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Introduction

In 1949, the Chinese author Shen Congwen drank kerosene, slit his wrists and cut his throat. He survived the attempted suicide, but his fiction did not. In this time, authors and artists were scrutinized for their bourgeois works of art that went against principles of the rising communist party. Shen Congwen’s writings on rural countrymen were criticized for having the perceived effect of degrading the society’s moral compass. As a result of the tense and ever-changing environment in China, the prolific author was unable to preserve in writing the regional cultures he saw throughout his travels. Shen championed the use of common language in Chinese literature, but his talent was wasted when harsh criticisms drove him to silence. In the later part of his career, Shen’s writing was confined to personal letters and research documents for museums. This time in his life was full of scrutiny, censorship and seclusion.

Despite the large number of works Shen completed, only forty have been translated into English. In an attempt to contribute to the collection of translations, I will present in this thesis three chapters of Congwen’s Autobiography: The Place I Grew Up, My Family, and A Lesson on the Xinhai Revolution—chapters one, two and four¹. With the completion of this thesis, we will be one step closer to having a collection of works that will properly introduce Shen to an audience larger than the niche group of the Sinophile

¹ Chapters three and five appear in the English translation of Shen’s other autobiographical work, Recollections of West Hunan.
Following the translation will be an analysis of the events that have left Shen Congwen understudied and largely unknown outside of Modern Chinese literary circles. Taking into consideration the political climate of the time period, I will analyze the conflict between minority and majority populations in order to get a better understanding of Shen’s life post-1948. To do so, I will examine Shen’s relationship to the Communist Party and how his life and work was restricted due to criticism. The result will provide deeper insight into Shen’s decision to cease publishing new fiction in the later part of his life.

While this combination of translation and analysis is seemingly disconnected, it is not. The analysis of Shen’s later life provides motivation for the translation of his work. His work has not received due attention in a global literary context; therefore I aim to bring attention to this in my thesis by filling a small gap in translation and shining a light on the oppression he faced.
The Place I Grew Up

As I pick up my pen, I want to write a bit about where I spent the first twenty years of my life. I want to write about the people I saw, the sounds I heard, and the scents I smelled in a place where I truly learned about life. I must mention that I grew up in a small remote border town in rural central China. If I am being honest, I am unsure of how to begin. Maybe I ought to begin with what the average townsperson says: “This is a weird place!”

After two-hundred years of Manchu-ruled China\(^1\) and the suppression and killing of the Miao ethnic group\(^2\), a unit of soldiers was sent to be housed within the walls of a fortification that would later become home to many residents. The history of this strange place has been written down on the pages of the official document, *Miao Fangbei Lan*\(^3\), but that story is merely part of a boring government document. I would like to include my own version, to introduce here a simple portrayal of this small town. Although this is only a rough sketch, the scene will stand out as if you can touch it.

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If an astute person searches an old map, he will discover a small dot known as “Zhengan” in the corners of Guizhou, Sichuan and Hunan. This dot, like the others on the map, represents a city, and in this city there was a population of three to five thousand. This city did not have the same concerns as other cities that relied on infrastructure, population and economic activity.

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\(^1\) The Qing Dynasty was ruled by the Jurchen people of Manchuria from 1644 to 1911.
\(^2\) An ethnic minority in China that were known for rebelling against the Ming and Qing dynasties.
\(^3\) *Translation*: Manual for Defense Against the Miao People
because it stood alone. This city was at the center of a collection of large, coarse and strong stones that spread out in all directions. Surrounding this remote border city were approximately one thousand pillboxes and more than three hundred barracks. Each pillbox was made up of large stone piles, positioned on the tops of hills along the ridge of a mountain. The barracks were organized along a post road to maintain order. One hundred and seventy years ago, this layout followed a precise plan to maintain an appropriate distance between pillboxes and barracks and to surround several hundred square li of land\(^4\). This ordered distribution of pillboxes and barracks solved the problem of the Miao “stirring up trouble” and “rebelling” in this corner of China. The Miao rebelled against two centuries of Manchurian tyranny\(^5\). Every government road and pillbox was dyed red with blood. Now, after this has all come to an end, most of the pillboxes have been destroyed, the barracks have been converted to houses, and most of the people have assimilated into the Qing dynasty. As the sun sets, this city stands alone, surrounded by tall mountains overlooking those pillboxes near and far that have been destroyed. Now, think back to that time, when the horns, drums, and fire carried messages of urgent warning. Today, this place is the center of a new type of military movement: the rapid repositioning and progression of everything. This progression is the elimination of old ways.

In the past, merchants and tourists had the opportunity to travel up the clear Yuan River all year round. It should have been obvious to those considering different routes to Sichuan and Guizhou that “Zhengan” was the most reliable and comfortable place for them to settle their belongings. In “Zhengan,” the average person had not heard of bandits, and the bandit-soldiers were pure and good as ordinary people. People did not insult or disturb others. The peasants were courageous and content with their place, and everyone respected the supernatural and obeyed the laws. Merchants walked alone to the village deep in the mountains, bringing a medley of goods to

\(^4\) One li is equal to approximately 0.31 miles.
\(^5\) The Miao people resisted the Qing dynasty’s policy of forced assimilation.
do business with the residents in hopes of making a profit. The hierarchy of this place was first the gods, next the government, and then the village chief that served the gods. Each family participated in the military. Those in the barracks received a bit of money and a portion of rice each month. They could work the public field, which was confiscated by the old government 200 years ago and later passed on to the current government.

Each year in the city, the people, according to their family’s means, donated money. They went to the emperor’s temple to kill a pig, slaughter a sheep, dismember a dog, and offer chicken and fish to seek the gods’ blessing of crops, animals, children, as well as to pray to ward off the misfortune of illness and mourning in marriage. Everyone was happy to pay the taxes assigned to them by the authorities. They all voluntarily contributed money to the temple official and participated in witchcraft. All of these matters maintained a kind of simple and honest custom, complying with ancient ceremonial rituals.

As the year ended, two seasons of farm work began. The elderly collected money from every household in order to put on a puppet show for the ancestors. When the drought came, they prayed for rain by having the children carry a live dog with willow branches, tied into a grass dragon, and they walked all around. In the spring, there was often an official wearing yellow going around singing farming songs. As the year came to a close, residents decorated red clothing for the devilish gods and made thunderous sounds by beating large drums in their living rooms. Miao shamans wore blood-red clothes and blew silver-engraved cow horns while holding copper knives and enthusiastically singing and dancing to pleasure the gods.

Many of the town’s residents were sent to become garrison farm-soldiers. In addition to the residents, there were merchants from Jiangxi selling cloth, from Fujian selling cigarettes, and from Guangdong selling medicine. Intellectuals were the minority, and military officers were the majority. The combination of politics and marriage gave rise to an upper class. This class used a
type of conservative and steady policy to maintain a long period of political administration and held a large portion of privately owned land. This class’ origin was due to the past days of the garrison farm-soldiers.

In the hillside, tung and China fir trees grew, the mine was filled with cinnabar and mercury, the pine forest had mushrooms growing in it, and the cave had an abundance of saltpeter. The whole town and countryside were filled with brave and loyal men and gentle and hardy women that made ideal soldiers and brides. Exceptionally tasty dishes come from the military kitchens, and passionate and elegant singing voices come from those chopping firewood.

There was a great river close to forty li southeast of this region. Alongside its fertile and open shores were lots of rice and tangelo. Twenty li northwest from the river was a plateau near the Miao countryside. There were many mountains of varying size that overlapped. Large China fir trees with threatening dark green color that lasted all year round stretched out every which way. A brook from a high mountain flowed into a stream that collected the flows from many other mountains. A forest of China fir trees ran along the shores of a brook that rushed speedily along. The peasants all wove bamboo along the shore, binding it into a water wheel. The water wheel was used to run water through the irrigation channel to irrigate the rice fields at high elevations. The river water was clear all year around and had many fish, including Chinese perch, carp and crucian carp. These fish were all bigger than the sole of a man’s foot. On the riverbank were women with tall bodies, white faces and inviting smiles. The brook flowed around the north wall of “Zhengan” and flows into the Chen River one-hundred-and-seventy Li back, leading to Dongting Lake.

