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THESIS

The Life and Works of Shen Ts'ung-wen

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ANTHONY JOHN PRINCE

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Shen Ts'ung-wen is one of the major figures in twentieth-century Chinese literature. Of an independent cast of mind, he aligned himself with no particular school of literary or political thought, and his stories, essays and autobiographical writings form a body of work impressive for its variety, scope and colour. The present thesis offers a survey of Shen's life and works, and is divided into three unequal parts.

The first part is mainly biographical and deals with the first twenty years of Shen's life. Knowledge of these years, passed in his native West Hunan, is essential to an understanding of his work, for they shaped his character and imagination, and gave him the experiences which were to provide much of his fiction with its material and themes. The primary source here is his Autobiography, which deals only with this period, and is of importance, not only for its biographical and historical interest, but also for its considerable literary value. For supplementary source material, I have made use of such other relevant autobiographical writings as were available to me.

The second and longest part of the thesis deals with Shen's career as a writer. Here I have been mainly
concerned to examine his works, and the events of his life during this period (about which there is in any case much less adequate information than for his first twenty years) are treated more sketchily. Even where his writings are concerned, however, I cannot claim to have given a complete account, for Shen was a prolific author, and much of what he wrote is out of print or otherwise unobtainable. Nevertheless, it seems safe to assume that what is discussed here includes most of his best work and is sufficiently representative of the remainder to give a reasonably accurate picture of his work as a whole.

I have examined Shen's early writings, up till the end of his stay in Shanghai, in some detail in order to show the gradual maturing of his art and the emergence of characteristic styles and attitudes. By about 1931 the basic character of his work was established, and he had already won a reputation as a gifted writer. He had by this time already explored, to a greater or lesser extent, most of the themes and styles that he was to continue developing throughout his career. After this point, therefore, I have been more selective in my treatment of his works, passing over many of them fairly briefly, while feeling free to linger over any which seemed to require more detailed comment by reason of their
length, their general excellence, or some feature or features of special interest. I have, however, tried to give some idea of the nature of each piece by summarizing the plot briefly and pointing out any salient features, so that the continuous development of Shen's work and its general scope will not be lost sight of.

In the third part of the thesis, I have made some concluding remarks about Shen and his work, grouped for convenience under eight headings. These remarks are not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to supplement the more specific comments made in the second part, and to give these latter more coherence by providing a general point of view to which they can be related.

For romanization, I have used the Wade-Giles system, omitting some unnecessary diacritical marks and regularizing the spelling slightly by using the ending -uei for all appropriate syllables instead of just kuei and k'uei as the Wade-Giles system has it. For the names of places, I have followed the map spelling where I could find one and the Wade-Giles spelling (modified as explained) where I could not. The precise meaning of dates and ages is often a problem. In general I have taken the Chinese names of months (j^y^eh, êrh-y^eh etc.) to refer to the months of the solar calendar (January, February etc.) unless it is clear from the context that they refer to
lunar months, and I have given the equivalent year AD for datings from the Chinese Republican Revolution of 1911: e.g. "1934" for "the 23rd. year of the Republic". I have also translated Chinese ages literally - e.g. "fifteen" for shih-wu suei - although I am aware that this may make the person appear a year older than he would be by Western computation.

Lastly, I should like to express my gratitude here to Professor A.R. Davis, my supervisor, for his constant guidance and encouragement, to Dr. W.P. Liu for much helpful information, and to Mrs. M. Colan for many kindnesses during the final preparation of the thesis.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SF
Selected Fiction of Shen Ts'ung-wen
(Shen Ts'ung-wen Hsiao-shuo HsÜan Chi,
Peking 1957)

SP
Selected Fiction and Other Prose of Shen
Ts'ung-wen (Shen Ts'ung-wen Hsiao-shuo
San-wen HsÜan, Hong Kong 1957)

SSM
The Short Story Magazine (Hsiao-shuo YÜeh-pao)

* * *
CHAPTER ONE: CHILDHOOD

A. Birthplace and Family Background

Shen Ts'ung-wen was born in 1902 or, more probably, 1903, in what he calls a "small, secluded border town". This town was traditionally called Chen-kan, and under the Republic was the administrative centre of Fenghwang District, in Hunan, not far from the Kweichow and Szechwan borders. The area was originally occupied by tribes of the Red Miao, and was pacified in the K'ang-hsi period (1662-1723) of the Ch'ing dynasty, the town being established as a military

1. The magazine Chinese Literature, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, October 1962, p.45, gives 1903. This is supported by Ts'ung-wen's Autobiography, Wen-li Ch'u-pan She, Hong Kong 1960 (hereafter referred to as the Autobiography), p.7, where Shen says that his father returned home after the capture of Peking by the Allied Army in 1900, that his grandmother died in the third year thereafter, and that he himself was four months old when his grandmother died. The rest of his works offer no more definite evidence than this. Other sources usually give 1902 as the year of his birth.


3. Tz'u-hai, Chung-hua Shu-chu, Shanghai, 1948, pp.1391/3, article Chen-kan.
outpost from which to "pacify and exterminate the remain­ing Miao tribes". Unlike most other towns, therefore, it "existed completely independent" of commercial and economic considerations.

Everything about this place left a deep impression on Shen Ts'ung-wen's mind. To a city-dweller, he says, it must seem "a very strange spot", and a sense of remoteness from the life and interests of city-dwellers was to remain with Shen for the rest of his life. Thus he says to his readers in a prefatory essay:

> Although you and I live together in the one city, and at times may even chance to share a trip on the same train or to eat at the same table, yet if the truth were told, we are going two separate ways....I am really a countryman....As a rule, a countryman will always have his deeply and firmly-rooted country temperament; and his loves and hates, his joys and sorrows, will have their own distinct pattern which is completely different from the city-dweller's.

And indeed, "countryman" (鄉下人 or 鄉巴佬) is the term he generally uses when referring to himself in the third person. As he came to feel that city life,
with its nervous bustle and confusion, only deadened the feelings and wearied the senses\textsuperscript{1}, he looked back to the richer and more peaceful life that he had seen in country districts like Chen-kan, where, he says, bandits were rarely heard of, "the soldiers were as good-natured as the common people, never insulting or annoying others; the peasants were brave and contented, all of them respecting the gods and keeping the laws".\textsuperscript{2}

In this idealization of country life, Shen is following an old tradition in Chinese literature according to which the country-side preserves the uncorrupted customs of antiquity. But he is aware, too, that country life is not always so idyllic: "As a result of two centuries of harsh Manchu rule and the rebellions which it provoked, every main road and every stronghold was dyed red with blood".\textsuperscript{3} And in fact death and suffering were never far from him in those early years: in the form of a bloody rebellion which he witnessed in 1911,\textsuperscript{4} for example, or of the executed prisoners\textsuperscript{5} or the slaughtered cattle\textsuperscript{6} which he observed with childish curiosity. It is perhaps

\begin{itemize}
\item 1. "Exercise", A-chin, p.5.
\item 2. Autobiography, p.2.
\item 3. Ibid., p.2.
\item 4. Autobiography, p.27ff.
\item 5. Ibid., p.16.
\item 6. Ibid., pp.21-2.
\end{itemize}
his experience of the proximity and the pointlessness of death which gives many of his stories that "slight air of melancholy" which he himself ascribes to the "influence of the rainy southern weather" of his childhood.\(^1\) On seeing the slaughtered revolutionaries in Chen-kan in 1911, the piles of heads and the strings of ears, he asked his father why this should be so, but the only answer he could get was "They revolted". "It is only now", he says, "that I realize that there has never been any lack of such things in the world, but nobody is able to give a little child a satisfactory answer".\(^2\)

Chen-kan was originally established as a military outpost from which to effect the pacification of the Miao tribes which occupied the area and are apparently still predominant there today.\(^3\) Shen was keenly interested in the Miao people, and later wrote many stories about them\(^4\). His contact with them, however, seems to have remained at a fairly superficial level. They were a

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1. "The Importance of Water to My Works"，Old Letters Reserved，Wen-li Ch'u-pan She, Hong Kong 1960, p.34.
constant and colourful element in his childhood environment, but he does not appear to have become closely involved with any of them personally. He mentions a Miao woman who nursed his baby brother back to health after a serious illness\(^1\), and he would often see Miao people at work in the town\(^2\), but the Miao territory proper lay in the hills over twenty li to the north-west\(^3\), and his visits there seem to have only been occasional adventures\(^4\). It seems likely that the source of most of his knowledge of these people was an elder cousin of his who lived half way between the town and Miao territory and had much to do with the Miaoos. When he came to town, Shen says, "he would tell me stories of the Miaoos, and when the time came for him to leave, I would always refuse to let him go"\(^5\). Shen must have made good use of these tales later, when he came to write his own stories about the Miaoos. He takes a romantic view of the characters in these stories, however, and the exotic quality he gives them is perhaps a measure of the superficiality of his knowledge. They are for him what the "noble savage"

\begin{enumerate}
  \item Autobiography, p.9.
  \item Ibid., p.15.
  \item Ibid., p.4.
  \item Ibid., p.42.
  \item Ibid., p.24.
\end{enumerate}
was for many in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries:

I am as free as nature first made man,
Ere the base laws of servitude began,
When wild in woods the noble savage ran. 1

But when he is content to depict the Miao people simply as he observed them in Chen-kan he writes from his own experience, and the Miaoos appear as colourful without being exotic:

And I could also see a dyer's shop, where the strong, sturdy Miao folk would be treading on the concave surface of the stone roller, standing tall and erect as they rocked from left to right. And then there was the shop where three Miao families made beancurd. The Miao women, with their small waists and white teeth, and their heads bound with coloured handkerchiefs, would always be singing softly to beguile the little Miao children wrapped up and strapped to their backs, as they scooped up the soybean juice with glistening copper ladles. 2

Chen-kan was a military town. The number of regular troops stationed there amounted to some six or seven thousand, outnumbering the resident civilian population by about a thousand 3. The "Green Banner" regulations, governing those Chinese troops which owed allegiance to the Manchus, were still in force here, "the only remnant

3. Ibid., p.4.
of the Green Garrison military system in China".1 There was no stigma attached to a military career here, for therein lay the only avenue of advancement for a young man, and consequently "everyone hoped to be a soldier".2 Shen's own family looked back with pride on the illustrious career of his grandfather Shen Hung-fu 沈洪富, who had been one of the young men leading the Chen-kan Division 湘軍 of the Hunan Army 湖南軍 in about 1860 to be given the title of Provincial Commander-in-chief 提督御 by the Ch'ing 清 government.3 At the age of about 22 he was Defence Commissioner 鎮守使 for Chaotung Prefecture in Yunnan. In 1863-4 he was Governor-General 總督 for Kweichow, but he was later wounded and had to return home, where he died.4 As a result of Hung-fu's achievements the Shen family became one of importance in the area.

Hung-fu naturally hoped that his son would follow in his footsteps, and according to Shen Ts'ung-wen his

1. Ibid. The Manchu army had been organized under eight "banners" of different colours, and these became the basis of the Manchu State administration. Loyal Chinese troops were placed under a separate, green banner and stationed at strategic points throughout China.

2. Ibid., p.47.

3. Ibid., p.6.

4. Ibid.
father did indeed show a truly military bearing and spirit. "Big, sturdy, brave and generous, straightforward: my father was fully endowed with all the natural qualities that a general needs". But unfortunately, a promising military career was interrupted by the death of his mother.¹ In 1900 Shen Ts'ung-wen's father was a colonel on the staff of the Provincial Commander-in-Chief who was responsible for the defence of the Ta-ku area in the Shantung peninsula. When the area fell to the Allied Army, the Commander-in-Chief committed suicide, and in the ensuing confusion Shen's father lost all the family valuables, which it was his habit to carry about with him. Thus more than half the family's property perished. After the fall of Peking, Shen's father returned home, and three years later Shen Ts'ung-wen was born. At that time he already had two elder sisters and an elder brother. "If it had not been for the Boxer Rebellion", he remarks, "my father would not have returned home, and I would not exist".²

Thereafter, although his father "dreamt only of becoming a general"³, and served in the army "in various places - Mongolia, the North-East, Tibet - by 1931 he was

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p.7.
3. Ibid., p.10.
still only a colonel 上校" 1. At first he had hoped that his second son, of whom he was extremely fond, would become something even more exalted than a general. However, says Shen, "he seems to have perceived early that I was no soldier, and no longer expected me to become a general." Nevertheless, "he told me stories of the great glory my grandfather had won through his daring, and a part of his experiences in 1900". 2 These stories must have given young Shen a favourable impression of soldierly virtues, and he always speaks with respect of men who exhibit them. He looks back nostalgically, for example, on the soldiers in the Chen-kan of his childhood. They would often fight, he says,

but...although it was not uncommon for them to kill one another, they would have nothing to do with assassination or secret plotting. These men, so skilled in fighting, formed a special class in this locality. They were broad-minded, tolerant, modest, comradely, ready to avenge wrongs done to their friends, generous, and as sons extraordinarily dutiful. But men like these were a product of their time, and after 1916 they gradually disappeared. 3

Shen himself, as he remarks, was no soldier. His artist's sensibility, his intelligence and his curiosity combined to exclude him from the straightforward and uncomplicated life of these men, despite his own years in

1. Ibid., p.11.
2. Ibid., p.10.
the army. Even in physique, unlike his father, he was small\(^1\) and, as a result of a childhood illness, thin\(^2\). Yet this only seems to have increased his admiration for the qualities he himself lacked and he is fascinated by men like his friend Tseng Ch'in-hsüan 鄭欽軒 \(^3\) with his coarseness, his boldness, his tall and soldierly appearance\(^4\); or like the former bandit chief Liu Yün-t'ing 劉雲亭, with his physical strength, his courage, his quickness in action, his simplicity of thought and feeling\(^5\). And he expresses his gratitude for the courage he himself got from his father\(^6\), and for the strong constitution he believes he acquired from his own life in the army\(^7\).

Chen-kan also has links with China's ancient literature, for "two thousand years ago the exiled minister of the kingdom of Ch'ū 楚, Ch'ū Yüan 趙原, boarded a little..."
plain wooden boat and travelled upstream along the Yuan River. 1 And travellers and merchants still followed his route, stopping at Chen-kan on the way to Kweichow and Szechwan. 2 When, after an absence of many years, Shen returned to Western Hunan in 1934, he thought again of Ch'U Yuan, observing boats which he assumed were identical with the one the poet had used, and noting that the "angelica" 6 was still to be seen everywhere 3. And again, in 1937, he attributes the beauty of Ch'U Yuan's poetry to the beauty of the countryside: "He merely came to this place and recorded its scenery". 4

As with everything connected with the traditional life of the countryside, Shen was keenly interested in local customs and folklore. 5 Here again he seems to have

1. Shen Ts'ung-wen, The Long River 長河, Wen-li Ch'u-pan She, Hong Kong, 1960, p.3.
3. Hunan Journey, p.17. Nine Songs 九歌, No.4, "The Lady of the Hsiang", 1.9: "The Yuan has its angelicas, the Li has its orchids". Translation by David Hawkes, Ch'u Tz'u: The Songs of the South, Oxford University Press, 1959, p.38.
been inspired by his birthplace, for Chen-kan, he says, "in all things preserved the purity of its customs, and the ancient traditions were scrupulously followed".  

Here the gods, who were honoured by all, had supreme authority, and government officials ranked next below them. Below the officials were the village elders, and lastly there were the shamans who served the gods. Each year there would be a sacrifice in the temple of the King of Heaven 天王廟, in which the whole town would participate, each family according to its means, offering sacrifices of pigs, sheep, dogs, fowls or fish, and seeking divine blessings on the town, its crops, livestock and children.

In spring and autumn, at the beginning and end of the harvest, the old men would collect money for a puppet show in honour of the gods of the soil and the grain社稷神. There were ceremonies to cure drought and to welcome spring, and at the end of every year an image of No Shen會生神 would be dressed in red and installed

1. Autobiography, p.3.
2. Ibid.
3. It was to see a puppet show that Shen first played truant. See "At Private School"私立校, SSM, Vol.19, No.1, Jan. 1928, p.91. And one of his stories, "Living" 生, is about an old puppeteer.
in everybody's home, while the Miao shamans, also "wearing bright blood-red clothes, would blow horns of chased silver, and would leap, sing and dance with bronze knives, to please the god".1

The inhabitants of the town were mostly soldiers, but there were a number of merchants from other provinces: cloth-sellers from Kiangsi, tobacco-sellers from Fukien, and sellers of medicines from Kwangtung.2 The surrounding land was fertile, and on the slopes immediately outside the town grew tung-trees and shan trees,3 and pine forests rich in mushrooms. Cinnabar and silver were mined there, and saltpetre was abundant in the caves. To the south-east the land was watered by a large river, and rice and mandarines flourished there.4 But the land in the opposite direction was mountainous Miao territory, where "the shan trees, with their overpowering deep green


2. Autobiography, p.3.

3. 椒樹未梢 : Aleurites cordata, from which comes tung-oil, and Cunninghamia sinensis, a kind of pine tree valued for its wood.

4. The mandarines grown along the Yüan River play a large part in The Long River. See below, pp.411-414.
which they retained throughout the year, grew in profusion everywhere". Here too there was a crystal-clear stream, full of all kinds of fish - a recurring image in Shen's works. From the mountains this stream flowed south-eastwards, circled the north wall of Chen-kan, and continued south till it met the Ch'en River. Along its shores were to be found the riverside dwellers' houses with their beautiful smiling women, which appear elsewhere in Shen's stories and essays.

It was in just such a small town that I grew up. I first left it when I was about fifteen. I went back on one occasion after two and a half years of travel, and from that day to this I had never re-entered its gates. Yet the place is familiar to me. There are still many people living in that little town now, but I shall always live in the memories it once gave to me.

Shen Ts'ung-wen was the fourth child in his family, being preceded by two sisters and a brother. Eventually there were to be nine children in the family, but by the time he came to write his Autobiography in 1934 four of them had died. His father, Shen says, was extremely fond of him, and was the first to praise his intelligence.

2. According to Shen, ibid. A map shows it running parallel to the Ch'en and flowing into the Yuan.
3. 1934.
5. Ibid., p.7.
But when he discovered that I was spending all day away from school, roaming around in the sun with a band of little ruffians, and that there was no way of restraining my young heart or of preventing my cunning lies, his soldier's heart was truly hurt by my behaviour.¹

After this he must have transferred most of his affection and attention to Ts'ung-wen's young brother, who already showed signs of having inherited the soldierly character that had apparently passed Ts'ung-wen by, although he was still only four years old. "Nor did he belie the family's hopes afterwards, for at the age of twenty-two he became a colonel in the infantry."² After the Revolution of 1911, Shen's father left for Peking, and the two of them did not meet again for twelve years.³

Shen seems to have often been troubled by a sense of having disappointed his father, and of having let down the family traditions. This may be why he frequently shows a self-defensive pride in the fact that his youth was spent in army service, and claims to have been toughened by his military training, although at other times he complains of poor health. The feelings of inferiority in the presence of his young brother which he exhibits in the 1931 story "Tiger Cub" are also no doubt

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.32.
to be traced to this period in his childhood. Shen evidently had a great affection for his father, and was deeply distressed by his inability to please him. He makes this clear in his account of his first chastisement for truancy\(^1\), where his father treats him kindly and is more distressed by his lying than his truancy, while Shen himself, though stricken with guilt, proves unable to resist the impulses which lead him into a continually repeated cycle of sinning, punishment and repentance.

Shen's artistic sensibilities, which he seems to have shared to some extent with his elder brother\(^2\), may have been inherited from his mother. At any rate, it was she who began his education, and in his Autobiography he acknowledges his debt to her and the influence she had on him:

My mother's surname was Huang 華, and when she was very young she went with one of her brothers into a military camp to live. She saw a great many things and she seems also to have been slightly better-read than my father. So the first steps in the education of all us children were entirely the responsibility of this thin, quick-witted mother of ours, who was so rich in courage and in general knowledge. It was no inconsiderable part of my education that I got from my mother. She taught me to read, to recognize the names of medicines, and to be decisive: for it is essential that a man have the ability to make decisions.

The influence which my father had on my character was small by comparison, and my mother's influence was greater.\(^1\)

He also credits his mother with special insight into his character and the future that lies ahead for him, and he speaks of her compassion for him at the time of his disastrous love-affair in Yüanchow, where she had come, with his elder sister, to live with him. "My mother said nothing at all", he says, after his foolish refusal of the advantageous marriage that had been offered to him. "She seems to have long known how much hardship it was my lot still to suffer"\(^2\). And finally, when he decided to abandon everything and leave Yüanchow, his mother "wept over this affair for a very long time....simply because it broke her heart to think of this countryman's temperament of mine, which ensured that no matter where I went I would be unable to avoid being worsted"\(^3\). Shen himself shares his mother's belief, but accepts his lot in a fatalistic spirit, for "what means has a countryman got of resisting what fate sends him?"\(^4\)

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1. Ibid., p.8.
2. Ibid., p.95.
3. Ibid., p.97.
4. Ibid., p.95.
By and large however, Shen's intelligence and his stubborn individualism prevented his family and his social environment from dominating his life, just as they were later to keep him from being swept away by the fashionable political and literary currents of the day. The native obstinacy to which he confessed in 1957 showed itself early in the persistent truancy which first set a breach between him and his family. "Of course," he says, "as a rule my family...did not understand the situation very clearly". His father, infuriated by his behaviour, once threatened to cut off one of his fingers, but Shen was not afraid and continued to go his own way. By the time he decided to enter the army at the age of nearly fourteen, his elder brother had gone away to look for his father, and his behaviour, he says, had become so wild that his mother could no longer think of any way of controlling him.

