tianyi Pavilion Library, Drum Tower, Tang Tower (i.e., Tianning Temple Tower) and the church at Sanjiangkou are still retained.

In the new and enormous concrete jungle, her residents demand poetic living conditions. Her history needs to be preserved, and in the meanwhile, a new history recorded. I think fiction can create common poetic imaginations of this city which can be deemed an effective way to resist the concrete jungle.

Nowadays, I already left Ningbo, but my fictional world remains in Ningbo and I am still fictionalising Ningbo. In my new book, *A Brief History of Women*, you will find a lot of Ningbo elements. What I wrote is a story about Ningbo.

Why do we feel warm and comforted while listening to stories? It is because we can learn life experience of other people from the stories. Every one of us is alone. It is actually hard for people to communicate with each other; instead, misunderstanding is a common situation. Nowadays, we watch other persons' lives through fictions and stories, allowing us to detect that there is another person in the world having life experience and issues quite similar with ours.

Yes, this is the very power of literature as well as the very power of reading.

-- extract from *AI Wei's speech in Tianyi Pavilion Forum, November 6, 2020*

公益信息

计划停电预告 12月07日 星期一

海曙区 城综集士港一带、陈家漕苑配电室、集士港人民政府、东欣(8:30-15:30),

石化加油 5310300024、街道路灯 5318000048、捷时进出口 5318000441、宁将农业 5002250724、中原机床 5310603030、绿雅日用品 5318033752、汇贸印务 5318009516、栎社幼儿园 5310603900、宏图印刷 5310603899、宁

波元吉 5002191544、忻杰燃气 5310111110、忻杰燃气 5310300645、豪门装饰 5310111530、永博铜业 5318061531 (8:00-11:00)、树桥宝丰4号公变(8:40-15:40)

光溪2号公变、光溪9号公变、广安6号公变、鄞江镇人民政府(11:00-14:00)

12月08日 星期二

海曙区 南外环路灯箱变(9:00-17:00)、冯家小学5320019245、冯家桥东公、冯家村1#公、冯家8号箱变(公)(8:30-16:30),

大桥柴家6号公变(8:00-12:00)

江北区 慈城镇乍山焊割厂、新乐斯、鑫华彩钢厂、江北振邦(8:30-16:30)

12月11日 星期五

海曙区 德天服饰、上水研5号公变、洞桥王寅塑料、上水研桥头王2号公变(8:30-16:30)

增加:

11月30日 星期一

海曙区 段塘东路箱变、旧村改造

5002175539(9:00-17:00)

12月01日 星期二

海曙区 雄镇1号、2号、3号、4号公变(9:00-17:00)

12月04日 星期五

海曙区 百仕达体育用品、鱼山7号公变、安鑫家居、百立得贸易、鱼山双桂3号公变、鱼山双桂9号公变(8:30-16:30)

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