This place is now known as Fenghuang. The name was changed after the events of the Xinhai Revolution and the fall of the Qing dynasty. West Hunanese commanders along the Chen Yuan Road were all permanently stationed here. The region’s residents numbered no more than
five-or-six thousand; however, the soldiers numbered seven thousand as the abolishment of the Green Standard Army, the only remaining Chinese military system, had not yet reached this place.

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It was in this small town that I grew into who I am. At age fifteen I left for two-and-a-half years before returning one last time. Since then I have not entered through the city gate, but I know the place well. Many people now live in this place, but I remember it for what it used to be.
My Family

During the time of the Xianfeng and Tongzhi emperors—a time of great importance in early modern Chinese history—each of the four great officials held equal positions in command of the Hunan army. The army was commanded to fight in one place after another by a young military official, who made a living selling horse fodder, the famous Tian Xinshu. In around 20 years, a total of four people received the rank of Manchurian-Qing local commander. Among them was my grandfather, Shen Hongfu. When the young officer was approximately twenty-two years old, he guarded Zhaotong, Yunnan for a time. Two years into Tongzhi’s reign, when he was 26 years old and the governor-general of Guizhou, he was forced to return home due to injury. He passed away soon after returning home. When he died, he left behind honor and an estate that gave his heir a superior position in the region. Shen Hongfu had no male offspring, so my grandmother went to live in the countryside with my great-uncle, Shen Hongfang. He had married a Miao girl, who gave birth to two sons. The second son was given up for adoption to my grandmother. According to local custom, Miao parents and children lacked social status and could not participate in civil and military imperial examinations. As a result, my uncle’s Miao wife was married off far away. A grave was made for her in the countryside, even though she was still alive. According to my bloodline, I am also a part of the Miao ethnic group. When I was four or five years old, I returned to the Huangluo

1 The Xianfeng emperor reigned from 1850 to 1861, and the Tongzhi emperor reigned from 1861 to 1875.
2 The four great officials were Zeng Guofan, Zuo Zongtang, Hu Linyi, and Peng Yulin.
Zhai countryside to go to the grave and knock excessively on the front of it. My father explained this history to me in 1922, while I was in Yuanling in the process of leaving West Hunan.

The future generations of soldiers had pride because of the glory of the local army. Two years after my father was born, he was adopted by a childless relative when arriving within the city. My grandmother had hoped that my father would again bring a general into the family. My family never lost hope. My father possessed a military appearance, in both physique and his manner. My father was large, bold, strong and straightforward, all the natural qualities one needs to become a general. Skill and knowledge were also necessary to become a general; therefore, when my father was about ten years old, his family hired a military instructor and private tutor for him. But my grandmother died before my father had a chance to become famous. In 1900, during the Boxer Rebellion, the Eight-Nation Alliance entered the capital and took over the Dagu forts. Commander Luo, who was guarding Dagu, killed himself at his post. My father was by his side as his assistant general. It is said that this conflict destroyed the greater part of my family’s estate because our valuables were often by his side. They were completely lost. After the fighting had gotten out of hand, and Beijing had been lost, my father returned home. Three years later, my grandmother died. I was four months old at the time, only having just been born. Two sisters and one brother were born before me. Without the Boxer Rebellion, my father may not have returned home, and I may not have been born. On the matter of my grandmother’s death, I seem to have a vague memory of being carried around in a crowd of white. Soon after, I was placed on a table. Ten years
passed after my grandmother died, and not one other person in my family passed away. If this was not a dream that I had after I was two years old, then this scene could only be a memory.

I was the fourth of nine siblings. Some of my sisters died at a young age, and so there are only five now. If I were to count my siblings now, I am the third.

My mother’s family name was Huang, and when she was young she lived with her brother in an army barrack. She saw many things, and it seems that she studied more books than my father. My grandfather, Huang Heqing, was the first local tribute scholar and observed the rituals of the academy of classical learning. It is said that he was the only local intellectual. Because of her father, my mother could read a little bit, she knew about medicine and could take photographs. My mother’s brother was a person with a modern mind. He managed the county’s first photo studio and post office. My mother took on her children’s initial education; it was, as a whole, modest, sharp-witted and full of courage and common sense. Most of my education came from my mother. She taught me to read, to recognize drug names, and also to think before making decisions (men usually think after they have made their decisions). My mother influenced my manners more than my father.

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3 Passed local imperial examination and could enter the capital for study.
A Lesson on the Xinhai Revolution

One day, my cousin came down from the village. I was very happy to see him, and I asked him about the waterwheels and grain mills. I asked him about many things that I was familiar with in the countryside where I lived. This day, he acted coldly and did not pay attention to me. I did not understand why he acted this way. He spent all day buying white ribbon. He purchased a lot, and expected my uncle to buy more. His family put aside two dan\(^1\) of white ribbon, but he said it was not enough. My cousin discussed many things with my father. I overheard them, but did not understand what was being said. On that day, a group of children that included some of my brothers and sisters left for the Miao countryside. They were sent with my cousin to where ten thousand people took refuge during the various dynasties. My father immediately began to send them off, following my cousin’s plan. My mother had finally conceded that it would be a safe. Very soon after, four of my family members departed up the road with my cousin. When my cousin went, he was carrying one dan of white ribbon on his shoulders. A stranger was also carrying one dan of white ribbon. I suspected that they were going to set up a shop. Why else would you need so much ribbon?

As my party was leaving, my father asked my cousin, “Will you be coming tomorrow night?” My cousin’s response was, “I will not. I have many things to do! How would I finish?”

\(^1\) A dan is load carried with a shoulder pole.
I knew what my cousin had to do. Surely he would bring me a pair of colorful roosters. He had previously promised this to me, and since I had been promised, I interrupted them saying, “You will come! Don’t forget what you promised me!”

“I won’t forget. And if I do, I will bring something even better.”

When my siblings hid in the Miao countryside, my father asked me, “How are you? Are you going to the Miao countryside, or are you going stay in the town with me?”

I asked, “Which place will be more exciting?”

He responded, “There’s no need to ask that, I know what you mean. If you want to enjoy the excitement of the town, you should not go to the Miao countryside.”

I heard what my father said about the town and I was happy. I remember the next evening clearly. I saw the red face of my father’s younger brother, who was sharpening a knife by a light. This was all very interesting to me. I then went to the study, where my father was cleaning a gun. There were usually many people in my home, and suddenly it seemed so empty. I typically wasn’t very courageous, and I didn’t usually go out after dark. This day was not afraid. I did not understand what was coming, but I knew was important and new things would happen soon. I walked around the house and stayed close to my father, listening to what he and the others had to say. Their faces were unusually agitated, and they spoke with a stammer. My family had two wide-style shotguns. A few of the men examined the guns, while the others smiled. I did not know why they were smiling, but I smiled back at them.

I saw them working under the sunlight and talking under the lamplight for days. My tall uncle ran out of the house for some time and returned speaking quietly. I
pretended not to notice, but I counted the number of times he left. One day, he left a total
of nine times. The last time he went out, I followed closely behind him, out of the house
and to the porch. I said to him, “Uncle, are you preparing to fight a battle?”

He responded, “Ah! You little thing, get outta here or else the cats will eat you!
Now, go to bed.”

I acted like a sissy and dragged my feet up the stairs. I leaned my head on my
mother’s lap and fell asleep instantly.

This night inside the town walls, it was unclear what had happened outside. By
the time I woke up, my whole family had already been up for a while. All of their faces
were white, and they were whispering about something. Everyone asked me what I had
heard from the previous night. I responded by simply shaking my head. My family
seemed smaller, so I took a moment to count them. I did not see all of my uncles. My
father was alone, sitting in his chair with his head down, silent. I remembered the
preparations for the deadly fight, and I asked him, “Father, father, did you fight?”

“You small thing” he replied, “do not make such remarks. We were defeated last
night! The army of men and horses were destroyed. More than a thousand were killed!”

While we were talking, my tall uncle came back into the house. He was sweaty
and stammering, saying, “The enemy has already claimed four hundred and ten heads, a
long string of ears, seven ladders, some knives and some other things. They killed more
at the river, and burned seven houses. Now they are not letting anyone onto the wall to
see.”
My father heard what my uncle said about the four hundred heads and told him, “Leng Han is not inside. Quickly, go see if he is among them. Go, go.”