Shen is proud of his independence of mind, which he sees as part of his character as a "countryman" and as an artist. "I observe everything", he says, "but I never go on to determine the worth of my loves and hates by

1. SF, Preface, p.4.
3. Ibid., p.10.
4. Ibid., p.47.
applying conventional social values to them".\(^1\) This individualism is apparent in all his work: "All one's work must have individuality, must be steeped in the personality and feelings of the author....the manners and styles that are currently fashionable in society may all be set aside and ignored"\(^2\). Or again: "I seem to have always been naturally opposed to every fixed rule."\(^3\) His stubborn independence of such external influences accounts for the integrity and consistency of his work, but it was to cause him much suffering in the years to come, when he found himself out of step with most of his contemporaries, and in the end he was obliged to repent of his "rustic" ways, for there is no place for "bourgeois individualism" in a Communist society, where "every.... revolutionary artist or writer should follow the example of Lu Hsün and be the ox for the proletariat and the mass of the people, 'bending his back to the burden until he breathes his last'".\(^4\) So Shen confesses in the preface to his **Selected Fiction**:

> Since social changes have been exceptionally severe, while the pattern of my life and work

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1. Ibid., p.93.
has remained extremely narrow and resistant
to change, and, what is more, my thought has
been conservative and obstinate, it is natural
that this should have caused my work to fall
further and further behind social realities
so that in truth I seem to have become a pupil
kept back in a remedial school from which I
will never graduate.1

B. Schooldays

Shen claims that his earliest memory is a faint re-
collection of the funeral of his paternal grandmother,
who died when he was only about four months old.2 "From
roughly the age of two", he says, "I can recall everything
of my childhood exactly".3 When he was about four, his
mother began his education, his maternal grandmother
apparently plying him with pieces of sugar as rewards
for learning. Up till then he had been a plump and
sturdy child, but under this treatment, he says, "by the
time I had learnt six hundred characters, I had worms in
my stomach, and they made me abnormally sallow and thin".4
By this time he was about eight years old,5 and had al-
ready begun attending school with his two sisters, but

1. SF, Preface, p.4.
3. Ibid., p.9.
4. Ibid.
since his teacher was a relative, and he was still so young, he "probably spent much less time reading at my desk than I did playing on her lap".1

At the age of six he and his young brother, who was then two years old, had both caught measles at the same time, and it was expected that they would die. However, although two small coffins had already been prepared for them, they both recovered, and the "big, sturdy Miao woman" whom the family hired to look after Shen's brother soon nursed her charge back to health, and he became, in fact, "uncommonly robust". Shen Ts'ung-wen, however, remained thin.2 A year or two later, he began to attend private school. He was the youngest pupil there, but since he already knew many characters and had a good memory, he was in no way at a disadvantage with the other older pupils.

The school was held in a large barn, beneath which rabbits had their burrows and the children liked to hide and play, and was run by Shen's maternal aunt. There were seventeen pupils, of which Shen was the youngest, smallest, boldest3, probably the brightest4, and, as it

2. Ibid.
4. His teacher called him a "child prodigy"神童 : ibid., p.90.
turned out, also the naughtiest. He was a pupil here for a year and a half, during which time the class completed the study of the *Yu-hsüeh Ch'üeh-lin* 幼學瓊林 1, the *Mencius* 孟子, and three sections of the *Book of Songs* 《詩經》. 2 It did not take Shen long, however, to discover that what went on inside the classroom was less interesting than what went on outside, and that books were chiefly useful as screens behind which he could doze unseen by the teacher.3

Thus Shen began to play truant, with such persistence that his father finally despaired of him. He was withdrawn from the school, and his father left him entirely in the hands of his mother, who sent him to a newly-established district primary school.4 The transfer made little difference to his behaviour, however, and he continued to seek his knowledge outside rather than inside the classroom. Consequently, he calls the chapter which he devotes to his early schooldays in his *Autobiography* "I Study a Big Book, and at the Same Time I also Study a Little Book", the little book being the one written with words and the

1. An anthology of biographies, anecdotes and general information, written in simple language and systematically arranged under various headings.
big book being the larger world of nature and human life.

Although he was to make writing his vocation he never lost his sense of the distinction between the two kinds of "book", or of their relative importance. It is bound up with the contrast he makes between the two types of the "countryman" and the "citydweller", which came to dominate his view of the world. On the one hand, there is the citydweller, the "student" whose thoughts and feelings are nourished only by books, and who therefore "suffers from spiritual malnutrition"; and, on the other hand, there are those who, by their closeness to nature and their intimate and wide knowledge of the realities of human experience, have gained a depth of wisdom and a richness of feeling and language far beyond the capacities of the former. The contrast between these two types is a constant theme in his writings. Even after he had himself become a student and then a teacher in the city, he did not forget which "book" he was really a student of:

Twenty-five years ago I came to this great city with the intention of doing a little study. As it turned out, I studied very few good books written with words; what I read through was, as before, that great book written with the affairs of men. Now (1947) I have again been appointed to come and

teach\textsuperscript{1}. To tell the truth, if the books are merely confined to the sort that are written with words, my appointment comes close to making a mockery of respect for learning...\textsuperscript{2}

Hence, then, the importance that Shen places on his early school-years, noting that they "formed the basis of my character and feelings for the rest of my life".\textsuperscript{3} It was at this time that he first began to sense the inadequacy of the written word, for "in the books that we read to death (at school), I was truly unable to discover the slightest trace of anything that a sturdy and lively child might need".\textsuperscript{4} At the same time he also discovered the larger and more interesting "book" outside the school, and began to play truant regularly and tell lies, undeterred by punishment and threats.

When his family saw that he was not going to mend his ways, they despaired of him and began to take more interest in his young brother. As a consequence, Shen was left with more freedom. He was greatly influenced at this time by a cousin who was his constant companion and guide in his ramblings, who

\begin{itemize}
\item[1.] Literally "teach books" 教書. For the appointment, cp. below, p.444.
\item[2.] "Actuality", SP, p.104.
\item[3.] Autobiography, p.10.
\item[4.] "At Private School", p.98.
\end{itemize}
led me to play truant from school, and encouraged me to go in the sunshine and learn to know the subtle lights and strange forms of this vast universe, and the activities of all its myriad creatures. He began to take me with him everywhere to play: to the orange and grapefruit orchards at his home, up into the hills, with crowds of all sorts of wild youngsters, and beside the water. He taught me to tell lies, to use one kind of lie with the family and another kind of lie with the schoolteacher, and he beguiled me into running everywhere with him.1

His cousin was partly responsible also for young Shen's introduction to another "influence" of considerable importance, namely, the water in the river where the children used to go to bathe. Shen's emotions at this time, he says, were "fluid and not fixed", and he was aware of an affinity with the water which was to last throughout his life:

When I was very young, the lovelier part of my life was for the most part inseparable from water. In learning to recognize beauty, in learning to think, water has been of the greatest importance to me.2

A preoccupation with rivers and streams, with boatmen and waterfronts, is in fact apparent in all his writings, and these things form the background or provide the subject matter for much of his fiction. One of his autobiographical essays, "The Importance of Water to my Works", is devoted to this theme, and it begins by making

1. Ibid., p.11.
2. Ibid., pp.11-12.
the same general point:

In my Autobiography I have mentioned the various impressions given me by the water: eavesdrip, tiny streams and the boundless immensity of the sea—all were of the greatest help to me. It was thanks to water that I learnt to use my young brain to think about everything, and it was thanks to water again that my knowledge of the universe took on a little depth.¹

Shen's truancy dashed any hopes of scholastic achievement that his obvious intelligence may have aroused:

I was by no means stupid... I understood things better than any of the other children. But ever since that elder cousin taught me to play truant, I became utterly without self-respect.... (Because of) my disinclination to study, my teacher, my family, and my relations all felt that there was not much hope for me.²

His only talent at this time, he says, was for telling lies:

My first study, and at the same time the one I found most use for, was the fabrication of all sorts of lies based on my varied experiences.³

There is a foreshadowing here of the literary talent he was later to show, and also of his creative methods, for the deliberate quest for "varied experiences" to serve as raw material for his fiction is characteristic of Shen. Indeed, the resemblance between his autobiographical narratives and his fiction is often very close. Many of

¹. Old Letters Preserved, p.31. Cp. also below, pp.309,487.
³. Ibid.
his stories, as will be seen are clearly based on the people and places he encountered in the first twenty years of his life, or on actual incidents that he witnessed. On the other hand some of his autobiographical works are presented as self-contained stories, while others contain incidents and character studies which would only require a little polishing and elaboration to become typical Shen Ts'ung-wen stories. Shen himself remarks on what he sees as the fabulous quality of his life and the people and places he has seen. In an essay, "The Hsiung Mansion in Chihkiang District", he speaks of a serialized translation of the Arabian Nights 天方夜譯 which he read in the Ta-lu Monthly 太陸月報, and which made a great impression on him. "But," he adds, "if the truth be told, the places and doings, the manners and customs dealt with in this little essay of mine will soon have become an Arabian Nights in the eyes of the younger generation". Similarly, in the 1945 story "Housewife" 主婦 , when one of his children demands a copy of the Arabian Nights for a present, Shen recommends his Autobiography instead.

1. See below, p.104.
2. SP, p.113.
3. SP, p.41.
Already in his early childhood, then, he saw the world about him with an artist's eye:

My heart would leap up at each fresh sound, colour and smell. I had to get to know life outside my own life. My wisdom had to be gained directly from life, for a good book or a fine phrase would not teach it to me. 1

So he commenced his career as a student of human activities, and he became a keen observer of rope-makers, basket-weavers, perfume-makers, and the like 2, and in this way he made a great many adult friends. His parents, however, understood none of this, and merely blamed his teacher for being too lenient.

For punishment, in addition to the usual heating before the ancestral tablet of Confucius, to which he had to bow in order to show his repentance, young Ts'ung-wen would sometimes be made to kneel with a stick of incense, which he had to hold till it was burnt up. The effect of this punishment on his mind, however, was not what was intended, and he was later to feel grateful for it, for "it gave me an opportunity of training my imagination when I had no way of being close to nature":

As I knelt for punishment in a corner of the room, I would remember all sorts of things, and my imagination seemed to have grown wings....Depending on whether the weather was cold or warm, I would think of the way the mandarin fish flopped about after they had been hooked and taken out of the water, of

2. Ibid., p.13; "The Importance of Water to my Works", p.33.
how the sky had been full of flying kites, of
the song of the yellow orioles in their
mountain haunts, of the profusion of fruits
strung on the trees....

The keen powers of observation and vivid imagination
which Shen displays here, he was never to lose. The
tendency to seek refuge from unpleasant realities in the
inner world of the imagination may also have remained
with him, and one is reminded that he has been called an
escapist. Certainly there is no doubt that while Shen
finds observing the phenomena of the external world to
be an activity rewarding in itself, his main concern is
generally with the effect of such observation on the inner
man - as is shown, for example, by the importance which
he attaches to the memories that Chen-kan gave him, or
by the following passage describing his reaction to the
sea:

After a further five years, I moved from dry
Peking to a bright and beautiful spot by the
sea. The sea is so vast, so limitless, that
I had more chance of contemplating distant
prospects of human existence. It is so quiet
by the sea that it has fostered my sense of

2. Vincent C.Y. Shih, "Shen Ts'ung-wen the Escapist",
3. Autobiography, p.93: "What I never tire of is looking
   at everything." Cp. also below, pp.481-3.
solitude. The sea has enlarged my feelings and my hopes, and also my character.1

In a striking passage in his Autobiography Shen effectively sums up his response to his childhood environment, and tells how the world simultaneously fed his curiosity, his senses, and his imagination:

My life was full of questions, to all of which I had to seek out the answers myself. I wanted to know so much, and I actually knew so little, that at times I would feel a bit despondent. In the daytime I went everywhere in the open air, watching, listening, smelling. The smell of dead snakes or of rotting hay, the body-odour of butchers, the smell that the earthen kilns in the place where the pottery was fired gave off after rain: I would have had at the time no means of describing these in words, if I had been asked to do so, but to distinguish them would have been perfectly easy for me. The sound of bats, the sighing sound made by the yellow ox as the butcher's knife cut into its throat, the hissing of the big yellow-throated snakes hiding in holes in the earthen dykes that divided the fields, the faint plopping sound that fish made on the surface of the water in the dark: because each of these sounds impinged with a different weight on my ear, I can still recall them with perfect distinctness. And so, when I returned home, I would dream in the night countless strange and wonderful dreams. Even now, twenty years later, these dreams often prevent me from sleeping peacefully in the middle of the night, since they not only carry me back into the emptiness of the "past", they also carry me on into a universe of fantasy.

The world before me had now grown wide enough, but I seemed to need a world that was even wider. I had to make use of the knowledge I had got from the one to resolve my questions

1. "The Importance of Water to my Works", p.34.
in the other. I had to tell by comparing them the good from the bad. I had to see a great many new things in the world that I had already become aware of as a result of my fondness both for questioning others and for imagining things to myself. Consequently, when I was able to run away from school I did so, and when I was not, I could only dream.1

His curiosity about the world, the thirst for knowledge that was eventually to take him to Peking, was unwittingly stimulated by his parents when they transferred him to a new school which was further away from his home than the old one had been. For this meant that he now had some excuse for being late, and so he was able to take his time every morning, studying the sights that met his eyes on the way: the huge spectacles of the needle-grinder, the busy apprentices in the umbrella-shop, the hairy patch on the fat cobbler's dark-skinned belly, the barber's shop, the dyer's and the beancurd shop, the drying racks hung with white noodles on top of the booming flour-mill, the freshly-chopped pork still twitching on the butchers' tables, the coloured paper demons, dragons and sedan chairs that were made for ceremonial occasions2. "I liked to watch these things", he says, "and as I watched, I learnt a great deal".3

2. Ibid., p:15.
3. Ibid.
Sometimes less pleasant things would claim his attention, and he would go past the execution grounds near the prison, pausing to examine the corpses and the wild dogs that fed on them, and perhaps throwing a stone at the "filthy head" of a corpse, or poking at it with a stick "to see if it could move or not".

He seems to have taken a special interest in the technicalities of the various crafts that he saw people practising. He is proud of the practical knowledge he acquired in this way, for it is part of his character as a "countryman", and helps set him apart from the city-dweller or the literary man who derives a purely abstract knowledge from books. So, for example he liked to watch the slaughtering of the cattle outside the southern city gate, and he claims that it was not long before he had a thorough understanding of the process of dismemberment and the position of the animals' various internal organs. He also watched the old basket-weavers at their work, and he claims to be still more expert at basket-weaving than at writing. The blacksmith's shop, like the iron foundry later at Huaihua, seems to have particularly pleased him. He delights in the colours and sounds

1. Ibid., p.16.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.17.
produced by working the metal, in the rushing of the bellows, the clouds of smoke and the showers of sparks. Here again he soon became familiar with all the details of the craft.\textsuperscript{1}

Despite his persistent truancy, he managed to avoid falling seriously behind at school by reason of his intelligence and his good memory. He knew that he was cleverer than the other children, and it "only made me despise school all the more because there I was treated like everybody else".\textsuperscript{2} He could not understand why his parents only wanted him to study and would not let him play, while his parents for their part failed to understand why he would not apply his obvious intelligence to his studies. But he considered study too easy. He could see nothing remarkable about learning a few characters (for the schools he attended were still the old-style ones, where learning was almost entirely by rote). The questions that filled his life were of a much more fascinating kind:

\begin{quote}
Why did the mule have to have its eyes covered when it turned the mill? Why could the knife, when it had become red hot, be hardened by being plunged into water? Why was the man who carved the images of the Buddhas able to carve wood into the likeness of a man, and what method did he use to make the gold that
\end{quote}

\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., p.17.
\item Ibid., p.21.
\end{enumerate}
he stuck on them so thin? Why was the little coppersmith able to drill such a round hole in a bar of copper, and engrave the ornamentation as neatly as he did? There were very many strange things like this.¹

Forty ¹li or so to the south of Chen-kan, where three of Shen's father's cousins lived, tigers were to be found. His father had nearly been eaten by one there when he was three years old, and Shen himself, on his first visit there at the age of about four, saw a dead tiger being carried into town - a sight which deeply impressed him.² More interesting than his three relatives here, however, was the cousin already mentioned³, a "purple-faced" soldier who lived ten ¹li to the north, halfway to Miao territory. When he was four, Shen had visited this man also for a few days, and again he was left with a vivid impression: "After twenty years I still remember the sound of drums and bugles at dusk in that tiny fortified town."⁴

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p.24.
3. Above, p.5.
4. Autobiography, p.24. Shen was to put the memory to effective use at the end of his story "The Day Before Absconding" (below, p. 244). Bugles also play a part in most of his writings about soldiers.
This cousin participated in the abortive rebellion that took place in Fenghwang in 1911 as part of the general uprising in south and central China that was to end in the overthrow of the Ch'ing dynasty. For once, when he came to town shortly beforehand, he ignored young Ts'ung-wen's usual eager questions. Instead, he engaged Shen's father in earnest and mysterious conversation. Large quantities of white cloth were bought, presumably for flags or armbands, and it was decided to send Ts'ung-wen's brothers into Miao territory with the nurse, while his sisters fled to the hills with his cousin, until the danger was past. Shen himself preferred to remain in town with his father, for he did not want to miss out on the excitement.

On the evening of the second day after this, knives were sharpened, guns were cleaned, and there was much animated talk and nervous laughter. The revolt finally broke out at night. Shen slept through the fighting, and woke the next morning to find all the men except his father absent. Everyone was pale and spoke in hushed voices. His father informed him that "we" had been defeated, and several thousand men had been killed. An uncle came in to report that there was a huge pile of human heads, over four hundred, and a great string of ears in front of the yamen. Shen, remembering his father's
stories about killing the "Long Hairs"\textsuperscript{1} was anxious to go and have a look. His father took him, and the first thing he saw was the string of ears. "Truly," he says, "so strange a thing is not easily seen more than once in a lifetime!"\textsuperscript{2} When they came to the heads he was asked if he was afraid, but he denied it. He adds:

\begin{quote}
I was in no way afraid, but I did not understand why these men had let the soldiers cut them down. I was a bit doubtful, and I thought that there must have been some mistake.\textsuperscript{3}
\end{quote}

This was Shen's first taste of the cruelty and bloodshed that he was often to witness in the coming years. "I saw," he says in connection with the executions in Huaihua\textsuperscript{4}, "a great many of the stupidities perpetrated by so-called humanity, things that are simply indescribable."\textsuperscript{5}

From another point of view, however, he accepted these things as a natural part of the human scene, for as an artist his attitude is essentially amoral:

\begin{quote}
I have no great understanding of the beauty of ethical principles. When close to human life, my feelings have always been those of an artist, and never those of what people call a moralist.\textsuperscript{5}
\end{quote}

\begin{enumerate}
\item The Taiping rebels of the 1850s and 1860s.
\item Autobiography, p.29.
\item Ibid.
\item Below, pp.78-9, 84.
\item Autobiography, p.72.
\item Ibid., p.93.
\end{enumerate}
Even such "unspeakable" things, then, may be seen by the artist as adding something indispensable to the harmony of the whole, just as darkness is necessary to balance light in a picture. Without this darker element, life may become impoverished and lacking in depth and richness. So, after mentioning the indescribable stupidities he witnessed in Huaihua, he continues:

These experiences impressed themselves on my mind, and for the rest of my life prevented my feelings from being in sympathy with the loves and hates of townsfolk. There, and elsewhere, I have seen brutal deeds that the average person has never seen, heard cries that the average person has never heard, and smelt odours that the average person has never smelt; and so I have never been able to take much interest in the views of what is good and evil in human conduct that are produced by the constricted, commonplace and timid life of the citydweller, and whenever I have come to live in the city it has made me feel melancholy and oppressed and as though I were no longer truly human.¹

The slaughter in Fenghwang that resulted from the battle was only the beginning. Now men were regularly dragged into town from the countryside, questioned briefly, then taken outside the city walls and decapitated. A hundred or more people were killed in this way every day, most of them, according to Shen, simple countryfolk who had no idea what was going on until they saw the executioner's sword. "This stupid slaughter", he says, "continued

¹. Ibid., p.72.
for about a month. Because the coldness of the weather effectively prevented decay, burial was not an urgent matter, and the corpses that were allowed to pile up beside the river generally numbered four or five hundred. At last some of the influential local gentry appealed to higher authorities for some limit to be set to the killing, or for some sense of discrimination to be applied. So the fate of those arrested came to be decided by lot. Two blocks of bamboo were cast, giving the prisoner two chances out of three of regaining his freedom. Those who were to live would then go to the right and those who were to die would go to the left.