Leng Han is my purple-faced cousin. He was fighting the night before, and I was concerned when I learned this. Hearing about heads and the string of ears reminded me of when my father told tales of killing long-haired rebels. This was both exciting and scary. My excitement came from the uncertainty about what needed to be done. I washed my face, and we walked outside. The weather was cloudy, and it looked like it might rain.

Everything was very dark. At this time I was usually able to hear the voices of the baker and other peddlers, but now everything was still, as if everyone was gone celebrating the new year. I wanted a chance to see the aftermath. What I thought about most was that I had never touched a severed head. My opportunity would come soon.

My uncle returned and spoke with my father. We learned that Leng Han’s head was not taken and that many people were at the Yamen. Also, the shops had been ordered to open, and Old Master Zhang—who was secretly connected to the local KMT—came into the street to see all the commotion. My father then asked me, “Little thing, are you afraid of human heads? If not, you may come out with me.”

“I’m not afraid” I replied, “I want to see!”

We went to the magistrate’s office, and I saw a pile of filthy, blood-stained heads. There were also heads all over the office’s outer abatis and gate. Some support ladders were retrieved from the town's border to be used as lumber (new bamboo was chopped in the hills and the many pieces were strung together). More heads hung from these ladders.

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2 Government Office
3 The KMT, or Kuomintang, were a nationalist force that fought to overthrow the Qing Dynasty.
It was a bizarre sight. There were many things I did not understand. Why had these people been killed? Why had their heads been cut off? Soon after, I discovered the ears. A string of things so odd I will never see anything like it again all my life!

My uncle asked me, “Small thing, are you afraid?” I was proud of my response; I said I was not afraid. I had always smiled at the old stories that said, “Heads are like mountains, with blood flowing like rivers.” When I went to the opera, it was said “great armies fight to the death.” At the opera I saw a wooden head on a red plate that Qing Qiong cried over as he carried around. But, I had never seen a real head. This was my first time. A real head that had been chopped off. And a large pile of bloody heads, cut from human necks. I wasn’t afraid at all, but I did not understand why these people would let their heads be chopped off. I was suspicious, and I was certain there must have been a mistake.

Why were the heads cut off? What was the reason these people were beheaded? I had many questions. I asked my father when we returned home, but he only replied, “The rebellion was defeated.” I was not satisfied by his answer. I had always thought my father was a great man, who knew everything on earth and in heaven. So I was surprised when he also did not understand what had happened. I felt strange. I understood now these things had always been a part of the world, but why? No one is capable of satisfying a child’s curiosity.

An old townsman knew the source of the revolution. It was to counter oppression and fight the government officials that accompanied foreign merchants along the Chen

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A legendary character.
Yuan Yongjing supply road. Before taking over the town, the officials met with the rebels. However, due to the army’s disrespectful attitude, the revolution broke out.

The revolution failed, and the slaughter was just beginning. After the town guards arranged their defense, a separate force was sent to capture rebels in the Miao countryside. These forces asked few questions before taking the arrested outside to be killed. Killings usually took place outside the West gate, but since the rebellion came from the North gate, the executions now took place on the riverbank nearer to the North. In the beginning, about one hundred people were killed each day. When fifty were killed, there would be twenty-one soldiers to perform the execution and around thirty prisoners waiting to die. Sometimes those waiting had their clothes left on and were not bound by rope. They were simply herded together and executed quickly. They would often stand a little ways away from the killings as they waited their turn. This led the soldiers to believe they were spectators so they were forgotten. The ones that died came mostly from the Miao countryside. They were confused and did not understand what was going to happen. Some only just began to understand the situation as they were forced to kneel down on the river bank. They would start to panic, wailing wildly and running around. The executioners then had to rush after them to chop them down.

This thoughtless massacre lasted about one month, then slowed down gradually. There was no time to bury the bodies, but the soldiers did not worry about them rotting, probably because the weather became severely cold. The four or five hundred corpses left on the riverbank also served as a warning to the public.
Later there were too many people in captivity, and it seemed as if all the prisoners would be beheaded. The Yamen reported this event in their official documents as a “Miao Rebellion,” meaning they had destroy every revolutionary in the region, in accordance with the rules. There were many prisoners who were too simple minded to save themselves. The executioners themselves were disturbed by all of the killings. A few of the local gentry conspired with people outside the town to revolt, though the government had no knowledge of the outsiders’ presence. The gentry then requested a limit be set on the killings, and that a process be implemented for selecting those to be executed—who should be killed, and who should be released. One-to-two hundred were arrested every day, almost all of them peasants. Not all could be released, but not all of them could be executed either. To solve this problem, they created a procedure to determine who would be executed. This responsibility of choosing the executed was entrusted to the Heavenly Emperor of the local people. Each prisoner was led one by one into the temple of the Heavenly Emperor where they would toss two bamboo ropes. For a prisoner to be released either one or both ropes need to land up. But, if both ropes landed down, then it was determined that the prisoner would be killed. The prisoner’s life depended on this game of chance. Those who were to die walked to the left, and those who would live walked to the right. A man who was given two chances out of three to gamble for his life did not say a word when he lost. He simply lowered his head and walked to the left.

At that time I had the freedom to go outside by myself. I would often climb on top of the town walls to see the beheadings on the river. On days that I would be too late to
see the beheadings, the other children and I would compete to see who had the better eyesight. We would try to count the number of bodies on our fingers. When we weren’t competing, I would follow the prisoners to the temple to watch them throw the bamboo ropes. I watched how the prisoners would close their eyes and exert themselves when they threw the ropes. Some did not dare open their eyes, even when they made a throw that would give them their freedom. Those who were supposed to die seemed to think of their livestock. Their face expressed dissatisfaction with the Heavenly Emperor. This moment had an impact on my life, and I will forever remember it. I loathed this abuse of power.

When I understood this, I began to understand “life.”

In the third month of the second year of this revolution, white banners with the word “Han” hung from every place. The officers considered this to be a sign of surrender. The soldiers formed a line to patrol the streets. The foreign commander, circuit administrator and county magistrate expressed an intent to leave. Then, all of the local gentry brought forth democratic elections within the general assembly. As a result, my father immediately became an important person in the area.

My siblings all returned from the Miao countryside that season, and many soldiers often came to my house. The courtyard was full of people. One day, in one group of strangers, I saw my purple-faced cousin. He had not been killed. On his back was a broadsword with a brilliant red sheath that was decorated with two golden dragons. He was speaking with others about the night when he threw himself near the town wall and
climbed it. I quietly told him, “I saw prisoners tossing ropes near the temple of the Heavenly Emperor. I wasn’t sure if you were there. I couldn’t see clearly.”

He responded, “Their hands were too short, so they couldn’t catch me. Now I ought to fight them.”

On that day, the whole town went to a meeting at the temple of the Heavenly Emperor. My father was on stage giving a speech when my cousin climbed on stage to strike the country magistrate on the mouth. Everyone began laughing, which brought the speeches to an end.

My family was changed by the revolution. Not too long after, my father ran to become a representative at the Changsha Conference. He was heartbroken when he lost, and felt as if he had been wronged. In a fit, he left home for Beijing. My father joined the blood and iron group, who were planning to assassinate Yuan Shikai. When they were discovered, some of them were arrested and promptly executed. My father escaped because he was informed that he needed flee while watching Beijing opera. Some of the group reunited in the capital of Rehe, where Jiang Guiti and Mi Zhenbiao had been hiding (They knew each other well). They later changed their names and became section chiefs in Chifeng and Jianping counties for many years.

Following Yuan Shikai’s death, my father sent instructions via handwritten letter for my family to sell their field to pay off their debts. After that, my family went bankrupt. My brother went far away in search of my father. In order to make a living along the way, he drew portraits for people. He went everywhere in the northeast of China in search of my father. He finally found him in the city of Chifeng. I did not see my father until
twelve years later in Chenzhou, while I was traveling down the border of Hunan. After that one time, I never saw him again.

My youngest sister was only three months old when my father lost the election and left home.

Things changed after the revolution, but not much. The Green Army units and Tuntian systems remained unchanged. The region had its forced military with different ranks, just as it did before. On a monthly basis, individuals or their families would go up to the barracks to receive food and money. The guards remained on duty, and the government office waited for their assignments. Just as before, the military horses were raised by local families. Every evening there would be three or five musicians performing for funerals at the drum tower in front of the government office. However, the defense forces were distributed a little differently. The weapons the troops used were different, and the local military officials were not the same. The positions of county magistrate and local commander were given to natives of the region. Each soldier’s family nailed a small wooden card near their door, which explicitly states everything about their military service. Each person’s service was different, and so was the wooden card. The scholar no longer stood beside the incense altar in front of the circuit administrator’s office and announced the imperial edicts.

I can never forget the impression the revolution had on me. The massacre of thousands of peasants is like a boldly-colored picture.

When I was three, a new type of elementary school was established in the surrounding region. And when I was four, I was enrolled. During the summer when I was
six, I floated down the Yuan River Basin’s thirteen counties and received another type of education.
我所生长的地方

拿起我这支笔来，想写点我在这地面上二十年所过的日子，所见的人物，
所听的声音，所嗅的气味，也就是说我真真实实所受的人生教育，首先提到一个我
从那儿生长的边疆僻地小城时，实在不知道怎样来着手就较方便些。我应当照城市
中人的口吻来说，这真是一个古怪地方！只由于两百年前满人治理中国土地时，为
镇抚与虐杀残余苗族，派遣了一队戍卒屯丁驻扎，方有了城堡与居民。这古怪地方
的成立与一切过去，有一部《苗防备览》记载了些官方文件，但那只是一部枯燥无
味的官书。我想把我一篇作品里所简单描绘过的那个小城，介绍到这里来。这虽然
只是一个轮廓，但那地方一切情景，却浮凸起来，仿佛可用手去摸触。

一个好事人，若从一百年前某种较旧一点的地图上去寻找，当可在黔北、川东、湘西
一处极偏僻的角隅上，发现了一个名为“镇筸”的小点。那里同别的小点一样，事实上应当
有一个城市，在那城市中，安顿下三五千人口。不过一切城市的存在，大部分皆在交通、
物产、经济活动情形下面，成为那个城市枯荣的因缘，这一个地方，却以另外一种意义无
所依附而独立存在。试将那个用粗糙而坚实巨大石头砌成的圆城作为中心，向四方展开，
围绕了这边疆僻地的孤城，约有一千左右的碉堡，三百以上的营汛。碉堡各用大石块堆成，
位置在山顶头，随了山岭脉络蜿蜒各处走去；营汛各位置在驿路上，布置得极有秩序。这
些东西在一百七十年前，是按照一种精密的计划，各保持相当距离，在周围数百里内，平
均分配下来，解决了退守一隅常作“蠢动”的边苗“叛变”的。两世纪来满清的暴政，
以及因暴政而引起的反抗，血染红了每一条官路和每一个碉堡。到如今，一切完事了，碉堡多数业已毁掉了，营汛多数成为民房了，人民已大半同化了。落日黄昏时节，站到那个巍然独在万山环绕的孤城高处，眺望那些远近残毁碉堡，还可依稀想见当时角鼓火炬传警告急的光景。这地方到今日，已因为变成另外一种军事重心，一切皆用一种迅速的姿势在改变，在进步，同时这种进步，也就正消灭到过去一切。

凡有机会追随了屈原溯江而行那条常年澄清的沅水，向上游去的旅客和商人，若打量由陆路入黔入川，不经古夜郎国，不经永顺、龙山，都应当明白“镇筸”是个可以安顿他的行李最可靠也最舒服的地方。那里土匪的名称不习惯于一般人的耳朵。兵卒纯善如平民，与人无侮无扰。农民勇敢而安分，且莫不敬神守法。商人各负担了花纱同货物，洒脱单独向深山中村庄走去，与平民做有无交易，谋取什一之利。地方统治者分数种：最上为天神，其次为官，又其次才为村长同执行巫术的神的侍奉者。人人洁身信神，守法爱官。每家俱有兵役，可按月各自到营上领取一点银子，一份米粮，且可从官家领取二百年前被政府没收的公田耕耨播种。城中人每年各按照家中有无，到天王庙去杀猪，宰羊，磔狗，献鸡，献鱼，求神保佑五谷的繁殖，六畜的兴旺，儿女的长成，以及作疾病婚丧的禳解。人人皆依本分担负官府所分派的捐款，又自动地捐钱与庙祝或单独执行巫术者。一切事保持一种淳朴习惯，遵从古礼：春秋二季农事起始与结束时，照例有年老人向各处人家敛钱，给社稷神唱木傀儡戏。早祷祈雨，便有小孩子同孩子们拾了活狗，带上柳条，或扎成草龙，各处走去。春天常有春官，穿黄衣各处念农事歌文。岁暮年末，居民便装饰红衣傩神于家中正屋，捶大鼓如雷鸣，苗巫穿鲜红如血衣服，吹镂银牛角，拿铜刀，踊跃歌舞娱神。城中的住民，多当时派遣移来的戍卒屯兵，例外则有江西人在此卖布，福建人在此卖烟，广东人在此卖药。地方由少数读书人与多数军官，在政治上与婚姻上两面的结合，产生一个上层阶级，
这阶级一方面用一种保守稳健的政策，长时期管理政治，一方面支配了大部分属于私有的土地。而这阶级的来源，却又仍然出于当年的戍卒屯丁。地方城外山坡上产桐树杉树，矿坑中有朱砂水银，松林里生菌子，山洞中多硝。城乡全不缺少勇敢忠诚适于理想的兵士，与温柔耐劳适于家庭的妇人。在军校阶级厨房中，出异常可口的菜饭，在伐树砍柴人口中，出热情优美的歌声。

地方东南四十里接近大河，一道河流肥沃了平衍的两岸，多米，多橘柚。西北三十里后，即已渐入高原，近抵苗乡，万山重叠，大小重叠的山中，大杉树以长年深绿逼人的颜色，蔓延各处。一道小河从高山绝涧中流出，汇集了万山细流，沿了两岸有杉树林的河沟奔驰而过，农民各就河边编缚竹子作成水车，引河中流水，灌溉高处的山田。河水常年清澈，其中多鳜鱼，鲫鱼，鲤鱼，大的比人脚板还大。河岸上那些人家里，常常可以见到白脸长身见人善作媚笑的女子。小河水流环绕“镇筸”北城下驶，到一百七十里后方汇入辰河，直抵洞庭。

这地方又名凤凰厅，到民国后便改成了县治，名凤凰县。辛亥革命后，湘西镇守使与辰沅道皆驻节在此地。地方居民不过五六千，驻防各处的正规兵士却有七千。由于环境的不同，直到现在其地绿营兵役制度尚保存不废，为中国绿营军制唯一残留之物。

我就生长到这样一个小城里，将近十五岁时方离开。出门两年半回过那小城一次以后，直到现在为止，那城门我不曾再进去过。但那地方我是熟悉的。现在还有许多人生活在那个城市里，我却常常生活在那个小城过去给我的印象里。
我的家庭

咸同之季，中国近代史极可注意之一页，曾左胡彭所领带的湘军部队中，有个相当的位置。统率湘军转战各处的是一群青年将校，原多卖马草为生，最著名的为田兴恕。当时同住数人，年在二十左右，同时得到满清提督衔的共有四位，其中沈洪富，便是我的祖父。这青年军官二十二岁左右时，便曾做过一度云南昭通镇守使。同治二年，二十六岁又做过贵州总督，到后因创伤回到家中，终于便在家中死掉了。这青年军官死去时，所留下的一份光荣与一份产业，使他后嗣在本地方占了个较优越的地位。祖父本无子息，祖母为乡下的叔祖父沈洪芳娶了个苗族姑娘，生了两个儿子，把老二过房做儿子。照当地习惯，和苗人所生儿女无社会地位，不能参与文武科举，因此这个苗女人被远远嫁去，乡下虽埋了个坟，却是假的。我照血统说，有一部分应属于苗族。我四五岁时，还曾回到黄罗寨乡下去那个坟前磕过头，到一九二二年离开湘西时，在沅陵才从父亲口中明白这件事情。