While this killing continued, young Shen Ts'ung-wen would climb the city wall at every opportunity in order to watch the executions, or, if the executions were already over, he and his friends would compete in counting the corpses. At other times they would go and watch the lots being cast:

I watched those countrymen, and how they would close their eyes, as they threw the pieces of bamboo they held in their hands with all their might. Some did not dare open their eyes even when they were already due to be freed. And I watched others too, who, although they were to die, still thought of the children, calves, pigs and sheep at home; and their air of dejection and resentment against the gods

1. Ibid., p.30.
was truly something I will never be able to forget. Such were the things that my first knowledge of "life" was gained from.¹

In the third month of the second year after this, the local revolution succeeded, and white flags with Han (i.e. Chinese, as distinct from Manchu) written on them were hung up everywhere. Shen's father now became a man of importance in the district, and his brothers and sisters returned from Miao territory. His house was filled with soldiers coming and going, and with people he had never seen before. Among them however was his cousin, whom he had feared was dead. There was a meeting of the whole town at the Temple of the King of Heaven, where his father gave a speech. His father had hoped to be selected as representative for the Changsha Conference, but he was defeated by another man, whereupon he left home outraged and went to Peking. That was the last Shen saw of him until twelve years later, when they met briefly at Shenchow (Yuanling). After that, Shen says, "I did not see him again"². He must have had news of him afterwards, however, for he mentions that he was a colonel in 1931³ and that he died in his native district, apparently in the same year, from a mild illness.⁴ At the time of his

1. Ibid., p.31.
2. Ibid., p.32.
father's departure from Chen-kan, Shen's youngest sister, the ninth child, was three months old.

The Revolution brought some changes to Chen-kan. The army was reorganized, and new weapons were introduced. The local officials were replaced, and the District Magistrate and Defence Commissioner were now local men. "But the only impressions of the Revolution that remain unforgettably in my memory are a few pictures, their colours still fresh, concerning those several thousand slaughtered, guiltless peasants".¹

In about the third year of the Republic (1914-1915) a new-style school was opened in Chen-kan, to which Shen Ts'ung-wen was transferred in the following year. Under the new dispensation, the children were no longer to be forced to learn the Classics by rote, nor were they to be beaten at will. They were allowed time off to play during school hours, and had one day's holiday a week. "Because of this", Shen says, "I no longer needed to run away from school."² Despite this, however, the pattern of his education remained the same. He still had no interest in school studies and cared only for fighting, playing games, climbing the city walls, and roaming through the town to watch the various craftsmen at their

¹. Ibid., p.33.
². Ibid., p.34.
work. After half a year, his mother, acting on the advice of a relative, had him transferred from the second junior primary school within the town to the first primary school outside it. Shen himself was delighted with the change, for his new school was near the mountains and was surrounded by trees. The discipline was anything but strict, for two of his cousins were among the teachers, and if he wanted leave to go and do or see something interesting, he could easily obtain it.

As usual, he learnt little inside the school apart from how to carve names in the desks and make comical clay models of the teachers, but his extra-curricular studies progressed rapidly, thanks to the school's stimulating environment. From his enthusiasm for climbing he came to learn the names of about thirty different kinds of trees, and from his frequent falls and cuts he became familiar with a variety of medicinal herbs. He discovered how to catch fish and gather bamboo shoots and edible bracken, and he became familiar with many different fruits and birds. Since there was a kiln not far away, he also became familiar with the process of making pottery from clay. Now, instead of watching the craftsmen in the town, he studied the hired labourers as they harvested the grain. In this way he learnt to distinguish the various kinds of shoots, and to recognize the different
kinds of harmful insects and the various sorts of grasshopper that he caught. He now knew how to catch carp and bastard carp in a chicken basket, and how to cook them. He became well-informed about fighting-cocks, which he and the other boys would borrow from the tenant farmers in order to stage their own fights in town. He learnt how to make whistles from tung-tree bark and trumpets from bamboo. Sometimes he would catch a hedgehog or kill a big snake, and at other times he would go pheasant-hunting in the hills with the farmers. At the end of autumn and the beginning of winter he would go with them again, as they hunted for wild pigs and the yellow musk-deer, or foxes.

School ended at three p.m. and the children would run off to play. Sometimes they would climb the town wall and sit on the brass cannons as they gazed out over the countryside or threw stones towards the river. Or else they would play at wrestling and somersaults, or have mock battles on "horseback" - the bigger children being the horses. At other times they would be drawn inevitably to the river, perhaps to torment a woodcutter by stealing his unattended boat and waiting in midstream for him to return, or perhaps, if the water level was low and they could cross the river by stepping-stones, to play in the Miao orchard on the opposite shore. When the
weather was hot, everybody would go down to the river after four o'clock in the afternoon for a swim. Some would bring their whole family, including the children, the watchdog and the ducklings. At such times, however, Shen and his friends would go further upstream where there were fewer people and the water was deeper. Naturally his family disapproved of his swimming in deep water, for they were always afraid that a moment's carelessness might see him drowned, so his elder brother had the responsibility of supervising him. Shortly after Shen had gone out to play after dinner in the afternoon, his elder brother would make his way down to the river. If he could not see Ts'ung-wen in the water, he would look for his clothes on the shore, and, when he had found them, would take them up to the roadside and sit down to wait. Ts'ung-wen then had no way of avoiding his punishment. Sooner or later he would have to approach his brother and get his clothes back, and the two of them would return home in silence. Before long, however, Ts'ung-wen learnt to hide his clothes under a stone, and whenever his friends warned him that his brother was coming, he would swim out into midstream and make himself as inconspicuous as possible by floating there with only his face showing above the surface of the water. His brother would recognize his schoolmates and call out, asking if
they had seen Ts'ung-wen, but they would call back: "We
don't know. Can't you see the clothes? Can't you count
us?"

So this good soul would look about everywhere,
and when he could not in fact see my clothes,
he would believe that the answer my friends
had given him was no lie. He would stand
there, enjoying the view of the river for a
while, and then bend down to pick up a couple
of glistening shells and contemplate their
beauty for a moment with his sad artist's
eyes that always seemed on the verge of weep­­
ing. Or else he would sit down and take out
a sketchbook and amuse himself by doing a
couple of simple sketches of the river scene,
whistling as he did so, and then he would
walk back up towards the road he had come by.1

After he had gone, Ts'ung-wen and his friends would
mock him by exchanging questions and answers among them­selves: "Hsiung Li-nan, Yin Chien-yüan, have you seen
my brother?" "We don't know, we don't know. Can't you
see for yourself how many clothes there are here?"2
Sometimes, however, he was not so easily deceived, and
would sit somewhere out of sight, waiting patiently till
his young brother walked past on his way home, when he
would spring out and grab him by the collar, to the great
amusement of the latter's young companions.

Nevertheless, Ts'ung-wen was growing older and strong­­
er, and had to be given more rights and greater freedom.

1. Ibid., p.41.
2. Ibid.
On Sundays he and his friends would go further upstream to a place called Coffin Pool 椐木潭, where they would spend the day swimming and fishing. Sometimes there would be a fair in the Miao country on that day, and they would go there to listen to the bargaining as the pigs and cattle were sold, to watch the gambling, and to feel the leopard- and tiger-skins and hear the tales of the animals' capture. They would also admire the fowls, making a note of the cocks that were going to be sold to the soldiers and merchants in the town for cock-fighting, and sometimes they would witness a fight between two Miaos with flat sticks or knives. On the river there were many boats and rafts, and on them they would see "the young Miao women with their long eyebrows and fine eyes, their very pale faces and full breasts." ¹

It was at this time that Shen acquired a taste for gambling. He discovered the fascination of dice games by watching others, and the money that was left over after he had bought the vegetables every morning first gave him the opportunity to join in. It was not long before he became skilled at the game, and was able to use the whole of his vegetable money without running too great a risk. If he happened to be unlucky, he could generally cover up by secretly persuading his grandmother to give him some

¹. Ibid., p.42.
money or by buying a few less vegetables. His chief interest, however, was not in winning or losing but in the excitement of the game itself, and he asked for nothing better than to finish with the same amount of money that he had begun with. The only thing that spoilt his enjoyment was the fear of getting caught by his brother, for then he was punished severely. His hands were bound and he was thoroughly whipped and made to go for half a day or even a whole day without food. His relatives felt sorry for him when they saw this, considering that one should not treat one's brother so harshly, but the responsibility of taking his father's place as head of the household no doubt weighed heavily on Shen's brother. Shen himself always speaks of him with affection and he excuses him here, saying that he himself did not know at the time how much distress his behaviour, "going off to gamble with some beggars, with no regard for 'face'", caused his family.1

His family looked with no more favour on the coarse language he acquired from his gambling companions at this time. In the long run, however, this was to prove a more useful skill, for "fifteen years later, when I became capable of writing stories based on my many-sided experiences, these coarse and vulgar expressions were very

useful to me, adding life to the characters in my stories".\(^1\)

It is not solely a question here of adding local colour, or making the speech of his characters more realistic. Shen also seems to have admired the speech of the country-folk for its intrinsic vividness and liveliness, and even for its robust coarseness. This is particularly so where boatmen are concerned, and in his return to western Hunan many years later, he seems to have been particularly impressed, as with the gamblers of his childhood, with their capacity for swearing, and he mentions it more than once:

> While the two sailors worked they would compose abusive rhymes in coarse language for their own amusement, with the inevitable curses for the foul weather and for the sailors who had been able yesterday evening to make their way with flickering torches to the pile-houses and their liaisons with the broad-faced, big-breasted women.\(^2\)

More is involved, of course, than the purely mechanical use of swear-words, which, he says, the boatmen would use "just as we use punctuation marks in writing: if one forgot to add them, one's meaning could easily become confused and unclear".\(^3\) Their language was richer than this, and in an essay he goes so far as to say that "if there is still something noteworthy in my style of

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1. Ibid., p.46.
3. Ibid., p.51.
writing, it is only because I have remembered a great deal of the speech of those who live on the water." It is the old story of the superiority of the countryman over the city-dweller and the literary man, this time reflected in the use of language.

Here again Shen's ideal may be illustrated by his friend Tseng Ch'in-hsüan, a "remarkable man", in whose "speech and action alike there was refinement amid coarseness", and in whose "mouth were blended elegance and vulgarity". Like the gamblers and the boatmen, Tseng delighted in swearing, and from him too Shen felt that he learnt much that was to prove valuable to him as an author:

As he spoke of all these women (that he had seduced), each one seemed to have a distinctly individual character, and yet he used only a few sentences of the most apt and vivid language with which to depict them. Later, when I wrote much fiction and sketched certain types of unmentionable young women, that I managed to catch their true likeness, that they spoke naturally, and beautifully - this was largely because I had had the benefit of hearing my friend's narratives....As far as the use of richly colloquial language and ambiguous figures of speech in my work is concerned, I have also learnt a great deal from listening to him.

1. "The Importance of Water to my Works", p.34.
2. Above, p.10.
4. Ibid., p.2.
The important thing about such language for Shen is that it is a living thing, unlike the dead words in books with which scholars are preoccupied:

I have never yet met any scholar who understood the use of Chinese sayings and proverbs better than this friend. Everything he said was alive, and even casual remarks and swearwords would have their proper sources and fit the context perfectly. His speech displayed a rich flow of similes which seemed as truly inexhaustible as the waters of the Great (i.e. the Yellow) River. Staying in the inn, (which Tseng owned), and listening to him cursing the servants, it made me think of all those gentlemen inside the gates of Peking compiling big dictionaries, and of how many books they had cut up, leafing backwards and forwards through the Shuei Hu (Chuan) 水浒傳, the Chin P'ing Mei 金瓶梅, the Hung Lou Meng 紅樓夢, ... and the other novels, for the usage of a phrase or a word. If only they could come to this inn and deliberately urinate in the courtyard, or, pretending to be absent-minded, throw some dirty object out the window, or simply perform some irregular or improper action in the presence of the proprietor. Good, just wait and you will hear that proprietor give vent to some choice and rare expressions, so that you may feel that a living dictionary has actually been placed here!¹

C. Military Training

But the Revolution was about to put a stop to young Shen's bad habits, and to decide the future course of his

¹. Hunan Journey, pp.7-8.
life. A girls' school had already been established under the new dispensation, and his two elder sisters were sent there. In 1916, the area was stirred up by Ts'ai E's campaign against the monarchy, and it was felt that some military reforms would have to be made. Accordingly, the local Office for Defence 鎮守署 set up an officer training corps軍官團, while the Garrison Office 都務院 - the former Circuit Intendancy 道尹 - also established a military academy 將兵學校. There already existed a soldiers' training camp and a training regiment for noncommissioned officers 教導隊, so Chen-kan could now boast a total of four military training institutions within its walls, all of them run according to the latest methods. Since the cadets were often to be seen marching through the streets,

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1. In 1916, Yuan Shih-k'ai 袁世凱 (1859-1916), then President of the Republic of China, had proclaimed a constitutional monarchy with himself as emperor. Ts'ai E 蔡錫, the former Military Governor 都督 of Yunnan, and at that time a member of the Political Council 參政院 in Peking, secretly returned to Yunnan, where he and Governor-General T'ang Chi-yao 唐繼堯 and others agreed to declare the province's independence. He formed an "army to protect the nation" 驅國軍, and led it into Szechwan, causing considerable popular agitation.
the local children began to take a greater interest in military matters, and soon about a hundred of them were receiving training after school hours from one of the army's instructors. One of Shen's schoolmates was in this group, and invited Shen to join him, explaining that one could take an examination every second month, and, if successful, become a fully-fledged soldier. Shen asked the advice of his mother, who received the suggestion thankfully, for she had been unable to cope with her second son since his elder brother had gone away to look for his father, and she readily gave her permission. So it happened that this "general's descendant determined to go and train in preparation for military service".¹

Shen went with the news to his class prefect, who, as he was shortly to discover, was also to be his squad leader, and the prefect took him to see the military instructor. At first Shen was intimidated by this man's stiff and stern demeanour, but he grew to like him when he learnt of the formidable gymnastic prowess of this "modern Hsü Liang".² The instructor, for his part, seemed satisfied with his new pupil despite his small size. At first, says Shen, he did make special allowance for

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¹. Autobiography, p.47.
². Hsü Liang 禽良 is a character in the Ch'ing dynasty novel Five Younger Gallants."
him, "but after ten days had passed, my energy and
courage won complete recognition from him, and whenever
there was a task that everybody was supposed to perform,
I too was allotted a share in it". ¹ Shen seems to take
special pride in the nimbleness, courage and hardiness
which he feels that he acquired despite his slight build,
and he adds:

I am very grateful to that instructor, for as a
result of his strictness in forcing me to
acquire a degree of skill in performance on
the horizontal bar, I was afterwards able to
use this skill to save my own life when it
was in danger on one occasion. And later on,
when I had knocked about in army ranks for
such a long while, my ability to withstand the
forty days' fever caused by the very severe
cold I caught then² may well have been due to
the assistance of the sturdy frame that I had
acquired through training in a technical squad.
That I always preserved something of a soldier's
toughness, and, no matter what I did, was able
to go and do it without caring much whether I
succeeded or failed - this too seems to have
been a product of the training that I received
for nearly a year.³

Now Shen was taking his public duties more seriously.
He and the boy who was then his best friend liked to put
on their uniforms in the evening and go for a stroll,
walking with self-conscious pride along the street and
outside the town. Once outside, they would be greeted
mockingly as "lieutenants" by the butcher at the gates of

². Below, p.142.
³. Autobiography, p.49.
the town, and have to endure the ribald banter of the old soldier on guard there. But "we two thought to ourselves that this was a small matter. We were going to (military) school so that we might do great things in future, and such trifles were naturally of no concern to us".1

He was now thirteen and a half,2 no longer a mere child, and his father's hopes and ideals began to have a greater influence on him:

Even if my father never realized his lifelong hope of becoming a general, that glory of grandfather's, which he conveyed into my wild and mischievous little brain by means of many pleasant stories, nevertheless had a great influence on me. Since I did not care for books, and since, moreover, the nation had undergone a revolution, I knew that there was already no hope of my graduating at the top of the imperial examinations, and my ambition was confined to becoming a general....The education I received from my father was really of great benefit to me, in the vicissitudes of my subsequent life, and in continuing to lead a life for which book-learning was of no use. Not very robust in body or soul though I was, the full measure of pride that my father gave me always prevented me from feeling dispirited in any difficult situation, or from becoming conceited whenever I was successful in my life, and this seems to be something of greater value than any amount of property which he might have given me.3

He even aspired now to enter the national military college, but he had to start at the beginning, and his

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1. Ibid., p.50.
2. Ibid., p.51.
3. Ibid., pp.50-51.
first step and immediate hope was to become a guard. Only one cadet could be selected from his group at a time, however, and although Shen worked hard at his military and gymnastic drill, he was not successful, and the post went to a talented art student. Shen's family were pleased, however, for he had been praised, and they "seemed to think that day was bound to come in future when I would be able to be a general". The next day a fowl was killed in celebration, and Ts'ung-wen was given the liver and the head. He failed again in his second and third attempts, but his family did not lose hope. It was enough for them that he had set out on the right path at last, and had become a true soldier in fact if not yet in name.

The organization and morale of the technical squad, however, depended almost entirely on the talents and personality of its instructor, and when he was promoted and transferred to another post, the group disbanded, and a brief but significant episode in Shen's life came to a close. He was also deeply affected at this time by the death of one of his elder sisters, as he recalls in a passage in which her death is symbolically anticipated by the disbanding of the technical squad and the plucking of peach blossoms:

1. Ibid., p.52.
I calculate that this spell of training lasted for about eight months, since it began in the eighth (lunar) month when mooncakes are eaten (i.e. at the mid-autumn festival on the fifteenth of this month), and we disbanded in the third month when the peach flowers bloom. I remember that after we had been dismissed from drill on that day, I picked a big handful of peach blossoms in an orchard on the way back home.

In that year my second elder sister died. She was two years older than I: beautiful, proud, clever, and very brave. In the group of nine brothers and sisters, this sister was of a quality superior to that of any of the others.¹

Shen was to see not only his sister but many of his friends die before their time, often as a result of war. Of the three youths who were successful in the military examinations, one died of fever, another was sent out of the district and also died, while the art student, although not killed, met a fate almost as unfortunate in Shen's eyes, for in spite of his outstanding talents "chance dealt unkindly with him, his environment restricted him, and his own somewhat complacent and proud temperament hampered him", and he ended by wasting his days in a sinecure as a major.²

The "technical squad" had been one of three groups of young "recruits" receiving military training in Chen-kañ every day. Shen's was considered the best, while another one inside the town was considered slightly

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1. Ibid., p.53.
2. Ibid., p.52.
inferior. Both these groups used the latest methods of training. The third group, however, under the command of an old soldier called T'eng Szu-shu 四叔 (i.e. Fourth Uncle T'eng) and known to the whole town as Master T'eng 師傅, was run according to the old style. The contrast could hardly have been more complete. The recruits in the first two groups, whose ages ranged from seventeen down to only twelve, wore gray uniforms and had to submit to an "iron discipline" and a harsh programme of drilling and gymnastics. T'eng's pupils on the other hand wore colourful clothes and were allowed a great deal of freedom to do as they pleased. While the other groups drilled with modern weapons, T'eng's boys staged mock battles, complete with menacing shouts and using such things as square shields of painted leather, round ones of cane, bows, arrows and spears. In the first two groups, mistakes and misdemeanours were punished promptly and severely, while T'eng had nothing but scorn for these "foreign methods". Instead, he would correct errors by stepping in and demonstrating himself, and insubordination might be punished by a forced swim across the river, or something equally interesting. As a result, says Shen, "we" stood in awe of the instructor, while "they" (i.e. T'eng's group) loved theirs.

1. Ibid., p.54.
We were always dry and sober, given a rigid and inflexible attitude towards life, while they, on the contrary, were kept lively and interested from beginning to end, so that there was no way of separating self-discipline from recreation.1

But despite the laxness of discipline, it was T'eng's recruits, Shen claims, who generally won the most places in the examinations, and made the best soldiers.

The Shen family lived on the same street as old T'eng, and they often asked for his advice on some matter or other. He was, however, considered rather low-bred, for,

he not only taught the boys to box, at times he even encouraged them to fight; he not only taught them to form ranks, he even went so far as teaching them to swim and gamble. Consequently, not many of the comparatively well brought-up children came to him. The children who came to him were mostly from poor and humble families.2

But although young Shen, to his obvious regret, was not permitted to join T'eng's group, since they lived near one another, he still managed to see a good deal of T'eng himself.