就由于存在本地军人口中那一份光荣，引起了后人对军人家世的骄傲，我的父亲生下两岁以后过房进到城里时，祖母所期望的事，是家中再来一个将军。家中所期望的并不曾失望，自体魄与气度两方面说来，我爸爸生来就不缺少一个将军的风仪。硕大，结实，豪放，爽直，一个将军所必需的种种本色，爸爸无不兼备。爸爸十岁左右时，家中就为他请了个武术教师同老塾师，学习做将军所不可少的技术与学识。但爸爸还不曾成名以前，我的祖母却死去了。那时正是庚子联军入京的第三年。当庚子年大沽失守，镇守大沽的罗提督自尽殉职时，我的爸爸便在那里做他身边一员裨将。那次战争据说毁去了我家中产业的一大半。由于爸爸的爱好，家中
一点值钱的宝货常放在他身边，这一来，便完全失掉了。战事既已不可收拾，北京失陷后，爸爸回到了家乡。第三年祖母死去。祖母死时我刚活到这世界上四个月。那时我头上已经有两个姐姐，一个哥哥。没有庚子的义和团反帝战争，我爸爸不会回来，我也不会存在。关于祖母的死，我依稀记得我被抱在一个白色人堆里转动，随后还被搁到一个桌子上去。我家中自从祖母死后十余年内不曾死去一人，若不是我在两岁以后做梦，这点影子便应当是那时惟一的记忆。

我的兄弟姊妹共九个，我排行第四，除去幼年殇去的姊妹，现在生存的还有五个，计兄弟姊妹各一，我应当在第三。

我的母亲姓黄，年纪极小时就随同我一个舅父在军营中生活，所见事情很多，所读的书也似乎较爸爸读的稍多。外祖黄河清是本地最早的贡生，守文庙做书院山长，也可说是当地惟一读书人。所以我母亲极小就认字读书，懂医方，会照相。舅父是个有新头脑的人物，本县第一个照相馆是那舅父办的，第一个邮政局也是舅父办的。我等兄弟姊妹的初步教育，便全是这个瘦小、机警、富于胆气与常识的母亲担负的。我的教育得于母亲的不少，她告我认字，告我认识药名，告我思考和决断——做男子极不可少的思考以后的决断。我的气度得于父亲影响的较少，得于妈妈的似较多。
辛亥革命的一课

有一天，我那表哥又从乡下来了，见了他我非常快乐。我问他那些水车，那些碾坊，我又问他许多我在乡下所熟习的东西。可是我不明白，这次他竟不大理我，不大同我亲热。他只成天出去买白带子，自己买了许多不算，还托我四叔买了许多。家中搁下两担白带子，还说不大够用。他同我爸爸又商量了许多事情，我虽听到却不明是什么意思。其中一件便是找三个同三哥派阿伢当天送进苗乡去。把我大姐二姐送过表哥乡下那个能容万人避难的齐梁洞去。爸爸即刻就遵照表哥的计划办去，母亲当时似乎也承认这办法较安全方便。在一种迅速处置下，四人当天离开家中同表哥上了路。表哥去时挑了一担白带子，同来另一个陌生人也挑了一担。我疑心他想开一个铺子，才用得着这样担带子。

当表哥一行人众动身时，爸爸问表哥“明夜来不来”，那一个就回答说：“不来，怎么回事？我的事还多得很！”

我知道表哥的许多事中，一定有一件事为我带那匹花公鸡，那是他早先答应过我的。因此就插口说：

“你来，可别忘记答应我那个东西！”

“忘了，忘了我就带别的更好的东西。”

当我两个姐姐一个哥哥一个弟弟同那苗妇人躲进苗乡时，我爸爸问我：

“你怎么样？跟阿伢进苗乡去，还是跟我在城里？”

“什么地方热闹些？”

“不要这样问，我明白你的意思，你要在城里看热闹，就留下来莫过苗乡吧。”
听说同我爸爸留在城里，我真欢喜。我记得分分明明，第二天晚上，叔父红着脸在灯光下磨刀的情形，真十分有趣。我一时走过仓库边看叔父磨刀，一时又走到书房去看我看我爸爸擦枪。家中人既走了不少，忽然显得空阔许多。我平时似乎胆量很小，天黑以后不大出房门，到这天也不知道害怕了。我不明白行将发生什么事情，但却知道有一件很重要的新事快要发生。我满屋各处走去，又傍近爸爸听他们说话。他们每个人脸色都不同往常安详，每人说话都结结巴巴。我家中有两支广式猎枪，几个人一面检查枪支，一面又常常互相来一个莫名其妙的微笑，我也就跟着他们微笑。

我看到他们在日光下做事，又看到他们在灯光下商量。那长身叔父一会儿跑出门去，一会儿又跑回来悄悄地说一阵。我装作不注意的神气，算计到他出门的次数，这一天他一共出门九次，到最后一次出门时，我跟他身后走出到屋廊下，我说：

“四叔，怎么的，你们是不是预备杀.OrderByDescending(235, 285)”

“咄，你这小东西，还不去睡！回头要猫儿吃了你。赶快睡去！”

于是我便被一个丫头拖到上边屋里去，把头伏到母亲腿上，一会儿就睡着了。

这一夜中城里城外发生的事我全不清楚。等到我照常醒来时，只见全家中早已起身，各个人皆脸儿白白的，在那里悄悄地说些什么。大家问我昨夜听到什么没有，我只是摇头。我家中似乎少了几个人，数了一下，几个叔叔全不见了，男的只我爸爸一个人，坐在正屋他那惟一专用的太师椅上，低下头来一句话不说。我记起了杀仗的事情，我问他：

“爸爸，爸爸，你究竟杀过仗了没有？”
“小东西，莫乱说，夜来我们杀败了！全军覆没，死了上千人！”

正说着，高个儿叔父从外面回来了，满脸是汗，结结巴巴地说：“衙门从城边已经抬回了四百一十一个人头，一大串耳朵，七架云梯，一些刀，一些别的东西。对河还杀得更多，烧了七处房子，现在还不许人上城去看。”

爸爸听说有四百个人头，就向叔父说：

“你快去看看，韩在里边没有。赶快去，赶快去。”

韩就是这样紫色脸膛的表兄，我明白他昨天晚上也在城外杀仗后，心中十分关切。听说衙门口有那么多人头，还有一大串人耳朵，正与我爸爸平时为我说到的杀长毛故事相符，我又兴奋又害怕，兴奋得简直不知道怎么办。洗过了脸，我方走出房门，看看天气阴阴的，像要落雨的神气，一切皆很黯淡。街口平常这时照例可以听到卖糕人的声音，以及各种叫卖声音，今天却异常清静，似乎过年一样。我想得到一个机会出去看看。我最关心的是那些我从不曾摸过的人头。一会儿，我的机会便来了。长身四叔跑回来告我爸爸，人头里没有韩的头。且说衙门口人多着，街上铺子都已奉命开了门，张家二老爷也上街看热闹了。对门张家二老爷原是暗中和革命党有联系的本地绅士之一。因此我爸爸便问我：

“小东西，怕不怕人头，不怕就同我出去。”

“不怕，我想看看！”

于是我就在道尹衙门口平地上看到了一大堆肮脏血污人头。还有衙门口鹿角上、辕门上，也无处不是人头。从城边取回的几架云梯，全用新毛竹做成（就是把一些新从山中砍来的竹子，横横地贯了许多木棍），云梯木棍上也悬挂许多人头。看到
这些东西我实在稀奇，我不明白为什么要杀那么多人，我不明白这些人因什么事就被把头割下。我随后又发现了一串耳朵，那串东西，一生真再也不知道见到过的古怪东西！叔父问我：”小东西，你怕不怕？”我回答极好，我说不怕。我原先已听了多少杀仗的故事，总说是“人头如山，血流成河”，看戏时也总说是“千军万马分个胜败”，却除了从戏台上间或演秦琼哭头时可看到一个木人头放在朱红盘子里托着舞来舞去，此外就不曾看到过一次真的杀仗砍下什么人头。现在却有那么一大堆血淋淋的从人颈脖上砍下的东西。我并不怕，可不明白为什么这些人就让兵士砍他们，有点疑心，以为这一定有了错误。

为什么他们被砍？砍他们的人又为什么？心中许多疑问。回话到中时问爸爸，爸爸只说这是“造反打了败仗”，也不能给我一个满意的答复。我当时以为爸爸那么伟大的人，天上地下知道不知多少事，居然也不明白这件事，倒真觉得奇怪。到现在我才明白这件事永远在世界上不缺少，可是谁也不能够给小孩子一个最得体的回答。

这革命原是城中绅士早已知道，用来对付镇镇，和辰沅永靖兵备道两个衙门的旗人大官同那些外路商人，攻城以前先就约好了的。但临时却因军队方面谈的条件不妥，误了大事。

革命算已失败了，杀戮还只是刚在开始。城防军把防务布置周密妥当后，就分头派兵下家去捉人。捉来的人只问间一句两句话，就牵出城外去砍掉。平常杀人照例应当在西门外，现在造反的人既从北门来，因此应杀的人也就放在北门河滩上杀戮。当初每天必杀一百左右，每次杀五十个人时，行刑兵士还只是廿一个人，看热闹的也不过三十左右。有时衣也不剥，绳子也不捆缚，就那么跟着赶去的。常
常有被杀的站得稍远一点，兵士以为是看热闹的人就忘掉走去。被杀的差不多全从苗乡捉来，糊涂地不知道是些什么事，因此还有一直到了河滩被人吼着跪下时，才明白行将有什么新事，方大声哭喊惊惶乱跑，刽子手随即赶上前去那么一阵乱刀砍翻的。

这愚蠢残酷的杀戮继续了约一个月，才渐渐减少下来。或者因为天气既很严冷，不必担心到它的腐烂，埋不及时就不埋，或者又因为还另外有一种示众意思，河滩的尸首总常常躺下四五百。

到后人太多了，仿佛凡是西北苗乡捉来的人都得杀头，衙门方面把文书禀告到抚台时大致说的就是“苗人造反”，因此照规矩还得剿平这一片地面上的人民。捉来的人一多，被杀的头脑简单异常，无法自脱，但杀人那一方面知道下面消息多些，却有点寒了心。几个本地有力的绅士，也就是暗地里同城外人沟通却不为官方知道的人，便一同向道台请求有一个限制。经过一番选择，该杀的杀，该放的放。每天捉来的人既有一百两百，差不多全是苗乡的农民，既不能全部开释，也不应全部杀头，因此选择的手续，便委托了本地人民所敬信的天王。把犯人牵到天王庙大殿前院坪里，先神前掷竹筮，一仰一覆的顺筮，开释，双仰的阳筮，开释，双覆的阴筮，杀头。生死取决于一掷，应死的自己向左走去，该活的自己向右走去。一个人在一分赌博上既占去便宜四分之三，因此应死的谁也不说话，就低下头走去。

我那时已经可以自由出门，一有机会就常常到城头上去看对河杀头。每当人已杀过赶不及看那一砍时，便与其他小孩比赛眼力，一二三四屈指计数那一片死尸的数目。或者又跟随了犯人，到天王庙看他们掷筮。看那些乡下人，如何闭了眼睛把
手中一副竹竿用力抛去，有些人到已应当开释时还不敢睁开眼睛。又看着些虽应死去，还想念到家中小孩与小牛羊猪的，那份颓丧那份对神埋怨的神情，真使我永远忘不了，也影响到我一生对于滥用权力的特别厌恶。

我刚好知道“人生”时，我知道的原来就是这些事情。

第二年三月本地革命成功了，各处悬上白旗，写个“汉”字，小城中官兵算是对革命军投降。革命反正的兵士结队成排在街上巡游。外来镇守使，道尹，知县，已表示愿意走路，地方一切皆由绅士出面来维持，并在大会上进行民主选举，我爸爸便即刻成为当地要人了。

那时节我哥哥弟弟同两个姐姐，全从苗乡接回来了。家中无数乡下军人来来往往，院子中坐满了人。在一群陌生人中，我发现了那个紫黑脸膛的表哥。他并没有死去，背了一把单刀，朱红牛皮的刀鞘上镶着金黄色双龙抢宝的花纹。他正在同别人说那一夜扑近城边爬城的情形。我悄悄地告诉他：“我过天王庙看犯人掷筊，想知道犯人中有没有你，可见不着。”那表哥说：“他们手短了些，捉不着我。现在应当我来打他们了。”当天全城人过天王庙开会时，我爸爸正在台上演说，那表哥当真就爬上台去重重地打了县老爷一个嘴巴，使得台上台下都笑闹不已，演说也无法继续。

革命使我家中也起了变化。不多久，爸爸和一个姓吴的竞选去长沙会议代表失败，心中十分不平，赌气出门往北京去了。和本地阙祝明同去，住杨梅竹斜街酉西会馆，组织了个铁血团，谋刺袁世凯，被侦探发现，阙被捕当时枪决。我父亲因看老谭的戏，有熟人通知，即逃出关，在热河都统姜桂题、米振标处隐匿（因为相
熟），后改名换姓，在赤峰、建平等县做科长多年，袁死后才和家里通信。只记到借人手写信来典田还账。到后家中就破产了。父亲的还湘，还是我哥哥出关万里寻亲接回的。哥哥会为人画像，借此谋生，东北各省都跑过，最后才在赤峰找到了父亲。爸爸这一去，直到十二年后当我从湘边下行时，在辰州地方又见过他一面，从此以后便再也见不着了。

我爸爸在竞选失败离开家乡那一年，我最小的一个九妹，刚好出世三个月。

革命后地方不同了一点，绿营制度没有改变多少，屯田制度也没有改变多少。地方有军役的，依然各因等级不同，按月由本人或家中人到营上去领取食粮与碎银。守兵当值的，到时照常上衙门听候差遣。兵马仍照旧把马养在家中。衙门前钟鼓楼每到晚上有三五个吹鼓手奏乐。但防军组织分配稍微不同了。军队所用器械不同了，地方官长不同了。县知事换了本地人，镇守使也换了本地人。当兵的每个家中大门边钉了一小牌，载明一切，且各因兵役不同，木牌种类也完全不同。道尹衙门前站在香案旁宣讲圣谕的秀才已不见了。

但革命印象在我记忆中不能忘记的，却只是关于杀戮那几千无辜农民的几幅颜色鲜明的图画。

民三左右地方新式小学成立，民四我进了新式小学。民六我便离开了家乡，在沅水流域十三县开始过流荡生活，接受另一种人生教育了。
Reflections on Shen Congwen Post-1948

Introduction

When Shen Congwen passed away in 1988, only a short, one-line obituary was published in Chinese newspapers. It failed to mention Shen’s place in the country’s literary history beyond simply labeling him “a famous Chinese writer” (Congwen & Liu, 2012). This was largely the result of the Communist Party’s ambivalent view of where he stood in society at the time of his death. Despite the Party’s uncertainty, Shen was an important figure in Chinese literature, having participated in the New Culture Movement and encouraging writers to use vernacular Chinese. Shen’s significance was not completely minimized, as he received some foreign recognition. It was reported that the Nobel Committee for Literature had considered Shen to be a candidate for the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature, and was on track to become the recipient of the award before his death the same year (Kinkley, 2004, p. xiv). His importance was largely forgotten in China due to the events of Shen’s later life, as well as his strained relationship with the Communist Party. Research into Shen Congwen’s life and work is important because it serves to show not only how Shen was oppressed and erased, but also how other writers face oppression due to the politics of a given time.

Authors’ own works can be used to ostracize them, justifying the burning of texts and discouraging them from participating in literary circles. These are all forms of oppression that a writer may face in an oppressive political system. It is important to consider this phenomenon of oppression when viewing the second half of Shen’s life.
because of the political structure he was living in. The Communist majority, made up of both the Party and leftist critics, were successful in alienating Shen and destroying his written works, using his own writing as justification. This almost resulted in an erasure of Shen from literary history, but in recent decades there has been a resurgent interest in him. Perhaps the most interesting of questions that has arisen recently is this: Why did Shen stop publishing new fiction after 1948, just as the Communist Party rose to power? Answering this question will require a multi-perspective look at Shen. His relationship to critics and the public must be analyzed, and his methods for self-preservation and his beliefs must be examined.