Although T'eng was illiterate, he was full of practical wisdom and a great variety of skills. He could do somersaults effortlessly, climb the highest trees with ease, walk anywhere on his hands, and dive straight to

1. Ibid., p.57.
2. Ibid., p.56.
the bottom of the deepest water. He knew three ways to catch fish, and was always ready with herbal remedies for an injury. He was skilled at raising fowls, ducks and fighting cocks, knew all about flowers and fruits, and could make images out of clay. He had a large and varied collection of weapons and musical instruments in his home. He was too shrewd ever to be cheated, but he was always friendly and fair. He received no payment for training the boys and wanted none. Of all the people in the area, Shen says, "the finest person, the most skilled, and the one whom I felt to be rich in humanity and completely lovable, was this old soldier". ¹ Shen admits a great practical debt to T'eng, for the knowledge that he used in his later years in the army to extricate himself or others from dangerous situations was "almost entirely learnt from that old soldier".² He also owes him a literary debt for one of his stories, "The New and the Old" 常與舊 is clearly inspired by the memory of Master T'eng and his old-fashioned methods of military training.

Shen's father had previously sold the greater part of the family's real estate in order to pay off several large debts, and by now the family's financial situation was

1. Ibid., p.58.
2. Ibid.
deteriorating rapidly. After the death of his elder sister Shen's mother decided that it would be better if her second son were to be sent away from home and learn to make his own way in the world. She discussed the matter with an officer who was to be stationed at Shenchow, and he agreed to take young Shen with him as a recruit.

At that moment I was still soaking myself in the river, testing my ability to sink down to the bottom of the water and stay there, and to float on the surface of the water lying on my back, as I had learnt from the old soldier. I remember distinctly that it was the day of the Ullambana Festival on the fifteenth of the seventh (lunar) month and for that reason I had brought some paper money, diluted wine and white meat to the river bank as an offering to the river ghosts. According to custom, nobody dared enter the water on this day, and the river was exceptionally clear. After burning the paper money, pouring the wine into the water, and eating all the meat, I took off my clothes and splashed about in the limpid river for about two hours, all by myself.

On the sixteenth of the seventh, early in the morning, I shouldered my little cloth bundle and left my district school, for the first time making haphazard entry into a wider school.1

1. Ibid., p.59. The "school" is that of life itself. Cp. below, p.144.
A. Shenchow and Yuanchow

When he left for Shenchow (Yüanling), Shen was, he says, a little over fourteen years old. Careless of his family's grief at the parting, he was full of eager anticipation at the thought of the freedom and the new sights and sounds that awaited him. Once he had set out, however, his high spirits vanished, for he suddenly realized that he was only one small, friendless individual in a crowd of about three hundred total strangers: "Everywhere there were strange faces. I did not know who I would be eating with in the daytime, nor who I would be sleeping with at night." ¹ The cloth bundle that he carried on his back was heavy, for his mother, fearing that he might suffer from the cold, had packed too many clothes for him. However, a porter soon noticed the disproportion between the large bundle and its small bearer, and relieved him of his burden. At the same time, Shen struck up a conversation with a middle-aged army messenger, who turned out to be an old schoolmate of his uncle's.

¹ Autobiography, p.60.
After a march of about sixty li, they reached a place called High Village beside the Yuan River. Here, twenty-odd sailing-boats were waiting to take them to Shenchow. The boats rapidly filled up, but Shen, whose friend had disappeared, had no idea what platoon he belonged to or which boat he was supposed to board. Nor did he know how to find out, and since he was too timid to approach the officers who stood in the bows of the comparatively empty boats, nightfall found him still alone on the shore. He describes the scene in a characteristic passage:

A glance at the sky showed that night was gradually descending. Some men had already lit cooking-fires in the prows of the boats and were boiling their rice, while others were already squatting down and eating. But I sat on a big stone on the bank, gazing into space and worrying, and unable to think what to do. By this time, the broad surface of the river had become overspread with light mist. There were wild ducks, ch'i-ch'ih and the like, winging their way opposite shore. A streak of deep purple was still left on the horizon. When I saw this unfamiliar scene, a wordless grief stole into my little heart, and then I smiled to myself, and rubbed my legs that were suffering painfully from the long march.

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1. Shen's estimate. In fact, the distance would be much greater.
2. Or hsi-ch'ih 鳥, sometimes called the purple mandarin duck 紫鴨.
Soon, however, he was rediscovered by his friend, and the two of them managed to find a suitable boat. The next day, they set off downstream, moving through a constantly changing landscape of "tiny villages, extensive bamboo forests, and black overhanging cliffs".\footnote{Ibid., p.62} As the boatmen worked the sculls, their songs would "go floating right across the river", and Shen, enchanted, completely forgot the home he had left behind.

When he returned to Hunan in later years, he was to be delighted again by these boatmen's songs:

Yet these coarse, rough men, these mouths that swore and fed on sour vegetables and rancid pork, when they were happy and began to sing, how perfectly beautiful and moving were their songs!\footnote{Hunan Journey, p.59.}

Songs like these, "which fill my soul with exaltation and can never be adequately praised"\footnote{Ibid., p.93.}, or like the "passionate and beautiful" woodcutters' songs of his childhood\footnote{Autobiography, p.4.}, often figure in his stories.

Four days later, after a stop at Luki \footnote{Ibid.}, during which Shen met the girl who was to be the model for the heroine of his best-known story\footnote{See below, pp.370-1.}, the boats arrived at
Shenchow, and after another two days Shen was quartered with about a hundred others in a dilapidated old yamen, which had to be thoroughly cleaned before they were able to sleep in it. After that, they followed the same routine every day. Early in the morning they would be drilled in marching at the double, and then they would receive individual instruction and be given practice in slow marching on the spot. In the afternoons they were free, and they would lie on the grass and sing soldiers' songs. The training Shen had received in Chen-kan stood him in good stead now, and he soon became squad leader 班長.

In the afternoons, Shen particularly liked to visit the waterfront, for there one was astonished by the countless little shops, selling ropes for boats, cut and polished hardwood pulleys, little fishing baskets, little knives, steels1, and pipes. There were interesting things everywhere. I used to go there all the time, and would squat down and watch for ages, like a member of the gentry, lingering beside the antiques that he loves and unable to tear himself away.2

Sixteen years later, Shen Ts'ung-wen returned to Shenchow, and gazed once again on this same waterfront:

1. Huǒ-lién 火梟, for striking fire.
2. Autobiography, p. 64.
These sixteen years had indeed passed rather too quickly. When I thought of all the changes there had been in human affairs during this span of time, I sighed softly a great many times. This spot was my second home. When I first turned my back on my native home and went off with that crowd of warriors as they shouldered their bayonets and marched away to live by fighting battles, we stopped for a while at this wharf-town. Every street in this spot, every yamen, every shop, and every little business carried on with a carrying-pole load in a niche in the city wall still seems to occupy a place in my dreams! This river-wharf educated me sixteen years ago. It gave me an understanding of many human activities, and helped enrich my imagination, and now it was its turn once again to revive the already vanished dreamworld of my boyhood.1

Apart from the morning drill, the recruits had no regular duties. Sometimes they would all sit in the sun and clean their guns, and in this way Shen became acquainted with the names of the various types of gun. Occasionally, twenty to thirty men would be chosen to escort the commander of their detachment on official visits. Shen once earned five cents by participating in this, "the very first time, I think", he remarks, "that I received government money".2

At this time, a government for Western Hunan had been organized at Shenchow, and three units were stationed there, their commanders being T'ien Ying-chao of Fenghwang, the head of the army administration, Chang

1. Hunan Journey, p.35.
Hsüeh-chi 张學濟 of Chihkiang, head of the civil administration, and Lu Tao 盧義, brigade commander in the Kweichow army and later to become provincial governor of Kweichow. Opposing them was Brigade Commander Feng Yu-hsiang 馮玉祥, who had stationed his troops at Changteh. Since the former would not move downstream, and the latter was afraid to move upstream, the status quo was being maintained while each side awaited its opportunity.

In Western Hunan alone, Shen says, about a hundred thousand men were under arms. Shen himself belonged to the First Mobile Detachment, which formed part of the Second Army of the United Armies for Restoring Order to the Nation 靖國聯軍第二軍, under the command of Chang Hsüeh-chi. The feeding and housing of so many troops was a growing strain on the local populace, and there was much tension among the soldiers themselves, belonging as they did to so many different groups. Too much paper money was in circulation also, and whenever it was possible to exchange it for ready cash, "women and children would be trampled to death" in the rush.¹ Violent brawls over army rations were very common at this time also. Accordingly, a military conference was held, and it was decided to disperse the troops. Some were to

1. Ibid., p.67.
be stationed along the river to guard against the possibility of a surprise attack from downstream, while the rest were to be sent to the outlying districts to hold and clear the countryside. The First Detachment was to go to the Commander's own native district of Chihkiang to "destroy bandits". ¹

Everybody was pleased at the prospect of moving, and before they left each man was given a silver dollar. When Shen had exchanged his dollar for its equivalent in copper, he bought himself three pairs of straw sandals, a towel, and a small knife of a type called "Yellow Eel's Tail", of which he was especially proud.

Two days later, Shen left with a body of troops amounting to about two regiments. They travelled upstream by boat for a week, until they reached the place where they had first embarked for Shenchow. Then they proceeded overland for three days, until they came to Yushuwan, presumably a spot at a bend in the Wu River, it was about thirty miles downstream from the town of Yuanchow or Chihkiang, and twenty miles upstream from the town of Kienyang.²

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¹ I.e. the former Yuanchow Prefecture in Hunan, comprising the three districts of Chihkiang, Kienyang and Mayang.
² Autobiography, p.70.
On the way there, the troops were alternatively feasted in strongholds by wealthy landlords, and shot at by local snipers on the mountain paths. Although these snipers were hard to catch, the army soon took its revenge. "During two days on the trail, our unit lost two men, but afterwards we killed about two thousand people in that place".¹

When they arrived, they were quartered in the Temple of the Queen of Heaven 天后宫. On the second day, forty-three "honest countryfolk" were brought in. They were briefly questioned as to their crimes, and then, depending on the seriousness of these, beaten with bamboos or punished with ankle-presses. Twenty-seven had their hand-prints taken and were decapitated two days later.

From then on, men were captured every day. If they confessed their guilt and agreed to contribute a few rounds of ammunition or some kind of rifle, or the equivalent of these in cash, they would be set free again on bail. But if they had no means of contributing anything, or if an enemy had bribed the authorities, they would be tried and executed.²

¹ Ibid., p.69. On the next page, however, he says, ironically, that it was "only a mere thousand".
² Ibid., p.69.
The number of men killed increased daily, but the troops had little need to go and catch their "bandits", for most of them were sent in from the countryside by the captains of the militia (who were themselves sometimes captured and brought in by the troops, to be released again after paying a fine), and by the landlords. So once again Shen was surrounded by bloodshed and brutality. Every five days a fair was held, and local informers would be hired to point out any "spies sent by the bandits" in the crowd. These "spies" would be dragged off to the camp and interrogated, and then publicly decapitated on the bridge, after which the people would amuse themselves by kicking and trampling on the corpse for a while, before going about their business again.1

Shen says that two things stand out in his memories of this place. One was the knife duels which often took place, and which impressed him as being "even fairer" than the ones he had seen in Fenghwang.2 The other was a strange incident which was to inspire two of his stories.3 The young daughter of the Chairman of the Traders' Association had died of an illness. The night after her burial, she was disinterred by a young beancurd seller

1. Ibid., p.70.
who lived in the same street. He carried her off to a cave in the hills, stayed there for three days, and then returned her to her grave. When the affair was discovered, he was brought to the yamen, tried, and sentenced to death. Shen, drawn by his perennial fascination with "the perverse but often beautiful manifestations of the human spirit"\(^1\), went to see the young man:

Just before the time for his execution, his brain was still quite clear, and in no way confused. He did not clamour for food and drink, nor did he fall to wild cursing. He merely contemplated in silence his own injured ankle. I asked him: "Who hurt your ankle?" He shook his head, as though he remembered something very funny, and he smiled for a moment and said softly: "It was raining that day, when I brought her back. I nearly tumbled into her coffin." I asked him again: "Why did you do it?" He cast a glance at me, still smiling, as if to say that he considered me a child, incapable of understanding what love is, and he paid no attention to me. But after a moment he began to speak softly to himself again: "So beautiful, so beautiful." Another soldier said: "Madman, they're about to kill you, are you afraid?" And he said: "What is there to be afraid of in that? Are you afraid of dying?" The soldier was a bit embarrassed by this counter-question, so he shouted loudly to frighten him: "You mad dog\(^2\), so you're not afraid of dying? Just wait till they're about to cut off your crazy head!" Then the young man smiled gently once more, and uttered no further sound. His smile seemed to be saying: "I don't know who is the madman." I remember that smile. Ten or more years later, the impression it left in my mind is still exceptionally clear.\(^3\)


\(^2\) Obscenity omitted.

\(^3\) *Autobiography*, p.71.
B. Huaihua

After four months, Shen and his unit were moved again, this time to a little country town called Huaihua (懷化, in the Autobiography, 懷化, in "My Education"). Here he was to stay for about a year and a quarter, and the impression it made on his feelings was sufficiently vivid\(^1\) for him to call the account of it he later wrote "My Education" 我的教育\(^2\). This essay contains nothing about his education in the usual sense of the word, but is a collection of remarks, descriptions and anecdotes in 26 sections, for the most part giving the impression of being undated extracts from a diary. Some sections consist of a brief remark, such as "Still raining,"\(^3\) while others contain connected narratives, such as the account of an attempted desertion.\(^4\)

Huaihua was a small town of about six hundred families\(^5\), the surrounding hills and fields being sparsely populated.\(^6\)

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3. Section 22, p.28.
4. Sections 17-18, pp.22-26. Shen also wrote a story about an army deserter at about the same time. See below, pp.242-5.
There was only one street in the town with a handful of shops in it: an apothecary's, where the soldiers bought their medicinal plasters, a beancurd shop, an opium house, and two stores selling produce from the south, where one could buy such foodstuffs as lump sugar (which Shen got into the habit of eating daily), brown sugar, edible kelp, dried jellyfish skin, stale "lotus cakes", and walnut cakes, sesame biscuits, and bundles of dried noodles.

At first Huaihua appeared a dreary spot, and there was little in the street to charm the eye:

It is extremely dirty in the street, which is full of the smelly water that runs out of the beancurd shop. White and black bubbles rise in it, and a lot of dirty gray ducks probe among these bubbles with their pink bills, noisily gobbling their food.

Some of the inhabitants were not much more prepossessing:

A woman of forty-odd would always be sitting in front of the opium house door. Her flat, thin face was spread with a thick layer of powder, and her eyebrows had been plucked very fine. She would deliberately hitch her locally green-dyed homespun trousers up high, in order to show off her light brown foreign stockings. When she saw soldiers and cooks going past, she

1. Ibid., p.2.
2. Ibid., p.16.
3. Ibid.; p.2; Autobiography, pp.73-4.
would turn her face away towards the inside of the building, watching them while affecting not to, as a sign of modesty. If those who went past wore long robes or were officers, she would give a wonderful sidelong glance, move the corners of her mouth slightly, and, in a sweet, seductive voice, call out to the men inside to do something for her.¹

But Shen maintained his artist's disinterest²: "Whenever I noticed these things, I never had the feeling that there was anything disgusting about them. I merely felt that these were human things."³

There was beauty to be found in the town, however, even (on market days) among the women, although Shen describes them with the same clichés that he used to depict the young Miao women that he saw on market days near Chenkan⁴: full-breasts, long eyebrows and pale complexions; and as before, the sight of them makes young Shen feel "happy" 辦月服.⁵ But the town itself could also take on an unexpected beauty, as in this scene at dusk:

The sky was covered with rosy clouds, light and faint like thin gauze. The sight made all those who were there gaze up at the sky, struck by its unusual appearance. Then, beneath this

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2. Cp: above, pp.36-37.
4. Above, p.45.
sky, the bugle blew a long throbbing call. All over town, the chimneys of the little tiled houses were emitting white smoke. All the men who had been doing the autumn ploughing and sowing the wheat, had shouldered their ploughs and were driving the cattle back home from the fields, their spotted dogs going before them and their black goats following behind. I seemed to have gained something from these things. I went back to the camp and squatted down by the stove to watch the vegetables cooking, and when the big basketful of cabbages was tipped into the pot, and a loud but indistinct crashing sound rang in my ears like an explosion, while my eyes gazed into the brilliant glare of the fire - once again I seemed to get a hint of something inexpressible.

Shen was lodged with seventy others in the left wing of the only large building in town, the ancestral hall of the Yang family, the walls of which soon became covered with the medicinal plasters which the soldiers loved to stick on their backs and legs. The men were supplied with plenty of warm dry bedding by the local militia, and so they settled down in happy anticipation of a comfortable existence.

As it turned out, however, life was all too comfortable and soon became tedious. Huaihua was remarkably peaceful, and the inhabitants themselves seemed to lead an easy-going life, although Shen remarks on the thinness

1. Ibid., p.34.
2. Ibid., p.1.
and unhealthy appearance of many of the children. Shen once caused considerable amusement by offering money to a man that he saw idly sitting in the sun playing a sona and surrounded by a crowd of children. On another occasion he met a fisherman by a stream.

I asked him how many fish he had caught today, and he laughed. When I asked again, I learnt that he was fishing for fun, because he had nothing to do, for it was not uncommon to go all day without a bite. It would soon be winter and the fish were not biting. I would not have thought that such carefree people still existed in this countryside.

Since the countryside was so peaceful, there was nothing for the soldiers to do, and they grew restless and discontented:

Because we were cleaning our guns, someone asked the platoon commander: "Sir, when are we going to go and get the bandits?" The platoon commander smiled and said: "It seems that there haven't been any bandits in this place lately." If there are no bandits, being stationed in this place to spend the winter is really something worth swearing about. We came here ready to put into practice all the things that we learnt at XX (presumably Shenchow): "spread out", "drop down", "prepare to fire", "charge". If there are no bandits, who are we going to try them out on?

1. "My Education", p.3.
2. សនា: a kind of wind instrument, of Turkish origin.
4. Ibid.
The resulting boredom and impatience often led to quarrels. Generally these were trifling affairs which soon passed, leaving everyone happier for the release of tension.¹ Shen marvelled at the constant fighting nevertheless: "It always seems strange to me when I see these strong men fighting. I think it is a natural ill-temper that no amount of medicine will be able to cure."² At other times matters took a more serious turn, and a man might be killed suddenly in a drunken brawl,³ or someone might attack his sleeping comrade in the middle of the night with a knife, as a result of brooding over some trivial insult.⁴

Roughly speaking, the army divided itself into three classes. At the top were the various officers. Next there were the common soldiers, including the young recruits and Shen Ts'ung-wen himself. And finally, at the bottom of the social scale and the end of the pecking order, there were the cooks. These simple souls were persecuted by everybody:

When the young officers graduated from (military) school and entered the army, the first thing they learnt was how to abuse

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1. Ibid., pp.9, 31-2.
2. Ibid., p.32.
3. Ibid., p.18.
4. Autobiography, p.27.
people. The soldiers who were abused were prevented by a regulation from uttering a sound, but before very long, as soon as they had the chance, they would pour all the clever new expressions they had learnt from their superior officers onto the heads of the cooks. Then the cooks could only abuse one another, or else direct scathing insults at the rice bucket, the water jar, or the soup ladle, things which of course usually said nothing.1

The cooks were big men2 and ate accordingly3. They were readily cheated4, were the constant butt of practical jokes5, were easily provoked to tears, and were always being flogged for their misdemeanours.6 Although they were from forty to fifty years old, Shen says, they were still only children at heart.7 Shen seems to feel a special affection for these people. "As I watch them carrying water," he says, "deliberately bumping one another's water buckets, my heart is affected in a way I cannot express."8 These cooks appear in "The Day Before Absconding", which seems to be based on his experiences in Huaihua and to have been written at about the same time as "My

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1. "My Education", p.27.
3. Ibid., pp.29-30.
4. Ibid., pp.15, 29.
5. Ibid., pp.14, 29.
6. E.g. Ibid., p.35; Autobiography, p.80.
8. Ibid., p.15.
Education", but his most notable fictional tribute to them is the story "Huei-ming".

The troops' daily routine followed a fixed pattern. They would have roll-call early in the morning, and then they would eat breakfast. Next, they would clean their guns and sing soldiers' songs, after which they would be free to go and amuse themselves as they pleased. Whatever they did, however, they were to refrain from touching other men's women, taking other people's property, and starting brawls. These three basic rules were impressed on them every day, and severe penalties were prescribed for their infringement.

Entertainment was hard to come by in such a quiet town, but market days offered a little colour and bustle, and some relief from the prevailing boredom. On market days too, the officers and some of the soldiers would generally gather together to play cards, tell stories, drink, and smoke opium. For these gatherings, Shen liked to play the cook. He would go out and buy dog-meat and other ingredients, cook it all himself, and then have it brought in, crying happily: "Come on, come and try it! See how it is today!" He got a great deal of pleasure

1. Ibid., p.6.
2. Ibid., pp.1, 2.
3. Ibid., p.5.
from this, and from the praise that was invariably lavish­
ed on his cooking:

Although I was nominally a secretary , in fact, every fifth day on market day, I had to be a cook. It is probable that at that time, my skill in cooking dog-meat was actually at a higher level than my skill in writing. My chief interest in life also seemed to lie more in preparing meals as a cook than in writing official letters, statements and petitions to superiors, and the like.1

Gambling was an especially popular pastime, although betting large sums was officially frowned on. This time, though, Shen seems to have been saddened by the futile loss of money involved rather than excited by the game, and he appears to have preferred watching to joining in.