**Literary and Political Climate**

The marriage of literature and politics is not a new idea in China. In the early 1900s, literary movements hoped to bring change to Chinese society. These movements—the New Culture Movement (1912) and subsequent May Fourth Movement (1919)—not only changed the way literature was written, but also had an impact on the way society was structured. Much of the writing from the May Fourth period was politically motivated, with every work being scrutinized for its political significance (Tiezzi, 2012, p. 91). A rebellion against the Confucian ways of traditional China, these movements attempted to bring about a new Chinese culture.

As time passed, some of the May Fourth authors that advocated for literature to be a driving force behind societal change became active as communist writers in the League of Left-Wing Writers (Tiezzi, 2012, p. 93). The result was the avocation of the Chinese Communist Party as China’s future and the Communist Party’s increased control over
literary publication (Tiezzi, 2012, p. 93). Merely speaking out against society’s ills was not enough for this new climate. Leftist writers were expected to also advance communist ideals. In rejecting old ideas, communist writers were required to present communism as China’s future.

Mao Zedong, in his talks on literature and art in Yan’an province, spoke out against literature for the bourgeoisie and called for it to be led by the proletariat (Mao, 1942). Mao thought the pen would be a necessary tool, which needed to fit into the “revolutionary machine” of the Communist Party, so that the Chinese people could be liberated from their landlord-rulled past (Mao, 1942). This set up an institutional system where the literature that could change society must also work to advance the Communist Party (Tiezzi, 2012, p. 94). Mao set up guidelines to determine what literature was acceptable, based on the class that it served (Tiezzi, 2012, p. 94). Since the Communist Party set the guidelines for acceptable writing, those who spoke out against the flaws of the Party found themselves the target of scrutiny (Tiezzi, 2012, p. 94). Many May Fourth authors, specifically, did not adapt to the rise of the Communist Party and therefore were attacked (Tiezzi, 2012, p. 94). The Communist Party only allowed works that aided its mission, and it censored or banned those seen as bourgeois (Tiezzi, 2012, p. 90).

The rise of the Communist Party brought uncertainty for many Chinese authors. Writers faced oppression not only from the party, but also from fellow writers who used the new climate to “settle old scores” (Huangfu, 2010, p. 41). Those who did not conform to communist ideals or whose past writing could be seen as aiding those outside of the working class were subject to increased criticism from both the Party and other authors.
Shen Congwen, an author against the idea of politics controlling literature, advocated for the opposite: literature leading society (Kinkley, 1987, p. 266). In 1948, Shen became the victim of criticisms that would forever change his status in China. Once at the forefront of Chinese modern literature, Shen disappeared to his job at the Museum of Peking and the various political reform programs he was enrolled in. He reemerged every so often, usually when he was being criticized (Kinkley, 1987, p. 270).

After 1948, Shen Congwen did write new fiction,¹ but he did not publish any of it (Huangfu, 2010, p. 60). While it would be difficult to determine the exact reason why Shen did not release any new fiction, it is possible to take a look at his relationship with the leftists in the literary world, as well as his relationship with the Communist Party. This will aid in understanding why the ever-changing political and social environment and Shen’s own beliefs were not conducive to him publishing new works.

**Isolation**

In 1948, the public’s perception of Shen Congwen turned sour because of the criticism by Guo Moruo. Guo criticized Shen for what he saw as “dampening people’s morals,” calling Shen “an ambitious, decadent brat” who hid behind the ideals of freedom and independence (Guo quoted in Huangfu, 2010, p. 44). He was criticizing Shen’s outspoken view that literature should not be driven by politics, but be free to drive

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¹ Most notable of Shen’s post-1948 works was “Old Comrade,” which was published in The Complete Works of Shen Congwen in 2002, fourteen years after his death. Jeffrey Kinkley also speaks of the various poems he was shown that were written between the 1960s and 1980s (Kinkley, 1987, 271).
political reform. Guo believed Shen “worked for counterrevolutionaries,” who hoped to degrade society’s morals (Huangfu, 2010, p. 44). Guo attacked Shen’s work for not being supportive of the People’s Liberation Army. He also rejected Shen’s view that literature should be written free from political influence (Huangfu, 2010, p. 44). These criticisms echoed through the halls of Peking University, which drove Shen close to a nervous breakdown and eventually depression (Kinkley, 1987, p. 266). It was not the criticisms themselves that drove Shen to this dark place; instead it was the realization that the “wrath of a few leftist critics could suddenly become the wrath of ‘the people’ and result in political exclusion” (Huangfu, 2010, p. 47). Guo’s assertions were just the beginning of Shen’s decline; critics railed against Shen’s work for the remainder of his life.

Political exclusion led to societal isolation. In early 1949, after some urging by his wife, a defeated Shen moved to Qinghua University to rest (Nieh, 1972, p. 112). In March, news got out that depression had overpowered Shen, and he “decided to bring an end to this seemingly endless wait [for communist acceptance] by taking his life” (Huangfu, 2010, p. 47). He survived, but his public image was not saved.

On May 30th, 1949, Shen wrote a journal entry detailing his feelings of loneliness, writing, “It’s as if I am completely alone in the world, it’s as if I have been completely segregated from the sadness and happiness of everyone” (Congwen & Liu, 2012). Shen goes on, reminiscing about a photograph of his old friend, Ding Ling, reflecting, “Something I can’t explain is causing me my very own madness. I feel as if I am separating myself and wandering away from the group. And I daydream in front of a photograph” (Congwen & Liu, 2012). Shen continues to comment on his inactivity,
saying, “I still sit by a writing table. But the world has changed… The world is moving, … but I am immobilized by my pity and my sadness. From afar I watch everything happen without a part to play” (Congwen & Liu, 2012). Feelings of isolation and hopelessness flooded the author. He was alone.

These criticisms and subsequent emotional damage had a lasting effect on Shen, who would be left with a lifelong fear of exclusion. Shortly after trying to kill himself, Shen told Ding Ling that he would suspend his literary career due to the “lingering trauma of previous attacks” (Huangfu, 2010, p. 48). Despite this self-imposed break, Shen expressed a desire to return to writing if he could learn to support the Communist Party and no longer fear criticism (Huangfu, 2010, p. 48). Shen genuinely wanted to assimilate to the Communist Party. He hoped that by studying and working, he could be transformed into someone who could participate in the new society (Huangfu, 2010, p. 47). Shen longed for his literature to drive society, and this was his chance. By integrating himself into the Communist Party, he could have an impact on society as a spokesperson for the majority, achieving something he had been unable to do as a minority writer. Fear pushed Shen to desire giving up his ideals and joining everyone else. But he also want to publish works that would make him proud. He was stuck between assimilation and independence.

**Shen’s Desire to Contribute**

Because of political pressure, and possibly out of his own interest in participating in society, Shen enrolled in thought-reform classes at the Political Research Institute of the People’s Revolutionary University in 1951 (Nieh, 1972, p. 114). However, he showed
an interest in eventually returning to writing even before he enrolled in thought-reform classes. In a 1949 letter to his wife, he wrote, “the masses are moving forward … perhaps at another time I can write about them, and I can preserve this time in words” (Congwen, 2010). He talks of a strong desire to record the historical contexts of his current position. He continues, saying, “People in the future should know what it is to live now” (Congwen, 2010). He wanted to write of the scenes he witnessed, but felt he was unable to in the present environment. He wrote, “One day I will be able to write about this experience” (Congwen, 2010). While he was afraid of further criticisms and attacks, Shen believed reform classes could provide him a future as a fiction writer.

His journal entries from his time in thought-reform classes included criticisms of the Communist Party, which suggests Shen was not self-censoring or distorting his opinions (Huangfu, 2010, p. 54). At the same time, Shen expressed excitement for the new nation of the People’s Republic of China (Huangfu, 2010, p. 54). He was enlivened by the prospect of driving the new society forward with his literature (Kinkley, 1987, p. 266). Despite his objections to the Party, Shen seemed to have a renewed interest in writing and gave his approval of the direction the Party was heading (Huangfu, 2010, p. 54-55; 58). This may have been an effort to show faith in the communist ideology, an act he believed necessary for participating in society again. But there seems to be a “genuine interest in socialism” in his writing (Huangfu, 2010, p. 59). Shen’s personal feelings are nearly impossible to determine; however, he showed a clear desire to return to publishing and contributing to Chinese culture.
The menial tasks Shen had to perform while in political reform classes did not discourage him; he used the opportunity to collect his thoughts (Kinkley, 1987, p. 268). Joining thought-reform classes gave Shen a sense of intellectual superiority because he thought his instructors did not fully understand the material (Kinkley, 1987, p. 268). This furthered Shen’s desire to write, and he hoped to be accepted as a Party member if he could produce a work for the people (Huangfu, 2010, p. 59). During this time, Shen wrote a few works of fiction he hoped would be published.

As early as 1951, Shen attempted to have his new works published. From 1951 to 1955, he sent three stories to various journals, but none were accepted (Huangfu, 2010, p. 60). It is easy to see why these works would not have been welcomed: he was facing ever-increasing criticism, and his old works were endangered. Taking political reform classes did not improve leftists’ views of Shen. When Shen published self-criticism in late-1951, things only got worse. Ding Ling published her own short criticisms of Shen, which referred to him not being “content with the modest lot of a struggling writer” (Ling quoted in Spence, 1982, p. 325). In 1953, Kaiming Press announced they would be burning paper copies of Shen’s works along with the printing plates (Kinkley, 1987, p. 270). Shen was not well received by publishers and the Chinese public during the years he was trying to get his work published. He was no longer trapped by fear, but society was not ready to give him a chance. By 1955, Shen was once again discouraged.

**Changing Literary Trends**

Even though he was disheartened, Shen kept up with the literary trends of the time (Huangfu, 2010, p. 60). In 1956, the moment he had been waiting for, a more
accepting moment, appeared to have arrived. Shen was invited to write an article for *People’s Daily* and was made a member of the People’s Political Consultative Conference (Huangfu, 2010, p. 62). Following a speech given in February 1956 at the Communist Party’s Twentieth Grand Conference, Shen “was permitted to publish *Selected Stories of Shen Ts’ung-wen,*” a collection of previously published fiction (Nieh, 1972, p. 117-8). These works, however, were “drastically revised” by Shen, who marked them with self-censorship and propaganda (Nieh, 1972, p. 118-9). This apparent acceptance seemed like an opportunity for Shen, whose position within the Chinese literary community was on the rise (Huangfu, 2010, p. 62). However, Shen did not publish any new fiction. The question then emerges: Why would Shen not publish new works when public seemed to be accepting him? While Shen was confident in his talent as a writer, he was discouraged because he saw other talented people being ignored.

In 1956, when Shen visited his hometown, he voiced his belief that real skill was not accepted in China. He wrote to his wife of the fabric weaved in his hometown and mentioned the weavers being largely ignored by cultural officials. These officials claimed to have an interest in uncovering “the best of the local culture,” while they themselves were from out of town (Congwen, 2010). Shen was upset because he saw the fabric as being the best of the local culture, but the officials turned a blind eye to it, importing mass-produced fabric instead (Congwen, 2010). Shen felt as if the local treasures were going to waste. He called the fabric “the best artwork,” and the people “the best resource” (Congwen, 2010). Shen was critical of the officials that would “never understand” that the talented people were “the best resource” (Congwen, 2010). He ends the letter with a
final thought, “Without a future their talents will die in time” (Congwen, 2010). It is as if Shen views his own fiction as being one and the same with the fabric—the best, but unrecognized by larger society. His final thought then becomes a prophetic: without a future, his talent will die.

In another letter from the same time, Shen writes of the books he finds within a small bookstore in the countryside. Overall, he only sees books of poor quality, but there are some that catch his eye. About them, he writes:

Only the books about heroes and model workers have some decent quality. In any case, these books are the masterpieces of our time, with at least a million readers, or perhaps even five million. Imagine the courage one must have to write such books! (Congwen, 2010)

There is a sense of sarcasm in Shen’s words. These works are only masterpieces because of their readership, not because of their quality (Congwen, 2010). The best thing he has to say about these books is that they stand out against the others that were “poorly drawn; … unrealistic; … [and] retold classics” (Congwen, 2010). This incident indicates a turning point for Shen. For years, he had hoped assimilation would bring acceptance, but this was not the case. If he were to assimilate, Shen would be forced to surrender his talent and produce mediocre works. In the moment outlined here, Shen expresses dissatisfaction with the type of literature he would have had to write to be accepted. But he was not discouraged. He hoped once again to use his talent for writing to make a mark on China.
In 1961, he aimed to do just this. Shen climbed Mt. Jinggang with the intention to stay for three years and work on a novel. He had been encouraged by the Party for some time to resume writing, but did not start until he felt motivated. The novel he had hoped to write was about a relative in his wife’s family who was a communist martyr (Kinkley, 1987, p. 270). He only stayed three months on the mountain before destroying what he had written (Kinkley, 1987, p. 270). Biographer Jeffrey Kinkley writes “Shen could not bring himself to write the sort of thing he was expected to” (Kinkley, 1987, p. 270). He did not want to compromise his talent with work that was merely for acceptance. While Shen’s time on Mt. Jinggang ended without a completed work, it was a positive experience. He was inspired to write poetry, which he would continue to do into the 1980s (Kinkley, 1987, p. 271). Instead of publishing these poems, he gave them away to close friends (Kinkley, 1987, p. 365). It was safer this way, and it allowed him to make full use of his talents to express himself.

Self-Preservation

Throughout Shen’s post-1948 career, self-preservation played a key role in maintaining his mental and emotional stability. Because he feared attacks, he adopted a strategy of “self-effacement and avoidance of ladders of social mobility” rather than releasing his work to the public, especially from the 1960s through the ‘80s (Kinkley, 1987, p. 268). In the late ‘60s, Shen’s method of staying out of the public eye proved to be useful, as many other authors faced intense criticisms and attacks during the Cultural Revolution (Kinkley, 1987, p. 272). Shen saw many of China’s writers denounced and
humiliated, and while he did experience some attacks, he was relatively protected by his decisions to keep himself outside of the public’s view (Kinkley, 1987, p. 272).

Shen came up with this strategy during his time in thought-reform classes. He was ridiculed by his instructors, so his method for self-preservation helped him keep a private life that was separate from his public life. Shen was criticized on and off until he passed away in 1988 (Huangfu, 2010, p. 77). In the later years of his life, Shen remained linked to an ideal vision of what the Communist Party should be, but avoided interactions with the Party itself, choosing to keep his distance from the literary circles of the time (Huangfu, 2010, p. 78). In the 1980s, Shen would say, “retreat to the second line” when describing this strategy (Kinkley, 1987, p. 268). This was a play on a phrase Mao Zedong used when discussing his retreat from day-to-day tasks of the Party; Shen meant it as a way of keeping a low profile (Kinkley, 1987, p. 268). It was this strategy that kept Shen from publishing new works of fiction toward the end of his life. As his health deteriorated, he could not afford to open himself up to new attacks. While he did publish his research on traditional Chinese costumes, and reissued some of his old work, Shen did not publish anything new.

Conclusion

There are multiple answers to the question posed at the beginning of this analysis: Why did Shen stop publishing new fiction after 1948, just as the Communist Party rose to power? Initially, Shen’s fear of political exclusion kept him from publishing his works, leaving him with a hope that he would eventually be accepted. As time passed, and Shen was ready to submit new works for publication, the literary community was not ready to
accept him. Shen was forced to continue to wait, but by the time they were accepting his works for publication, Shen was discouraged by the mediocre literature he saw celebrated. Shen did not want to ignore his talent and do write stories that were below his standards just to be accepted. In the end, Shen’s self-preservation protected him from attacks, kept him from descending back into depression and allowed him to have a private life. Unfortunately it also meant he could not share any new writing with the world, or become a public figure.
References