Every now and then, something of exceptional interest would occur, such as the desertion of a soldier, which afforded everybody a couple of days excitement, until he was caught and executed and the reward money dissipated in gambling. On the whole, however, the most popular and reliable means of relieving the tedium of life in Huaihua was to be found in the regular public executions. "Although watching executions is not a refined sort of entertain­ment," Shen says, "as a result of the excessive

1. Ibid., p.77. Cp. above, p.32.
3. Ibid., p.15.
5. Ibid., pp.22-26.
quietness a great many officers and subordinates from our unit did in fact hurry to the execution ground in order to see this sort of thing."¹

It was in fact the same story of slaughter as at Yūshuwan: "When our unit reached the place, there seemed to be nothing for it to do except kill people, and there also seemed to be nothing for the soldiers to do except watch people being killed."² Shen estimates that he saw with his own eyes over seven hundred men executed.³ This, he says, was the army's way of showing that it was doing its job: "Every time a man is executed, it is a way of making these country people understand that we have come here to rid them of bandits, and that we are certainly not receiving provisions for nothing."⁴

Shen also witnessed the interrogation and flogging of a number of prisoners. When the first "bandit" was sent in by the militia, everybody crowded round to see him, but he proved disappointingly ordinary - "just like any ordinary person, bare-headed, dressed in clothes of blue cotton, with a straw sandal on the left foot only. He had probably been beaten on the left side of the face,

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2. Ibid., p.74.
3. Ibid., p.72.
for it was slightly swollen". The judge interrogated the prisoner perfunctorily for a while, but then he startled Shen by a sudden burst of anger, shouting out: "Confess, or you'll be flogged!" The prisoner received a hundred blows, but still refused to admit his guilt:

The man said: "Your Honour is perspicacious. I have been wronged." The judge said: "Wronged! Wronged! I can see that you've got the face of a thief! If you don't confess you'll be flogged again!" The man kowtowed and said: "Spare my life, Sir! I am really a good man. The militia have done me an injury." The judge looked at the written accusation and thought for a moment, then he shouted to the soldiers to drag the man to the foot of the stairs and give him another hundred blows.  

Even though he received five hundred blows in all, Shen says, "he was a countryman after all, with a sound constitution, and despite the suffering inflicted on him, he still would not confess". The next day, however, the process was repeated, and after three hundred blows, the prisoner broke down and told the judge what he wanted to hear.

Sometimes Shen would have to be present at the interrogation of the prisoners. Confessions were extorted by various kinds of torture, such as crushing the ankle bone

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1. Ibid., p.7.
2. Ibid., p.8.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.9.
with wooden clubs, breaking the legs with iron clubs, or burning incense on the chest.

While they were beating these ignorant country people, I would usually have to stand by their side and take down what they said, recording their incoherent depositions, as they confessed when no longer able to endure the punishment.¹

In this brutalizing atmosphere, the soldiers naturally tended to become callous. They adopted a fatalistic attitude: that one man should have to suffer and die while others were well-fed and comfortable was only a matter of fate. One man's luck was good and another's bad, that was all.² Shen describes how they would torment the cooks, and adds: "Men like this would seem to be extremely pitiable figures, but if we still had any of this thing called "pity", I suppose we reserved it for use in other situations".³

Shen seems to have been very conscious of his place as a member of the group. He liked to be with the other men in his unit, to play, march and sing with them.⁴ He was delighted if the neatness of his uniform was praised,⁵ and was moved by the sense of comradeship expressed in the songs that they sang:

3. Ibid., p.29.
4. E.g. Ibid., pp.19, 22.
5. Ibid., p.21.
When I think of the words of the songs, I seem to be deeply moved. All of us in the unit really are very close to one another. If one is beaten, the others will get medicine for him; if you lose all your money, they will lend you some to get back what you have lost; if there is wine, it will be shared equally among all of us. Even if there is a job to be done, everybody will argue over who is going to go and do it.\(^1\)

Because of this sense of community, although he still cherished romantic hopes of becoming a "knight-errant" 俠客,\(^2\) Shen could not but be affected by the prevailing callousness. He tells how one evening he encountered some of the men cutting stout bamboos to flog the prisoners with, for

the bandits in this place are extremely cunning, and it's no good using ordinary bamboos that are used for beating soldiers to deal with these animals ( 東 西 ). Yes, that's not a bad idea, these local people all seem very strong. They are certainly not as thin or weak as we soldiers, and if you want them to confess to some things that they don't even realize are crimes, what are you going to do if you don't beat them severely? Sometimes they don't even cry out when they are being flogged. Barbarians!\(^3\)

Although this passage is clearly satirical in intent, the attitude which it reflects must have influenced Shen to some extent at the time. He too was a fatalist,\(^4\) laughed

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1. Ibid., p.19.
2. Ibid., p.13.
3. Ibid., p.9.
4. And seems to have remained one. Cp. below, pp.377, 384, 394, 401.
at the cooks\textsuperscript{1} and played tricks on them\textsuperscript{2}. Once, when a group of the soldiers started to play with the head of an executed man, throwing it from one to the other like a ball, Shen too joined in the spirit of the game, giving the head an experimental kick "out of curiosity", although he only succeeded in hurting his toes.\textsuperscript{3}

At other times, however, he was touched by compassion for the suffering that surrounded him, and was moved by vague doubts about his present mode of life:

In the evening I fell asleep very late, because a soldier was being given five hundred blows. He had, offended against the platoon commander's first rule\textsuperscript{4}, and, having been found out, he was paying the penalty. Soldiers are supposed to obey orders, and if they do something wrong they are beaten. After this man had been beaten, he just lay on his bed and moaned. His friends looked everywhere for medicinal herbs with which to massage his thighs. Later the platoon commander got angry and went to see the battalion commander and everybody felt depressed. But before long they all fell asleep, and even the soldier who was beaten seemed to have done so. But I was still unable to sleep, as I thought of how military men are supposed to obey orders, and remembered that soldier's groans and shouts.\textsuperscript{5}

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2. Ibid., p.29.
3. Ibid., p.11.
4. Above, p.77.
Sometimes it was the executions that seemed to haunt him:

All by myself, moved by some strange and indefinable mood, I went once again, very early, to have a look at the bridge where the men had been killed. I saw the same four corpses as before. Their heads had been thrown by the soldiers into the mud in the fields. Near one corpse, some unknown person had secretly burnt some paper money in the very early morning, and the ash that was left looked like the blue wildflowers that one commonly sees by the side of the road, the blue colour of the ashes making a mournful contrast with the trail of blood which had already congealed into black clots.¹

Elsewhere, this mood provokes a more explicit protest against the cruelty of life itself:

When they have killed a man, they seem to forget all about him immediately. Even in the dead man's home, they seem to forget at once the fact that a member of the household has been killed, and everybody goes on living accordingly. When I think of this, I feel a little bit troubled in my mind. But I realize that this is something that never changes. Even though the executioner, when he returns to camp to sharpen his knife, will have bought a hundred paper cash during the night to burn for the dead man, yet it is all just a matter of regulations. Outside the regulations, there is no one at all whose duty it is to remember anything of the griefs and fears of others.²

But much of Shen's leisure was spent in the happier kinds of activities that had delighted his childhood. Sometimes he would roam around in the hills behind the

¹. Ibid., pp.18-19.
². Ibid., p.14.
town, or he would go in search of herbs, flowers and fruits with his friends. On these expeditions they would sometimes cut short lengths of bamboo, Pierce holes in them to make flutes, and march back into town playing in unison and attracting a great deal of attention. At night they would often go out with torches, to catch fish with sickles in the streams, or with baskets in the fields, and at other times they would go into the hills to set traps for wild cats and weasels, flaying the animals when they caught them and stuffing the skins to dry them.

Shen was particularly fond of the iron foundry, and he often went there alone to watch the men working and study the fourfold process of manufacturing iron, which he describes in some detail. Sometimes he would help work the bellows, delighted by the roaring sound and the column of blue sparks that this produced, and by the sight of the white-hot molten iron. His favourite spot in Huaihua, however, was the repair shop. Here, too, he could watch the metal being worked, and when the

1. Ibid., p.3.
3. Ibid., pp.77-8.
4. Ibid., p.78.
7. Ibid., p.79.
weather was cold outside, he could always find warmth and comfort here\textsuperscript{1}, roasting and eating the dog-meat which seems to have been the workmen's constant diet.\textsuperscript{2} But what drew him to the place was above all the companionship that he found there. "I love the people in this room," he says, "with their bodies all covered with soot and rust".\textsuperscript{3} "I liked the young workmen, and I liked the boldness and cheerfulness with which they worked."\textsuperscript{4} There were three or four of these young workmen, and Shen spent much of his time with them, both in and out of the shop. With one of them in particular, a lad called Hsin-shou, he seems to have been particularly close friends. Although Hsin-shou was only thirteen, two years younger than Shen, Shen admired him for his intelligence and knowledge of his craft.\textsuperscript{5} One day, however an anvil fell on his legs and crushed them, and "My Education", like many of Shen's stories, concludes on a melancholy note:

For several days this affair has given me cause to weep. For my companions, it serves as material for a few days' idle discussion: because Hsin Shou worked in the repair shop, he

\begin{enumerate}
\item "My Education", pp.30-31.
\item Ibid., pp.10, 20, 31.
\item Ibid., p.30.
\item Autobiography, p.79.
\item "My Education", p.17.
\end{enumerate}
has met with a disaster that was bound to come. But for me, the disaster lies in the subsequent loneliness in my heart.¹

Of the other people in the repair shop, Shen was most deeply impressed by the pockmarked foreman. He admired this man partly for his generosity and kindness,² and in fact his "good nature" nearly persuaded Shen to become a workman in the repair shop himself.³ Partly, too, he admired him because, like old Master T'eng in Fenghwang⁴, he had acquired a great many skills,⁵ and a large store of general knowledge derived from experience and hence superior to mere book knowledge. He knew all the popular plays and was a skilled singer of songs from them⁶, and he could tell Shen and the others which trees produced the best timber for knife-scabbards, and which the best timber for wooden boxes.⁷ His knowledge in fact was extensive and inexhaustible. He has had some interesting experience about everything. He seems like a complete dictionary, in which one may find, by leafing through it at will, a perfectly satisfactory explanation for anything that a young man might be ignorant of and wish to know about.⁷

1. "My Education", p.35.
2. E.g. Ibid., p.10.
3. Ibid., p.20.
4. Including swimming, which, like T'eng, he taught to the boys in his care.
7. Ibid.
In a sense, Shen's education - the sort of education that was eventually to make it possible for him to teach Chinese literature in universities - did begin at Huaihua, but it was in a more conventional sort of dictionary that he first began to study, a dictionary that he does not mention in "My Education".

Because of his ability to read and write, Shen was promoted to the rank of Secretary shortly after his arrival in Huaihua, and was given the job of keeping the inventories of weapons and supplies. Soon after his promotion, there arrived in Huaihua a young man of a type quite different from any that he had encountered before. He was to have a decisive influence on Shen's life, giving it a new direction. "At the time," Shen says, "I could only have said that he was interesting. Now, when I think of his manner, and of how he acted as a pivot (literally "nail" or a cogwheel for my whole life, I have much to be grateful to him for." His surname was Wen, and he came to Huaihua as a private secretary. He was small and pale, but what struck Shen about him first was his unfailing politeness. Good manners were not much considered in the army, where the men would talk and swear volubly at mealtimes,

2. Ibid., p.82.
cramming their mouths with food, and where everything was referred to as a "bastard" or something worse. But Wen kept aloof from all this, merely observing it with a faint smile. When the two youths knew each other better, Wen gently rebuked Shen for always referring to himself vulgarly as "the old man" To which Shen replied: "It doesn't worry the old man. That's his privilege." Then he added more apologetically: "It's only fooling. It doesn't hurt anybody." But Wen said "You shouldn't be acting the fool like this. You're clever. You ought to study properly. There are lots of good things in the world that you could study!" They soon became fast friends, and began to exchange their knowledge:

I would make a wolf's howl or a tiger's roar for him, and would tell him how to distinguish the tracks of a wild pig from those of a goat. From him, I could learn how a train or a steamship sounded and what electric lights and telephones were like. I told him how heavy the head of an executed man was, and how, in the processes of opening up carcasses and extracting gall bladders, one should make a slanting cut through the abdomen with a knife and give a kick from behind, while he told me about the uniforms worn by English and American soldiers, and what a torpedo-boat and a balloon were. He found the various things that I knew quite extraordinary, and I felt that the things he understood were truly remarkable.

Wen's most prized possession was a copy of the encyclopaedia Tz'u Yüan. When Shen first saw the two volumes, he was startled by their thickness and the smallness of the print. Wen said to him: "Young officer, this is a treasure. Everything under Heaven is written in it. All the things that you would like to know about are set out systematically and in full." He invited his awed friend to ask him about anything at all. Shen, his eye lighting on some relief carvings which were apparently visible from the window, suggested Chu-ko Liang and the required information was quickly found. Shen was fascinated, and after washing his hands, at Wen's bidding, he was allowed to look through the books himself. When Wen saw that Shen's taste for learning had been stimulated, he asked him whether he had read any newspapers. Shen replied: "The old man has never read a newspaper. He doesn't want to read newspapers." But Wen countered this by looking up the "Old Man" in the Tz'u Yüan, and Shen then discovered that he "was the Old Master, Lord of Heaven", and that the Old Master, Lord of Heaven was someone who had actually existed. Never again did I call

1. Autobiography, p.84.
2. Adviser to Liu Pei, ruler of the Kingdom of Shu (A.D.221-263) during the Three Kingdoms period.
3. 太上老君: honorific title given to Lao Tzu in later Taoism.
myself Old Master, Lord of Heaven...". ¹ Shen and Wen now made an agreement with another old secretary to send in a joint subscription to the Shun Pao ² They subscribed to the paper for two months, and Shen felt that he learnt much from it, including many new words. ³

Shen now read the Tz'u Yüan whenever he had the opportunity, and in this way he came to know about such things as hydrogen, the Huainan Tzu ⁴, and the Senate ⁵. He would have liked to read it every day, but Wen would not permit this, so Shen was reduced to dreams of stealing it, or reading whatever else he could find, such as the Letters from the Pavilion of the Autumn Waters ⁶, or a copy of the novel Record of a Pilgrimage to the West ⁷, which he borrowed one volume at a time from the Senior Adjutant.

2. The first newspaper published in Shanghai. It first appeared in 1872.
4. A Taoist work of the second century B.C.
5. By Hsü Szu-mei 信思濟 of the Ch'ing dynasty.
6. By Wu Ch'eng-en 吳承恩 (1500?-1582?).
Shen and Wen were soon to be parted, however, for the military situation in Hunan was growing unstable. As long as the Second Army remained strong, Yüanchow was an advantageous and easily held spot. But when control of the First Army passed from T'ien Ying-chao to his regimental commander Ch'en Ch'U-chên, the strength of the two armies began to vary - the excessively mixed composition of the Second Army making itself felt in a tendency towards disintegration, while the First Army was gathering its forces and becoming more powerful every day. Ch'ang Hsüeh-chi now found himself in financial and military difficulties, and since the First Detachment had "done nothing at all except kill people", the army's reputation was very bad. Consequently, the countryside was growing restless, and when Ch'en's troops left Mayang (north of Chihkiâng), the Second Army had no choice but to make a hasty withdrawal downstream. So Shen was uprooted once more, retracing his steps with the troops over the snowy land, until they all reached the river, boarded the boats, and, five days later, arrived back at Shenchow.²

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1. For this and following names, see above, pp.64-5.
C. Shenchow to Chihkiang

Before long, the army was preparing to move again, this time to eastern Szechwan, as reinforcements. Many of the younger soldiers were given leave to return home, so that their parents could decide whether they were willing to have their sons take part in the dangerous expedition to Szechwan or not. But when Shen arrived home, he found that there was nothing that he could do there, and so he boarded a boat again and returned to Shenchow, determined to go with the army. When he arrived, however, he discovered that the entire unit of four thousand men had left for Szechwan four days ago, and so he was obliged to remain behind with "an old chief adjutant, a lame adjutant, an opium-smoking clerical officer, and twenty soldiers classed as old or feeble.

There was now less for Shen to do than there had been in Huaihua. His only duties were to copy a report every three days, and submit a written account of the soldiers' pay at the end of every month. When the chief adjutant noticed Shen and another young soldier sitting under the trees in the yamen courtyard all day singing

1. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.91.
folk songs, he began to send them regularly to the lotus ponds outside the town to fish for frogs that he could eat with his wine, in order to give them something to do.¹ But this made little difference to the emptiness of the days, or the quietness of the town and Shen found that time weighed heavily on him.

Sometimes he would stroll down to the riverside to study the different kinds of boats, and watch them unloading the soldiers' supplies. But although the scene was colourful, it failed to raise his spirits. "Beauty always makes one sad," he remarks.² It was loneliness above all that oppressed him. Now that all his friends had gone, he had nobody to talk to, and his pleasures brought him less happiness than before, because he could not share them. In search of companionship, he would often go and chat to the old dumpling-seller by the town gate³, watch the drill in the military training camp⁴, or go to the well to watch the people drawing water and washing clothes, and perhaps to help the women with their work there.⁵

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1. *Hunan Journey*, pp. 91-2; *Autobiography*, p.87.
3. Ibid., pp.87-88.
4. Ibid., p.87.
5. Ibid., p.89.
He also liked to sit on top of the town wall next to the mission school, where he could look down on the children at play. Sometimes they would accidentally kick the ball that they were playing with up onto the top of the wall, and then, not feeling inclined to climb up after it, they would ask Shen in a friendly manner:

"Young officer, young officer would you help us by throwing our ball down?"

I would hasten to pick the ball up, and I would kick it with the point of my foot as they had done. Then the leather ball would soar high up into the sky, to drop down swiftly beside the young students. They would convey their approval and gratitude with a smile, and some would exclaim softly and gaze at me for a moment, before returning at once to their struggle for the ball.1

Shen gained a sense of fellowship from this exchange which soothed his loneliness for a moment. It pleased him too to be addressed as "young officer" because of his gray uniform, for he liked to think that his true (and superior) status as a secretary was a secret that was concealed from everybody else. His happiness on these occasions was bound to be short-lived, however, for

before long the school bell would ring for the beginning of the lesson, and they would scatter like a swarm of bees, leaving behind nothing but a round leather ball in a corner of the lawn. By the wall, masses of flowers whose names I did not know were beginning to fade and

1. Ibid.
fall, the sky was calm and peaceful, and I gazed at my own thin shadow cast below me by the sun, feeling an indefinable sense of boredom.¹

As he walked away from the school, along the top of the wall, he would sometimes encounter a group of young women going in the opposite direction. Seeing him, they would be thrown into consternation. There would be confused cries of "third sister, second sister", "a soldier, a soldier" and the like, and they would all appear to be on the verge of turning back, so Shen, painfully embarrassed, would feel obliged to stand aside and turn his back to them, so that they could pass. It was at times like this that he was sorry that he wore a uniform. "I considered myself to be a student, and I did not think that other people ought to detest me."² Then he would think nostalgically of the books he had read in Huaihua, and when he got back to his quarters, he would sit at his desk and assiduously practice his handwriting for a long while.³

In this way, spring and summer passed into autumn, and after a year had gone by, news of the army came from Szechwan. At first it was merely said that there had been fighting with "divine soldiers"⁴ and then that the

1. Ibid., pp.89-90.
2. Ibid., p.90.
3. Ibid.
4. 神兵: bands of fanatical warriors who believed themselves to be magically protected and hence invulnerable.
army had been forced to retreat to Hunan. Finally, a
detailed telegram arrived telling how almost the entire
army had been wiped out in a popular uprising. All but
one or two of the officers, who had been fortunate enough
to escape, had been slaughtered, as had three out of the
four thousand troops. There was now no need for the men
left at Shenchow to stay there, and within five days
they had all received their discharge money and passports,
and had set off for their various homes.¹

Shen arrived back in Fenghwang in August 九月 ,
but by December he felt that there was no point in his
staying at home any longer, so he set out for Chihkiang,
in search of some fresh opportunity. After four days of
often dangerous travel through heavy snow, he reached
the town, and soon found employment as an official in
the little police station, where a maternal uncle of his
was chief of police. His job was simply to copy out
records of crimes and punishments, and to accompany a
policeman through the jail every evening, checking the
names of the prisoners on the roll and seeing that they
were all securely bound in accordance with their pre-
scribed punishments.²

¹ Hunan Journey, p.92; Autobiography, pp.90-91.
² Autobiography, p.91. Shen was later to write two
stories about the inmates of a jail: below, pp.354-6.
When the police station was given the job of collecting the local slaughter tax (640 cash per pig), Shen had to fill in the receipts. A more interesting job was to accompany the man who was sent out as tax inspector, as he made his rounds of the slaughtering tables outside the town. In this way, Shen made a great many new acquaintances:

The men in the various shops got to know me, and I also got to know them. The tailor's, the silversmith's, the stationer's, the tobacconist's: no matter where I went, there was always someone to greet me, and everywhere I was in the habit of chatting and enjoying myself. As a rule, these shopkeepers were local gentry who were always drinking with my uncle, and they also knew a lot of things that could be useful to the police, so they used to treat me very well. ¹

Shen also had another relative, who was an important man in the area, being possessed of both money and influence, and who was everywhere treated with great respect. He praised Shen's ability, and allowed him to be present when he was composing poems with Shen's uncle, as they used to do every day. In this way, Shen says, "although I could not write poems, I learnt to read them". ² He would copy the poems out, and, in order to win their praise, he began to practice writing in the small "regular" style. He now had a chance to resume his interrupted self-education, and the best possible opportunity

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¹bid., p.92.
²bid.
was provided by his relative's house, where he "lingered for about a year and a half". It proved to be a treasure-house for him, and he has described it in detail in an essay, "The Hsiung Mansion In Chihkiang District". It was 1919 when he came to Chihkiang, and he was now seventeen years old.

The Hsiung family mansion consisted of two main sections, an old and a new. The first was an old-style building of three rows of rooms and three courtyards. It was largely deserted now, for the eighty-year old mistress of the house was now living in Peking, while the son who had occupied the first row of rooms had died, and his wife had returned home to Fenghwang. A younger son still occupied the second row with his wife, but the third row and the third courtyard were unused. In this third courtyard, however, there was a store-room, and although half of it held only grain, the other half, as Shen discovered, contained a great variety of interesting things - mostly presents given to the house:

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3. Ibid., p.113.
Kinhwa hams, duck-liver sausage from Kwangtung, American milk, Fen wine from Shansi, Japanese clay figurines, "winter insect" plant from Yunnan... Altogether there were about a hundred and ten completely different things. There were even shaggy bear's paws, and various dried and shrivelled-looking things.

Next to the old building, another in more modern style had recently been erected. Originally it had had three rows of rooms and two courtyards, but some of the rooms had been later removed so that the two courtyards could be combined into one. This large yard was peaceful and full of potted orchids and jasmine, and beds of wild tea and the monthly rose (月季: *Rosa indica*). Here Shen spent many happy hours reading. Here there was also a big earthenware jar containing goldfish with a miniature mountain landscape in the centre, just like the one Shen describes in *The Long River*. Facing the courtyard was a large hall where guests were entertained, and here Shen was delighted by a vivid Ming Dynasty ink painting of four dragons and some pieces of calligraphy.

1. Kinhwa 金华 being a district in central Chekiang.
2. A famous wine produced in Fenyang District 汾陽縣.
3. 冬蟲夏草 *Cordyceps robertii*, a parasitic fungus which grows in the bodies of insects and arachnids, used for medicinal purposes.
5. Ibid., p. 108.
6. Ibid., p.110.
The rooms facing the street were furnished in semi-Western style. Round the walls hung paintings and inscriptions, most of them gifts from Peking, given to the lady of the house in honour of her age. One couplet in particular impressed Shen, both by its meaning and by the bold style of the handwriting. It was signed Li Yuan-hung, \(\text{Yuan-hung}\), and read:

She has sons who are present-day heroes,
And lives to a venerable age enjoying the world's esteem.

This couplet touched Shen's sense of patriotism, and was to find an echo in many passages in his works where he evinces (despite his professed lack of interest in ethical principles) an idealist's passionate concern for the present and future condition of his country:

What pleased me most at the time were the words "present-day heroes". They seemed even more wonderful and stirring than all the great heroes that I had just read about in the Shuei Hu Chuan. For I did not believe that this title could be won by means of killing people, according to the popular conception. On the contrary, it would have to come from a different kind of prowess, which would exhibit simplicity and purity of character, compassion and generosity, far-sightedness and depth of thought. Only then could one assume this title without shame. The nation always

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1. 1864-1928. President of the Republic 1916-17 and 1921-23.
2. Ibid., p.110.
needs an adequate supply of such heroes if it is to progress, and yet, when one compares the present generation with other ages, they are by no means numerous.1

But Shen's patriotism finds expression, not only in a desire to see China "progress" in the modern world, but also in a respect for the traditions of the past, for a secure future can only be built, he believes, if it preserves and continues the values of the past. Here, the old matriarch of the Hsiung family, referred to in the second line of the couplet, appears as a symbolic figure:

The old lady had personally experienced prosperity and adversity, and she was simple and unpretentious, good-natured and amiable. Just like the model good mothers among the older generation in other places in China, she brought greatness into the commonplace. When she reached the advanced age of eighty, although she lived in a mansion in Peiping, dwelling peacefully in a position of eminence, surrounded and attended by children and grandchildren, with great men and strict teachers, from the President on down, gathering about her house: in crowds and standing in line to offer congratulations on her longevity, and although she attained for a time a life of great luxury, wealth and honour in the world - yet, if she were actually to choose for herself, I fear that she would still prefer the time when she used to live in the country, with two or three relatives and neighbours, readily finding true happiness in life by sunning the yellow soy-juice in the empty courtyard, by making pickled vegetables, mushroom oil or beancurd, or by chatting about old and commonplace things.2

2. Ibid., pp.111-112.
The Hsiung mansion also opened Shen's eyes to the worlds of art and history, by means of the paintings and calligraphy that adorned its walls. But the greatest treasure in the house was the two big boxes full of books on the upper floor of the new building. Here there were ten or more volumes of seals, and from them Shen learnt to recognize many old seals and inscriptions. Later, he learnt how to cut seals himself, as well as how to write in the "grass" style and how to compose five-word and seven-word "regulated" poems. His interest in seals and inscriptions may also be seen as a foreshadowing of the antiquarian interests that were eventually to be his sole pursuit, when his career as a writer of fiction was over.

More important than the seals, however, the boxes also contained a set of the novels of Dickens, translated by Lin Shu (1852-1924). Shen was delighted by them, and in the "quiet, fragrant" courtyard that summer he read them all one by one: Oliver Twist, A Christmas Carol, Nicholas Nickleby, David Copperfield and the rest. "I liked these books," he says, "because they told me exactly what I needed to understand. They didn't speak

1. Ibid., p.110; Autobiography, pp.92-3.
of principles like other books; they merely recorded phenomena". 1 Each of them in turn became a "good teacher" and a "helpful friend" to him. The hardships and struggles that took up the first half of the stories seemed to him to be quite close to the story of his own life so far, but "as to whether the second half would turn out as successfully as in the books or not, that would depend entirely on me." 2

Next to the mansion was a school which was financed and run by the Hsiung family, at a considerable loss to themselves. When Shen arrived in Chihkiang, the school had already closed for the holidays, except for the sericulture section. He had access to the library, however, and here he leafed through the Shih Chi, the Han Shu, and various other books. He also found a handsomely printed set of the Ta-lu Monthly 大陸月報, containing a translation of stories from the Arabian Nights 天方夜譚 which he read with great pleasure. 3

But it was Dickens' novels which had the deepest influence on him, serving him as a source of inspiration and guidance for the future:

3. Ibid., pp.112-3.
I used (them) ... as a bridge over which I crossed into a brand-new world. The fame and achievements of great men and martyrs, the loves and hates of young men and women in country villages: all were to reappear under my pen and receive fresh life. It is this that is history, and human life. When one reviews this seemingly disconnected but in fact unbroken history, this apparently tangible but in fact elusive life, one cannot but be deeply moved.2

It was about the time of the May the Fourth Movement of 1919, and the cultural upheaval that was then taking place in China also first appeared to Shen's eyes in Chihkiang, in the form of the young women students who were later to fill his Hsiao-hsiao, in the story of that name, with fear and hope. He was with the butchers one day,

when I suddenly saw several women students, their pigtails freshly cut off, returning home on holidays from Taoyuan, and walking along the street side by side, all of them daughters of the greater and lesser landlords of Chihkiang. The behaviour of these landlords' daughters, with what appeared to the inhabitants of a small town as its air of unreality, was naturally a source of amusement; and I remember that the descendant of Chuan Chu in front of me was

1. Lieh-shih 猛士.
3. 桃源. On the Yuan River, a little upstream from Changteh.
4. I.e. the butcher. An ironical reference to the assassin Chuan Chu 刺客 of the state of Wu 諸 during the Spring and Autumn period (722-481 B.C.)
reminded, as soon as he saw them, of a number of stories about women students, and he actually put down his butcher's knife and burst into loud laughter, in which I also joined. I little thought that ten years later some girls who had studied little but were fully mature in feeling would almost all, out of a faith accepted in all simplicity, throw themselves boldly into the maelstrom of the Revolution, to receive the sorrows and joys, mingled with bitter tears, that were to be their individual destinies.¹

Shen was happy in his present environment, and as a consequence he worked cheerfully and industriously.² Meanwhile, his mother and sisters had sold their house in Fenghwang, and since they had relatives in Yuanchow, and Ts'ung-wen seemed to be prospering there, they came to live with him. The Shen family was known to be an old and respectable one, Shen Ts'ung-wen was clever and capable, and their relatives in Chihkiang had a great deal of local influence. For all these reasons, Shen was treated well by everyone, and his mother was convinced that the family's fortune had at last taken a turn for the better.

¹ "The Hsiung Mansion", pp.113-4. Shen is probably thinking in particular of his friend Ting Ling here, for he writes of her in a similar way in his biography of her and in the 1933 story "Three Women" 三女. ² Autobiography, p.93.
And if fate had not dealt unkindly with me, and had permitted me to pass the years and months in this way, I imagine that by now I should have become one of the lesser local gentry, my wife would certainly be the daughter of a fairly well-to-do merchant, I would no doubt have twice been local magistrate , and, finally, I would be bound to have become the father of four or more children.1

In fact, his own relative had thoughts of accepting him as a son-in-law. But things were to turn out very differently.

Shen's uncle, the chief of police, died suddenly of tuberculosis. As a result, the duty of collecting taxes was transferred to a new militia office to which Shen was also moved, and where he resumed his work as a tax collector, his salary being increased from twelve thousand to sixteen thousand cash per month. Here he made the acquaintance of a tall, fair-skinned youth who seemed very well disposed towards him, and soon invited him home to meet his young sister. Within half a year, Shen's life had been completely disrupted by what he fancied was his love for this girl. When his relatives and friends got wind of the affair, they urged him not to be foolish, pointing out that many of the local gentry had their eye on him, and a much more suitable marriage could easily be arranged. In fact, his relative informed him, four possible matches were open to him already, all

1. Ibid., p.94.
of them far above anything he would have dared aspire to before. He had only to choose one of these four young women, if he wished, and the marriage would be arranged.

But God and the Devil must have conspired together, for I thought that I loved the other fair-skinned girl, and I also believed the fair-skinned youth's lies, and thought that she loved me too. A strange fate was to snatch me out of this commonplace existence and set me down again in the midst of the vicissitudes that were to follow. And so I said to my relative: "That's no good. I'm not going to be your son-in-law, or a shop-keeper's son-in-law. I have a plan, and I'll work things out myself according to my own plan." What plan? Heaven alone really knew.1

His mother smiled sadly and said nothing. His relative was philosophical: "All right. We'll see. Everything has its allotted destiny. It's no good forcing matters."2

Soon Shen was busy writing a stream of love-poems to his sweetheart, passing them on to her through her brother. He was now in charge of his family's finances, including the sum that his mother and sisters had got from the sale of their house in Chen-kan, and the girl's brother used to borrow money from him regularly, for some mysterious purpose of his own, and return it promptly the next day. After a while, it appears that he no longer needed this money, and he ceased to call at Shen's place to collect

1. Ibid., p.95.
2. Ibid., p.96.
his poems. Shen realized then that he had been made use
of and lied to, and that his one-sided love-affair was
over. Broken-hearted, he lost all interest in his work
and could think only of getting right away from the town
and its unhappy memories.

So one day I left the account-books, the brother
and sister, the four ideal fathers-in-law who
used to ask me as soon as they saw me 'How's
the poetry going?', the four tall, slender,
graceful girls with their long plaits and their
eyes as black as lacquer, and my poor mother
and sisters, and I went away.  

D. Changteh and Paotsing

Shen wanted to leave Chihkiang as far behind as
possible, and his original intention was to go to Peking,
but in fact he went no further on this occasion than
Changteh. He found lodgings here in a small inn, and,
having nothing else to do, he began to spend his time as
he had at Shenchow: that is, by frequenting the water-
front. The waterfront street here was much bigger than
the one in Shenchow, however, being about two-thirds of a
mile (two li) long, and Shen would spend all day strolling
up and down admiring the shops and buildings, or simply
squatting and contemplating the bustling show in front of
him. His favourite section of the waterfront was called

1. Ibid., p.97.
Mayang Street 麻陽街. It was bounded on one side by the town wall, and on the other by the close-packed row of little houses that rose from the riverside. It was muddy and slippery the whole year round; and it contained the usual array of shops: opium houses, sellers of food and ships' equipment, barbers' shops, and so on.

The river was full of moored houseboats and big merchant-ships, and sailors were everywhere in the street, hurrying about as they made their purchases. Since boatmen and prostitutes (in Shen's writings, at least) inevitably go together, there were also a number of brothels, outside of which a few women could always be seen, dressed in blue and red printed cotton, "with powdered faces and oiled hair, the bridges of their noses pinched to make them red. They sat on the long benches in front of the door, cracking sunflower seeds, and giggling whenever anyone walked past, or softly singing songs of Mayang."  

Cockfights were popular, and men too were commonly seen rolling in the mud and fighting. Sellers of sweets and cakes were constantly going their rounds, attracting attention by striking wooden clappers or little bells, and singing bawdy songs. Everywhere women would be sitting

1. Mayang is a district between Fenghwang and Chihkiang.
outside their doors, quarreling and cursing as they cut up their vegetables. And somewhere a puppet show was bound to be in progress, a crowd having gathered round at the sound of the gong and drum, only to disperse rapidly when the puppeteer tried to collect some money. At night the lights of the boats would twinkle on the river, and Shen would hear the long-drawn cries of the boatmen selling wine, pork and noodles. Once again, he feels that his own life was enriched by the life that flowed about him on the waterfront and was to reappear in many of his stories:

Coming and going up and down this street, seeing how these people lived and what their joys and sorrows were like - in this way I also seem to have grasped something of the meaning of life.

As always, he also liked to climb the town wall and walk along it. From this vantage point he could look down into the courtyards of the houses against the wall beneath him, or else gaze out away from the town to the north, where he could see a small river with ducks and geese, a dye-works, some soldiers grazing horses, and occasionally a burial. Sometimes he would actually go outside the town and talk to the dyers or the soldiers.

Here, as if to correct any possible misapprehensions in his readers' minds, he points out again that despite his studies and his interest in students, he was still a countryman at heart:

Although I now seemed to have become an educated man in fact I was much more like a soldier in spirit. With them I found more things to talk about than I could with a student. And even now, I seem to be able to carry on a more varied conversation with somebody from the lower classes, for their thoughts, feelings and opinions, like mine, are mostly drawn from real life. But if I talk to a university professor, apart from the understanding he has gained from studying books, he can only speak of the impressions that we have both acquired from the newspapers, so that, as far as the qualities that make one a man are concerned, there always seems to be something lacking in him, and the things we can talk about are very few indeed.¹

Shen had not forgotten what drove him to Changteh in the first place, and he wrote a remorseful letter to his mother, blaming himself and begging her forgiveness. "There is no reason for not forgiving a mistake that has already been made," she replied. "If you do your own work properly, we will be content." "When I received this letter," Shen adds, "I went quietly up on to the town wall and wept, for I could imagine the tears that must have been on both their faces as my mother dictated the letter and my elder sister copied it out."²

¹ Ibid., p.101.
² Ibid., p.102.
He also had news of his former sweetheart at this time. She had set off down the river with the intention of studying, but had been abducted by "bandits" and taken into the hills to become the "wife" of their leader.¹ She was later ransomed and married to a regimental commander in the Kweichow army, but her husband was soon killed, whereupon she returned to Chihkiang and became a Roman Catholic nun there.²

Shen continued to linger in Changteh in hopes of getting back into the army, for thirty miles upstream at Taoyuan, a unit of three detachments had been stationed to "clear the countryside". These men formed part of the troops from Fenghwang, which had recently joined the First of the United Armies³. Shen secured an introduction to a Detachment Commander, and set off by steamboat for Taoyuan, full of hope. When he got there, however, after finding lodgings with a cousin who had been sent down to Taoyuan to translate cables, he discovered that there were no vacancies for secretaries and the like, and although he was willing to serve as a simple soldier again, he was not wanted in that capacity either.

¹. Ya-chai fu-jen 抑寨夫人．
It was now two years since he had left the army, and his trip to Taoyuan seems to have made him nostalgic. He was full of admiration for the commanding officer, a clever, and, in spite of his having risen from the ranks, a cultured man, and Shen felt that to serve under him "might be more interesting than doing anything else".\(^1\) He was also deeply impressed by the new spirit of discipline, efficiency and self-respect that he saw in the army there, "nothing like the slipshod style of the past".\(^2\) Every day that he stayed in the little inn in Changteh cost him thirty-six cents, and after four months he was well behind with his rent. He had begun to dread facing the landlady over dinner each day, and, after finding no openings in Taoyuan, he was thinking in desperation of working as a waiter in the inn itself when he got back. So when he heard that a boatload of military uniforms was to be sent upstream as part of a convoy, and that the man in charge of this boat was someone that he had already met and an old friend of his elder brother's, he decided to go too. A schoolteacher relative promised to settle his debts for him, and, after packing a tiny bundle, he set off on the slow journey, which was to last for over

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a month, with his brother's friend and his cousin, who was returning to his own regiment.¹

The oldest member of this trio was Shen's brother's friend, Tsêng Ch'in-hsüan, who has already been mentioned.² He had read little, but was a superb story-teller. Although he was no more than twenty-five, he claimed to have seduced about forty young virgins, and he would entertain the other two with tales of his exploits, which, however, he related in a matter-of-fact way with no trace of boasting or pride. As mentioned above, Shen felt that he "learnt a great deal from listening to him". Before they had covered an eighth of the journey, Shen and his cousin had spent all of their money, and thenceforth the three of them passed the days by lying about on the new cotton uniforms and gazing at the scenery, or amusing one another by joking, singing and telling indecent stories.

At dusk on the first day of the new year, they arrived at Shenchow, and the three friends went into town. As they were walking past a butcher's shop, they were startled by a cracker thrown at them by some unseen prankster. Tsêng drew the others aside, and they hid and waited till the trick was repeated with two passing

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1. Ibid., p.104.
2. Above, pp.10, 48-49.
merchants. This time they saw that the culprit was in the upper storey of the butcher's shop, and Tseng walked over and knocked on the door, crying "Happy New Year" in an affable voice. When the unsuspecting butcher opened the door, Tseng felled him with a single blow, swore at him, and tossed his name-card in the door, inviting the butcher to come and see him off at the boat if he "had anything to say". Then he grasped the other two by the arms and strode off, laughing loudly. When they got back to the boat, they armed themselves with sticks and stones in preparation for a battle, but although they waited till midnight, nobody came. "Perhaps," says Shen, with a touch of local pride, "he had heard from the sound of his challenger's voice that he was a man from Chen-kan, and he knew that it was better not to irritate him". ¹


On the morning of the second day, they left Shenchow and the Yuan River, and turned northwards up the River Yu, towards Pao tsing, which was their destination. They travelled upstream for another fortnight, but when they had nearly reached Pao tsing, Tseng's boat hit a large rock which smashed the starboard side and flooded the boat with water. Being full of uniforms, however,
it did not sink at once, but was whirled downstream by the powerful current for about a mile, where, by great good fortune, it entered shallow water, and Shen and the rest were able to scramble ashore. The rest of the convoy continued on its way, for it was only two days' journey to Paotsing, and there were no "bandits" in this area. Meanwhile, Shen and the others, with some of the soldiers and boatmen, built a temporary shelter on the beach out of the wreckage of the boat, lit two large fires to keep wild animals away, and passed the night there.

When he reached Paotsing, Shen took up lodgings with yet another of his cousins, who was employed as a secretary in the army there.\(^1\) After an unsuccessful attempt to find a job for himself in the army, Shen settled down to half a year of what was locally known as "drifting": dining at the expense of any friend or acquaintance who was willing to invite him, and waiting for something to turn up. He did not much like his present situation, but there seemed to be little that he could do about it. Moreover, he had no clear-cut ambitions. As he says: "I was willing to become a real man, as one should, but just what sort of man I would want to be, I was unable to say."\(^2\) So he was content to wait until time had worked a

\(^1\) Ibid., p.109.
\(^2\) Hunan Journey, p.113.
change in his circumstances, for "time may change all men and all things".1

The country around Paotsing was wild and rugged. Wild pigs, wild dogs and wolves could often be seen there even in broad daylight, for they had little fear of man.2 On moonless or cloudy nights, there could be heard "the howling of wolves, far and near, the sound seeming to lie along the ground, flowing everywhere like water, low and long, mournful and sad"3; and often the high-pitched roar of tigers and leopards could be heard echoing for a long time in the mountain valleys.4 Because of the number of wolves, windows had to be boarded up at night, and two of the animals once came and scratched at Shen's window, until two sentries drove them off with bayonets.5 Among these densely wooded hills, through which flowed the "clear, transparent waters of the Yu"6, Shen once again found his imagination stimulated by being "close to nature's secrets. I would climb a hill close by a river, and lie down in that deserted spot, meditating,

1. Ibid.
dreaming boundless dreams, and drawing near to what always seemed to be a more substantial world".¹

On a hill outside the town there was a secondary school, the pupils of which were drawn from thirteen surrounding districts. Not far away from the school, on another hill, there was an army repair shop, from which there came the incessant sound of machinery wheels and gunfire. The army camp where Shen and his cousin lived was apparently located on this second hill. The young soldiers from the camp would often go to the school to join in the ball game that was a favourite pastime among the pupils there. (Since the aim was only to grab the ball and run and kick it, and there were no rules at all, any number could play.) Shen was once invited with a group of soldiers, and thereafter he would often go by himself, when the lessons were over. Whenever the ball was kicked over the barbed-wire fence, he would go and fetch it, feeling very important, for the students were not allowed out of bounds.²

Shen made many friends here, but the best part of them were to die an early death:

Almost all in this crowd of young people were brave, straightforward, and thoroughly lovable, but within the last ten or more years,

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¹ Autobiography, pp.110-111.
² Hunan Journey, pp.108-110.
over half of them, after graduating from military academy as junior officers, have been sacrificed to die and moulder in a succession of petty civil wars.¹

His three favourite friends were from his own native district. One of them, to whom he devotes the last chapter of his Hunan Journey, survived to work under Mao Tse-tung and eventually take part in the Long March, but the other two were not so fortunate. In 1927 they were schoolteachers in the area, and working hard for the left wing of the Kuomintang, but when the movement to purge the Party began, the army commander received a secret order to eliminate the "activist element". The two young men were accordingly invited to attend a meeting, and, when they got there, were stripped, taken outside the town and executed.²

After a few months of trying unsuccessfully to get a job, Shen got to know the secretaries very well, since he was staying with one of their number, and when they were busy he would often help them by copying out some of the less important orders and proclamations. One day he was caught in the act by an officer, who asked him what he was doing there. Shen explained timidly, afraid that he

2. Hunan Journey, p.114. Similar executions occur in Shen's stories, as, for example, in "The New and the Old" 新與舊 and "The Vegetable Garden" 菜園。
would be in trouble, but the officer was pleased, and reported the matter to the staff, so that Shen soon found himself a secretary again, on a salary of four dollars a month. Now that he had found a position, he began to work hard, and soon outstripped his fellow-secretaries. His handwriting became more stylish than theirs, and he was able to correct their mistakes. His enthusiasm for calligraphy was rekindled, and he came to "feel that the one man in the world most deserving of veneration was Wang Hsi-chih 王羲之." ¹ He saved up his money and used it to buy copy-slips containing rubbings of famous calligraphic inscriptions. His supervisor noticed the improvement in his writing, and would say to him with a smile: "Young man, your writing is really like flying dragons and dancing phoenixes. Nobody else will do for copying out this document!" Such praise spurred Shen on to fresh efforts, and he would sit up late at night to practise.²

Shen Ts'ung-wen was a prolific writer, and he attributes his indefatigability to the training which he imposed on himself in those days. "Later," he says, "I was able to sit at my desk for eight hours at a stretch, writing

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1. Wang Hsi-chih (A.D.321-379) is commonly considered the greatest of Chinese calligraphers.
of things that I had known and thought about during my life, without knowing the meaning of the word 'tired'. This habitual perseverance is certainly the result of my destiny in having become a secretary'.

The secretaries were given a fixed amount of work to do each day, and when they had finished, they were free to do as they pleased. There was little to see in the town, except on market days, so they would often go for long walks outside the town, taking clubs for protection against wild animals. They liked to climb the hills to admire the view from the top, and sometimes they would look for certain kinds of medicinal herbs. Although their rank and duties were humble, they led a healthy life:

We did not care much about the usefulness of money, for we were living, and where there was so much life, we had of course only to approach it, to experience it with our bodies and minds: we had no need of a sum of money or a book to serve as an intermediary.

But even though each of us was firmly settled in his own life in this way, would we be willing to let the days and months drag us one by one into the grave? Certainly not. Each of us knew that an opportunity would come, and when it did we would transform ourselves, change ourselves, and try with all our might to live like real men. He who was to die would fall and rot, and that would be the end of him.

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
But the living would continue to live the portion of sorrow and happiness allotted to them.¹

E. To Szechwan and Back

After ten months, word came that the commander of the Szechwan Army had asked for four regiments from Paotsing as reinforcements. Shen was told that someone would be needed to handle documents and that he could have the job for nine dollars a month. He was glad to accept, although he reflected that if he had gone to Szechwan the last time he had had the chance, he would have been killed.² This time, however, his commanding officer, would be the same man whom he had so much admired at Taoyuan two years before,³ and Shen was anxious to serve under him. He also wanted to see the Wu Gorge on the upper Yangtze, the splendours of which had once been vividly described to him by two of his friends who had been to Chungking.

Consequently, Shen said that he was willing to go to Szechwan in any capacity and at any salary at all, and three days later he set off with the rest of the men and the

1. Ibid., pp.115-116.
3. Above, p.114.
horses. On the eve of their departure, everybody had received a month's wages, which in Shen's case had amounted to nine dollars. He had spent some of this on a pair of silk socks and about half a pound of lump sugar, and had put the rest away in his belt. Since the nights were now very warm, he gave his old cotton coverlet away, so as to have less to carry. This left him with only a small bundle containing most of his worldly goods: "an old padded cotton jacket, an old lined jacket, a handkerchief, a lined pair of trousers, the pair of silk socks worth $1.20, a pair of noisy leather-soled shoes with uppers of fine blue woollen cloth, and an unlined suit of plain coarse cloth". There were also four books of calligraphy, worth about eight dollars altogether, and a volume of poems by Li Shāng-yin 李商隱 (A.D.813-858). In his belt, he kept a pair of chopsticks and a toothbrush, and, suspended from the belt, an enamelled porcelain bowl. "This was the sum total of my possessions, and it still moves me to speak of it now." 1

The regiments moved south along the Hunan border, then crossed into Kweichow, passing through Sungtao. Then they turned north again, entered Szechwan, passed through Siushan and arrived at Lungtan.

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on the seventh day. They had thus passed through three provinces in a week, and "the journey added considerably to my experience". Because of the large number of men, adequate accommodation had not been easy to find, and three times Shen had had to sleep on narrow benches or tables. On two occasions even all these "beds" were taken, and he had to sleep on a pile of rice straw in the open air, where "at midnight one could still see the shooting stars flying through the blue sky". He found all this no hardship, however. On the contrary, he claims that "the thing that I dislike most is sleeping in the same sort of bed every day....Even now, I can never lie down to sleep in the same bed without dreaming that I am sleeping in all sorts of different places." 

Although the troops were to continue further into Szechwan, they were obliged to make Lungtan their temporary headquarters. They were stationed in a temple, and the staff, as before at Huaihua, occupied what had formerly been a theatre. They were welcomed by the Traders' Association, which made all the arrangements for them. The town was not large, but since it was on the salt road

1. Ibid., p.119.
3. Ibid.
to Hunan, and since a small, navigable river connected it with Tungting Lake 洞庭湖, there was a considerable amount of traffic and trading. Consequently, there was a post office, a brewery, and large oil and dyeing works. 1

Near the town, there was a famous "Dragon Cave" 洞, into which the light could penetrate for about half a 里, and from which there flowed, all the year round, a stream of ice-cold water which was used for irrigation. Shen was a frequent visitor to this cave. He would go there almost every day to sit and listen to the sound of the water, returning eventually with a big gourd full of the water for his friends. As usual, he also liked to sit on the river bank watching the boats and the men who strained to haul them along the pebbled shore. "The scene," he says, "was truly moving in its beauty, and always made one feel happiness and sorrow at the same time." 2

His duties were few, and consisted chiefly in keeping a record of incoming and outgoing documents. Although his status was now slightly higher than that of a secretary 司書, his salary was still less than that of a petty officer 旗官. Nevertheless, under his present circumstances, nine dollars a month was more than he knew how

1. Ibid., p.120.
2. Ibid., p.121.
to spend, and he would often use a couple of dollars to treat his friends to a meal in a local restaurant.  

Each part of the building that was serving as army headquarters was marked with a strip of white paper announcing, in Shen's handwriting, which particular section of the military establishment was housed therein. Shen's own office was at the rear of the building, and was adorned with small paper strips reading:

Surpass Chung and Wang,
Eclipse Tseng and Li.

Among Shen's friends here, the one that he found the "most interesting" was a former bandit chief named Liu Yun-t'ing 尹雲亭. Small and dark-skinned, with flashing eyes, he seemed to Shen to be "a real man". He had once been a law-abiding citizen, but had fled to the

1. Ibid., p.122.
2. Ibid., pp.122-3. Chung and Wang are two famous calligraphers of the past: Chung Yu 鍾繇 of the Wei Dynasty (A.D.220-264), and Wang Hsi-chih 王羲之 (above, p.121). Tseng and Li were two contemporary masters: Tseng Hsi 曾熙 and Li Juei-ch'ing 李瑞清.
3. Ibid., p.131. The chapter which Shen devotes to this man in his Autobiography has been printed as a separate story in The Chinese Earth, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London 1947, a collection of his stories translated by Ching Ti and Robert Payne.
hills when he was mistaken for a bandit and shot at by some soldiers. He then became a bandit in fact, but turned to soldiering instead when his life was saved by the man who was now his commanding officer, and under whom he was serving faithfully as a captain.

Liu would often come to visit Shen and chat with him, providing him with much new information about the "human life" which was to be the subject of his stories:

From his lips I heard accounts of burning houses, killing people, raping women and all sorts of crimes. And from his straightforward explanations I gained insight into the understanding of life that lay concealed behind these actions. From him I came to understand so-called evils, and how these evils, though not tolerated by society, had nevertheless forged this tough and untamed soul. It was from his frank narratives that I first came to understand how strange and bewildering are the situations produced by the various incidents of which man's life is the theme.¹

One day, news came that the men of the Szechwan Army who were camped on the opposite bank were keeping prisoner in a temple a beautiful young woman who had become a bandit leader at the age of eighteen. Shen, of course, was curious, for "it seems that I must at all times nourish my soul with these fresh sights"², and a few days later Liu offered to take him to see her. They crossed the river and entered the temple without incident, for Liu seemed

¹. Ibid., p.124.
². Ibid., p.125.
to be on uncommonly good terms with the guards, despite the fact that there was a certain amount of hostility between the soldiers in the Szechwan Army and those from Hunan.¹ When he saw the woman, Shen was immediately struck by the beauty of her figure and her large eyes. He chatted with her through the bars for a moment, and then left her alone with Liu, promising to come and see her again the following day.²

At breakfast the next morning, however, he heard that she had already been executed. The news startled him, and he soon hurried to the bridge, but the corpse had already been taken away, and all that was left was a pool of blood and a pile of ashes, from the burning of the paper money. Shen, still puzzled, went in search of Liu, but found him lying silent on his bed, and did not dare to ask him any questions.

He soon learnt, however, that the woman had not been executed before only because the army hoped to discover the whereabouts of a cache of seventy rifles she was known to have buried somewhere. Liu by promising to help her escape, so that they could spend the rest of their lives together as bandits in the hills, had managed to gain her confidence, and had spent the night of Shen's visit in her

¹ Ibid., p.123.
² Ibid., p.126.
cell. When the guards had realized what was happening, the news spread and a crowd of angry Szechwan soldiers soon gathered round the temple. Liu, however, had been able to bluff his way out, with a pistol in each hand - partly because his opponents knew that the Hunanese troops on the other shore far outnumbered their own. The next day, however, the woman was hastily taken out of the temple and decapitated.¹

Liu lay on his bed for about a week, eating nothing and speaking to nobody, but then he suddenly got up again, and announced to Shen that he was now "better". "By now he was truly a comic and pitiable sight, but there was nothing that I could have said, so I only grasped his hand tightly, and smiled."²

Shen stayed at Lungtan for nearly half a year, for circumstances prevented the army from proceeding to its original destination, and there seemed to be little hope of his seeing the Wu Gorge after all. Moreover, although he had made many friends here, Lungtan offered nothing but the usual round of eating, drinking, and watching executions. Consequently, when a chance came of returning to Hunan by boat, Shen was glad to take it. Liu was also to leave on the same boat, for, having been unjustly

1. Ibid., p.128.
2. Ibid., p.129.
(as he saw it) refused permission to take a concubine, he had vowed to leave the army and return home, to take up "my old tricks" again.¹

On the day when they were due to depart, Liu was suddenly summoned downstairs, and a moment later Shen heard what sounded like preparations for an execution. When he opened his window and looked out, he saw Liu standing in the middle of the courtyard, firmly bound and surrounded by troops. Soon the Commander emerged, an ivory pipe in his hand, and smiled at the spectators. Liu appealed to him for mercy, but the Commander only admonished him to stop complaining and prepare to die like a man. He explained that he had decided to kill him now rather than allow him to return to Hunan and stir up trouble as a bandit again, and added that he would look after his wife and children.

After the bandit chief had listened to what the Commander said, he ceased to clamour for justice. He flashed a smile at the people in the two buildings, and suddenly, in an apparently casual manner, said: "All right, Commander. Thanks for looking after me during the last few years. Goodbye my friends, I'll see you later." And after a moment he added: "Commander, you must be dreaming. Somebody spent six thousand dollars to get me to assassinate you, and I still wouldn't do it!" The Commander seemed not to hear. He turned his head to one side, and ordered an adjutant to buy a good quality coffin.²

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p.131.
Liu was then led away, and Shen saw him no more. That afternoon he boarded his boat, arriving back at Pao- tsing five days later. The cultured and talented Commander, whom Shen had so much admired, was to be betrayed and murdered in Shenchow three years later, by a subordinate who was himself to be killed the following year, in the same town and in the same way.

On his return to Hunan, his skill in copying secured Shen a position as secretary to a commanding officer with a very good reputation. He was still only earning nine dollars a month, but the job gave him a new opportunity to educate himself. In the building where he worked, there were four or five large wooden chests containing over a hundred scroll paintings dating from the Sung to the Ch'ing dynasties, several tens of bronzes and ancient pieces of porcelain ware, more than ten boxes of books, a large collection of stone rubbings, and a set of the huge anthology Szu-pu Ts'ung-k' an 四部叢刊. Since Shen often had to fetch books for the Commander he soon became familiar with their titles and arrangement. Furthermore,

when entering old pictures and antiques in the catalogue, I also had to know the particular painter's name, period and contemporary status, or the name of the vessel and its use, and

1. Ibid., pp.131-132.
entirely through actual use, I acquired a great deal of knowledge. Again, because I was in the habit of leafing through them all day, I slowly came to read and understand the greater part of the old books as well.¹

Shen was fairly busy now, and might even be summoned from his bed at midnight, if an urgent telegram arrived, or some other document needing his attention. Because his freedom to roam out of doors was restricted, he spent most of his spare time in the building, where he would amuse himself by looking through old catalogues of antiques and bronze-inscriptions, striving to identify and value the bronzes around him. Thus his eyes were gradually opened to the entire cultural heritage of his country, and as a result of this initial knowledge, a countryman who had lived to admire the life of man and the phenomena of nature, went on to take the widest and keenest interest in understanding the splendours of the wisdom of mankind.²

Shen expresses gratitude to his Commander for giving him the opportunity of studying here. But, typically, he claims that it was the Commander's remarkable character which affected him most deeply and "influenced my whole life's work":

He would get up before it was light, and go to bed after midnight. There was nothing that he did not understand clearly. He always lived as frugally as a low-ranking officer, and from

¹. Ibid., p.133.
². Ibid., p.134.
one point of view, he was even simple and unaffected. He would set himself to learn and understand anything that was good, and he dealt with all matters firmly and with dispatch. As a result of his remarkable energy, the Chenkan Army had had an excellent reputation throughout Western Hunan for the last twenty years, and had an inner coherence that made it as tough as steel, or an indivisible hank of silk.¹

F. The Turning-point

Shen must have been about nineteen by now, and his increasing years together with the influence of his new environment began to work a change in his character. He kept more to himself and when he went into the hills or down to his "beloved river", he generally took a book with him:

I would lie in a patch of grass reading, and when I wearied of that I would look up from the book and watch the white clouds moving in the sky, or the leaves drifting slowly in the river. Since I had read many books, my feelings had been considerably softened, and when I was close to nature my attitude was no longer quite the same. Moreover, I had grown a little older, and I may have been a bit uneasy in my mind about my present situation, being worried about things that were past or yet to come. And so, although I was living in extremely promising circumstances, I still felt exceptionally lonely.²

¹. Ibid., pp.134-135.
By this time, his father had returned from the north, and had secured a post as a medical field officer 軍醫 at Shenchow. His mother and his youngest sister were also living at Shenchow, while his young brother was serving as a secretary in the same unit as Shen himself.¹

Shen was beginning to grow away from all his old friends, who now found him "a bit strange", and he longed for a sympathetic friend to whom he could pour out some of "the thoroughly confused feelings that were fermenting in my mind".² He did in fact make four new friends at this time, three of whom, like three of the four young men in Shen's 1946 story "Rainbow", had travelled in south-west China. One of them, as will be seen, was soon to be drowned, while another two were to die elsewhere in battle. The fourth was the young art student mentioned above.³

Shen also found much pleasure in the company of an uncle who arrived in Paotsing at about this time, and took up lodgings in a temple on the other side of the river. This uncle, who was the Commander's teacher, was a learned man, and Shen would often cross the river to hear him talk about the philosophy of the Sung and Yuan dynasties,

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p.136.
3. Above, p.55.
Mahāyāna Buddhism, Buddhist logic, the Theory of Evolution, and a variety of topics about which Shen knew nothing but was anxious to learn, for he had a vague feeling that there was something he should do, some goal that he should aim at, which would harmonize with his character and give meaning to his life. What that goal was, however, and how to achieve it, he did not yet know.¹

At this time, a number of questions, such as the use of soldiers to build roads and clear land, the management of schools, and the encouragement of industry, were being much discussed in the newspapers. Consequently, the Commander drew up a plan to form the thirteen districts under his jurisdiction into a kind of self-governing community, and before long, there were established at Paotsing a teachers' training college, a model secondary school, a girls' school and technical college, a model forestry project, and half a dozen factories. Teachers and technicians for all this were imported from Changsha. It was also decided to issue a regular gazette, and to this end a newspaper office and printing press were set up. Since most of the articles were written by the Commander himself, it became Shen's task to copy them out on lithographic paper. Shen was also given the job of proof-reading, and for this reason he was transferred to the

newspaper office, which was only a short distance away, although he might still be called back on occasion, if there were documents to be copied.\(^1\)

At his new job, Shen met another "interesting" person, who, like his friend Wen at Huaihua, was to introduce him to a new world. He was a young printer from Changsha, tall, and with round face and eyes. "Although", Shen says with a touch of irony, "he was only a worker,. . . he had come under the influence of the May the Fourth Movement and had become a progressive worker".\(^2\) He owned a number of books and magazines of the new literature, which he kept on improvised bookshelves against the wall, while Shen kept the copy-books and collections of poetry which he had brought from headquarters on the table. Thus, "we slept in the same room, worked under the

1. Ibid., pp.137-8.
2. Ibid., p.139."Oh May 4, 1919, students in Peking demonstrated in protest against the Chinese government's humiliating policy towards Japan. There resulted a series of strikes and associated events amounting to a social ferment and an intellectual revolution. This rising tide was soon dubbed by the students the May Fourth Movement (Wu-ssu yün-tung), a term which acquired a broader meaning in later years than it had originally." Chow Tse-tsung, The May Fourth Movement, Harvard U.P., 1960, p.1. Chow was himself a student in Changsha, according to the preface, p.ix.
same light: and when he read his new books, I would read my old books."¹

But when they got to know one another a little better, Shen's "countryman's temperament" would not let him overlook any opportunity for asking questions, and so

I asked him what that book with the picture of the bare-chested person on the cover was, and when he had told me that it was Reconstruction ² I asked him again what sort of thing that Superman 超人³ was. I still remember his expression then: with his round face and eyes, he was just like a cat. "What! Good Heavens! What an ignoramus! A world-renowned poetess... and you still don't know of her?" "I only know the T'ang dynasty poetess Yu Hsün-chi 玄機, who was a Taoist priestess." "A modern one?" "I know the women pupils of the Sui Garden."⁴ "More modern than that?" I shook my head; and said nothing, but when I saw his expression, I felt a little ashamed. I really knew nothing at all.⁵

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1. Autobiography, p.139.
2. Or La Rekonstruo, a monthly journal of the Chinputang or Progressive Party, first published in Shanghai in 1920 as a continuation of a semimonthly periodical begun the previous year. See Chow Tse-tsung, op. cit., p.179.
3. Title of a volume of stories by the woman poet and story-writer Ping Hsin 冰心, pen-name of Hsieh Wan-ying 謝婉瑩 (born 1902).
4. 隨園女弟子 . The "Sui Garden" was the name of the Nanking estate of the poet Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1798). He had several women among his pupils, and compiled an anthology of their poetry.
5. Autobiography, pp.139-140.
Shen's new friend took pity on his ignorance, and gave him a story to read, followed by a copy of the *Creation Weekly* 創造週報. He seemed to think that this latter publication would explain everything, but at first Shen was not very impressed:

When I had read it for a while, I remembered a few people's names. I also knew where the difference between colloquial (pai-hua) and classical (wen-yen) literary style lay: one ended sentences with yeh 也 and yen 而 while the other ended them with ya 耶 and a aì 哎; and when writing in one, the less you said the better, whereas when writing in the other, the more you said the better. After I had grasped this distinction for myself, I went again to the printer and asked him to tell me whether I more or less had the gist of it. He seemed to feel that I was rather comical then, for in his eyes I really was a bit "feeble"，as they say in Changsha.

The printer was lonely, however, and wanted someone to talk to, so he explained to Shen that the most important thing about pai-hua literature was that it had an indispensable quality called "thought":

At the time, I did not understand what "thought" was, and I felt very embarrassed. If I could have known that ten years later I was to write pieces that some critics would read right through without understanding the meaning of what they said, making wild criticisms of my writing as

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2. *Hsiū* 糜, literally "rotten, decaying", hence "stupid, backward, ignorant".
"lacking thought" - if I had known that even then I would not understand what was meant by "thought", it seems to me that I would have had no need to feel ashamed on that earlier occasion either.  

Despite his initial and later scepticism, however, Shen was eventually won over by his friend's enthusiasm for the new literature, and he set aside his volumes of classical poetry and calligraphic specimens for magazines like Reconstruction and New Tide 新潮. Later he was to change his attitude again, as his confidence in his own ability as a writer enabled him, like D.H. Lawrence, to feel a sense of superiority over his contemporaries:

I remembered the names of a great many new personages, and it seemed as though they were intimate acquaintances of mine. I revered them, for I felt that they were more deserving of reverence than anybody else. It always seemed


strange to me that they should know so many things, and that when they set their hands to it they could write so much and so well. But I had not the faintest inkling that in fact I knew even more than they did, and what is more, that after a while I would be able to write better than they did.¹

As a result of the literature that he was now reading, Shen was inspired with a sense of duty towards his fellow men. No longer content to drift along taking each day as it came, he felt that he must set about sacrificing his own interests for the betterment of mankind. After reading accounts in the newspapers of humble people contributing money to "promote study", he decided that since he had no opportunity to study himself, he should help others to do so. Accordingly, he sent ten days' pay in stamps to the editor of Awakening ² in Shanghai, together with a note requesting that the money be forwarded to the Work-and-Study Corps 工讀團 ³ This altruistic act gave the "anonymous soldier", as he had signed himself, a great deal of pleasure.⁴

¹ Autobiography, p.141.
² Supplement to the Kuomintang newspaper Republican Daily 民國日報. Published separately from May 20th 1910.
⁴ Autobiography, p.142.
When he was not busy, Shen liked to stroll around and inspect the new schools and factories. But although the latter delighted him, the schools were a source of sadness, for they seem to have made him feel cut off from a life in which he should have been sharing, and he could only console himself with the thought that he was still serving his country, and with the memory of his recent anonymous donation. Scholarships were now being provided for study in Peking or even overseas, and Shen would have liked to acquire some useful skill in this way. "But what ought I to study, what could I study? I had no idea at all." 1

Soon he was more often required for copying than for proof-reading, and he was transferred back to his old post. Not long after this he was struck down by a severe attack of fever. Delirious and unable to eat, his head aching and his nose bleeding, he lay ill for forty days. He managed to survive, thanks to the "strong constitution" that his "whole past life" had given him, but shortly after his recovery, one of his friends was sucked down by a whirlpool while swimming across the river, and was drowned. Four days later, his body was recovered, and Shen went to collect it for burial. The sight of his

1. Ibid., p.143.
friend's bloated corpse, coupled with the recollection of his own fever and near death, made him reflect seriously on his present situation:

To die from illness or drowning, or to go somewhere else and starve to death: what difference did it make? If I had died of illness a few days ago, I would not even be able to set eyes on the many things that I had not yet seen, and would have no way of going to the places that I had never visited— a most undesirable state of affairs. What I knew and had seen was really so little, while there was so much that I ought to know and see. What should I do? 1

This was to be the major turning-point in his life, and he thought things over carefully before making his decision. For four days, "lying in bed, by the water, in the hills, in the big kitchen and the stables", he pondered the problem in silence, confiding in nobody, until he finally made up his mind:

For better or worse, I would have to die one day. To see a few more fresh suns, to cross a few more fresh bridges, to use up the last of my strength and breathe my last breath doing something dangerous—this seemed likely to be more interesting than dying of illness here, or being unexpectedly killed by a stray bullet. 2

So Shen determined to leave Paotsing and go to Peking to study. If he was unable to study, he would become a policeman. If he could not become a policeman, then he

2. Ibid.
would have to admit defeat. He had no other plan.  

Having made his mind up, he went to discuss the matter with his superior officer, who gave him three months' pay and some words of encouragement, offering financial support if he should succeed in his studies, and a place in the unit at Paotsing again if he failed and wanted to return home. Shen then collected his twenty-seven dollars from the paymaster and left Hunan. He travelled first to Hankow, and then through Chengchow and Suchow to Tientsin. Finally, after nineteen days' travel, he emerged with his bundle of luggage from the railway station at Peking. He stood blankly in front of the station for a while, until he was approached by a rickshaw man, who explained to the young countryman that he could take him wherever he wanted to go. Shen then allowed himself to be conveyed to a small inn on the West Moat just outside the city. In the visitors' book he wrote: "Shen Ts'ung-wen, age twenty, student, Fenghwang District, Hunan." "And then," he says, "I first entered a school from which I have no means of ever graduating, to study the always inexhaustible lesson of human life."  

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1. Ibid.  
2. Ibid., p.145.
CHAPTER THREE: "THE FIRST STAGE"\(^1\)

When Shen arrived in Peking, it was the third year after the May the Fourth Movement\(^2\), and like the hero of one of his stories, he became one of "at least a hundred thousand students" in "a great city of one and a half million inhabitants".\(^3\) His intention was to divide his time between work and study, but there were some hard lessons to learn before he was able to make his way:

The first thing to learn was the ability to endure the cold, so that I could pass the winter with no stove in a musty room\(^4\) in a little boarding-house while the temperature dropped to twelve degrees. The next was the ability to endure hunger and a thoroughly empty stomach after two or three days without food. The next was the ability to read widely in the library,

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1. "Actuality", p.86. In this essay, written in 1947, Shen gives an account of his life and career, together with extensive criticism of the times in which he lived, roughly from the point at which the Autobiography leaves off. Seeing his life's journey as following a road "which never ends" (ibid., p.103), he divides it into five "stages", the first of which begins with his arrival in Peking and lasts for about five years.

2. Ibid., p.86.


4. A number of Shen's stories are given as written in the "Cramped and Musty Study" 窄而霉齋 , usually in Peking, but also in Tsingtao.
feeling my own way, while oppressed by both
hunger and cold and without hope or assistance.
The next was the ability to struggle against
and adapt myself to the failure of my work,
after I had begun to use a pen to write con-
stantly day and night, sending my works in to
the various newspapers and magazines, and
waiting, without the slightest result. ¹

When Shen first arrived in Peking, a relative had
tried to dissuade him from the difficult course on which
he was set, and had urged him to return to the country,
pointing out that "there are ten thousand university
students in the city of Peking at present, and when they
have graduated there will be no jobs for them". ² But
Shen was still determined to "pursue my ideals and do some
study", and he retorted that in the country

in six years I have seen with my own eyes over
ten thousand guiltless common people killed in
my presence, and apart from the memories of
stupidity and cruelty, of men killing and being
killed, that I have been left with, I have
learnt nothing at all. ....I want to come and
do some study, half studying and half working,
so that when I have finished I can help save
the nation.³

He went on to expound his views on "saving the nation",
using the ideas and phrases that he had learnt from the
magazines he had read in Tsingtao. Society would have to
be remade, he said, and the task must begin with the

¹. "Actuality", p.86.
². Ibid., p.84.
³. Ibid., p.85.
remaking of literature. The Literary Revolution would rekindle the feelings of a long-suppressed people, and innate human decency and sincerity would reassert themselves in society. In all this the New Literature had an important part to play, and Shen wanted to participate in it, helping to remould society at the same time as he was improving himself by study. "I talked on and on", he says, "till even I realized that I did not know what I was talking about, and then I stopped in confusion."

He saw that all his passionate oratory amounted only to an expression of his own dissatisfaction with his past life and his desire for a change. "And as for literature, I still did not know how to punctuate!" His relative smiled sympathetically, however, and said:

"All right, all right. So here you are then. Others go into the hills to catch tigers and leopards with bows and arrows, crossbows and poisoned bolts, while you have come to Peking to do business empty-handed and with a head full of impractical fancies. You're a strange country fellow, but you're game enough! If you keep your courage you'll have what it takes to live in Peking and to learn and experience everything. But I must tell you this: since you have come to Peking out of faith, don't lose that faith on any account, for without it you will have nothing at all!"

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p.86.
These words made a deep impression on Shen, and were to prove a source of comfort and strength through the difficulties that lay ahead:

"But you must on no account lose your faith."
This was my one stand-by. How could I forget it? Then I would once again flee from the muddled feelings created by my actual surroundings, and fix my gaze, bleared and dimmed by hunger, on distant prospects.

Shen does not provide a great deal of information about his life during these first four years in Peking. One essay, however, "My Neighbours" gives a humorous account of a particularly trying period when he was living in the same boarding-house as a number of noisy soldiers, ex-soldiers and musicians. All through the day, he says, he would be obliged to listen to the soldiers quarrelling loudly with one another or with their wives, and while he sat by his window attempting to read

1. Hsien-shih, "actuality", or "reality", in the sense in which one speaks of "being realistic". The term suggests to Shen a cynical acquiescence in the existing state of affairs, and the sacrifice of principles and ideals to mere expediency. It is "the pursuit of, superstitious belief in, and dependence on actuality" which he considers to be the chief source of China's ills. See "Actuality", pp.101-2.


3. SSM, Vol.18 No.8, August 1927, under the pseudonym Mao Lin.
"Buddhist scriptures", he would be "given a clear understanding of the scenes in the various hells" by the interminable practising of the musicians in the next room. Nor could he seek refuge in sleep, for even blocking his ears would not keep out the din.

In the evening there would be a brief respite while the musicians had dinner, but afterwards they would begin again, not to cease till they went to bed at midnight. Only then could Shen work in peace for a while, until he too was obliged to go to bed. Sometimes, however, even this much peace was denied him, when some other neighbours began a rowdy game of mahjong which might go on till four o'clock in the morning. Shen seems to have found noisiness particularly distracting, for he complains of it elsewhere, and his desire for peace and quiet seems to have been well-known to his friends. But on this

1. Presumably Jātaka tales and other stories from the Buddhist Canon, such as he was later to study closely, rewriting some of them to make a book. See below, pp.337ff, 383-4.


occasion he had no alternative but to endure it, for he was too poor to be able to move elsewhere.

Other memories of Shen's life at this time seem to form the basis of the 1936 story "Existence", for although the hero is a young married painter who has had to leave his wife behind in the country, in other respects his circumstances seem to be virtually identical with Shen's during these first years in Peking. Like Shen, he has just arrived in Peking from "an unimaginably tiny spot" in the country, intending to study and with nothing to sustain him but his hopes for the future. Like Shen again, he lives in a small mildewed room and often has to go without food, but derives comfort from the encouraging words of a relative. Too poor to buy the proper painting materials that he needs, and too tormented by hunger to endure walking past the restaurants in the street, he is often reduced, as Shen apparently was, to lying on his bed and brooding. In these moods, he thinks of the many young people, of age, ambitions and circumstances similar to his own, who have committed suicide in despair, and he weeps. He is sustained, however, as Shen must have been, by his faith in his own ability and his creative work:

2. Ibid., p.354.
But when he lit the lamp and shone it on the still unfinished painting, it was just as though he saw there a ray of light. Suddenly his mood changed again. His confidence of success, his ambition to establish himself in this great city by means of his work, came back to him once more.¹

Shen's difficulties at this time reflected those of his country, for China was passing through a phase of great turbulence and instability which was to culminate eventually in the Nationalist Revolution of 1927. Looking back from 1947, Shen distinguishes four influential groups in society during this first stage of his career: the military establishment, the civil administration, the people's representatives, and the intelligentsia. In none of them does he see any sign that the promise of the May the Fourth Movement was approaching fulfilment. The military, he says, were interested only in having affairs with actresses, and in increasing their own power and prestige by staging elaborate entertainments, arranging marriages with important families, and negotiating with "bandits" and minor military cliques.²

The high-ranking officials and popular representatives for their part thought chiefly of frequenting brothels, going to restaurants and listening to singing-girls. Even in

parliament, judging by what was printed in the newspapers, little was done beyond quarreling and exchanging insults, and at times the members would actually take to hurling inkpots at one another.\(^1\) Everything could be bought and sold, even the books from the Peking Municipal Library, which were mortgaged to provide salaries for the Department of Education:

> In short, all those in charge could do as they pleased with the things entrusted to their care .....With all this constant selling, the government naturally sold itself out of office, and the whole mass of corruption finally came to an end.\(^2\)

However the real cause of the disease, Shen adds, remained untreated, and those who had helped bring the old government down had themselves, through proximity to corruption, became carriers of the virus, and soon infected the rest.\(^3\)

The "disease" was by now affecting the students for the worse also. The new currents in literature and thought which had gained in strength with the May the Fourth Movement had "enlarged the young students' dreams about the reconstruction of society and their confidence in it", but the government had taken up an obstructive attitude towards their teachers, with the result that there began

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1. Ibid., p. 88.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
to emerge from among the students an activist element which was interested only in politics. Formerly the students had divided their time between action and study, but now neglect of studying "seemed to be a universal contagion".\(^1\) Chow Tse-tsung\(^2\) notes the same trend:

The degree of failure of these struggles ("for independence of national finances", led by the teachers) proved to the leftists and nationalists that the program of the liberals to reform China through pure education was not practicable under the circumstances. As a result, the former two groups obtained more favourable opportunities to attract the intellectuals to their cause, that of overthrowing the Peking regime by force. Meanwhile, the student movement was strengthened, even though the liberal teachers remained reluctant to participate in it and continued their criticisms of its political nature.

Shen is contemptuous of those who abandoned their education and creative work for the superficial glamour of politics. "If these people become high officials in future", he wonders, "what will they be able to do for their country?"\(^3\) He sees here a decline from the standards of the May the Fourth Movement, when concern for scholarship and literature went hand in hand with concern for social reform. Now things had become very different:

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1. Ibid.
At that time, many of those who were engaged in the practice of literature laid down the pens with which they were learning, and became active in all sorts of current affairs: establishing connections with this, dealing with that, welcoming the living, commemorating the dead, holding meetings, quarreling... all these things alike were called struggles in the process of reform.

Shen, however, believing that creative writers were at least as important to society as ill-educated politicians, persisted in his studies and his writing. This, he says, distressed some of his acquaintances, who noticed him working at his table all day and began to fear that he might end by committing suicide or going mad. Accordingly, they approached him and urged him to join them, trying in vain to tempt him with their gospel of "actuality":

"There's no point in writing things now old chap. You really don't know enough about actuality. You can go on being a bookworm, daydreaming, dreaming up great works of art, but will that achieve anything? It would be better to join us, and then you'd have food and a job, and in future you might even - you need only be willing, there's nothing difficult about it at all!"

Shen mentioned his faith and his hopes, but this was brushed aside:

"What you believe in and hope for can only be realized by means of a reformation which will overthrow the present state of things.... If you take an energetic part in it, in future you will be able to be a commissioner or a minister, and every ideal can be gradually realized.

1. Hsièn-shih, "actualities".
If you don't take part, the best you can hope for is to become a contributor to periodicals, writing little pieces for 35 cents a thousand characters."

Shen persisted however, and his friends lost interest in him:

"You say that faith and hope are only simple and empty words. As far as I'm concerned it's not like that at all. At least it (sic) will prove that one man, through firm faith and lofty ambition, can make a genuine contribution to society. Take science for example...."

"There's no need to lecture me. I really must go now. I have a lot of things to do yet. At four o'clock I have to be at a meeting of people from my native district. At half past five I have to be at a symposium on free love. At eight o'clock I have to.... You go on writing your masterpieces old chap. I have to go now!"

When the "reformation" (presumably the Nationalist Revolution) finally came, such friends became commissioners, married, went abroad and returned, and, from having been authors, became "minor figures of importance carrying brightly polished leather briefcases". But Shen is all the more convinced that his course was the right one:

Certainly there must be people to become officials and hold jobs, and certainly people are needed who will hang out an author's nameplate and be active everywhere, holding meetings and consuming refreshments. But even more necessary are those who will bend down their heads and devote themselves to their work.2

1. Ibid., pp.89-90.
2. Ibid., p.90.
Nevertheless, the "reformation" had its effect on Shen too, for he found that he could no longer support himself by his writing, and he was obliged to take a job as a minor official in the Hsiangshan Home for Children, to the north-west of the city of Peking. Thus he "became aware that I had just completed the first stage of my journey".1

But Shen's life during these years in Peking was not all suffering, nor were all his friends unsympathetic. In the early days at least, he was sustained by the excitement of discovering new friends to talk with, new places to see, and new books to read and think about. Often, he says, he would spend the whole night in conversation. If he heard of some place that sounded interesting, he would drop everything and go there at once, regardless of the distance. If he was told of a good book that he had not read and could not afford to buy, he would make friends with the owner of a bookstall and spend the day there, sitting on a bench and reading the book he was interested in. He also had many friends, some of whom were students at Yenching University, with whom he could share his enthusiasms and his hardships, and loneliness at least does not seem to have been among his

1. Ibid.
The closest friendships Shen formed at this time were with Hu Yeh-p'in 胡亦頻 and Ting Ling 丁玲 (pen-name of Chiang Ping-chih 鄭冰之). He seems to have met Hu, a former naval cadet, during his first year in Peking, and the two of them soon became fast friends. Shortly afterwards, Shen was also introduced to Ting Ling, with whom (as he was slightly shocked to discover) Hu was living at the time. He first met her when Hu brought her round to his room, and it soon emerged that they both came from the Hunan countryside and had a great deal in common. So well did they get on that Hu was soon left out of the conversation altogether, and had to pass the time by looking through one of Shen's books. Although Shen remained very close to both Ting Ling and Hu throughout the following years, it was Ting Ling for whom he seems to have had the greater affection. In his biography of her, it is noticeable that he tends to take her side in quarrels, and he sometimes claims that Hu hampered her

1. About Ting Ling 丁玲, Liang Yu良友 Publishing Company, Shanghai, 2nd. ed., 1935, p.37. This is only the first half of Shen's biography of Ting Ling, and the second was published separately in 1940. These two books will be referred to hereafter as Ting Ling I and Ting Ling II.

2. Ting Ling I, pp.32-4.
development as a creative writer.  

Of his other friends, and of the literary acquaintances that he must have made at this time, Shen says very little, although he certainly met the writer Yü Ta-fu (1896-1945), and also apparently the poet Hsü Chih-mo (1895-1931), to whom he was later to express such a considerable debt.

Shen's literary output during these years is said to have been large, but if so, very little of it is now available. What there is, however, includes short stories, poems, plays, a story in epistolary form, and an autobiographical essay. This variety, which is also reflected in the list of contents of his first published volume Duck, which appeared in 1926, indicates that Shen was still experimenting, trying to find the literary form that best suited his talents and temperament. He seems to have made up his mind by the end of

1. E.g. ibid., pp.68-9.
this stage, however, for his subsequent two volumes, published in 1927, are devoted entirely to short stories.¹

Shen's earliest available works are two short stories and an essay, all dating from 1925. Despite their brevity and their early date, they already display many of the essential characteristics of Shen's work as a whole.

The first story, "Fu-sheng" ² is based on memories of Shen's early school days. Like the young Shen Ts'ung-wen, Fu-sheng is the smallest boy in his class, is given to daydreaming instead of listening to the teacher, and loves to play with the other children in the river. Similarly, his teacher is in the habit of sending the children out of the classroom one by one when school is over, in the hope of preventing them from fighting outside, just as Shen's first teacher used to do.³

The story falls into three unequal parts. The first and longest part describes events in the classroom at the end of the day. Fu-sheng is unable to recite the day's lesson, and has his ear painfully tweaked by the teacher, who keeps the last two fingernails on his left hand

1. Ibid., pp.334, 340.
2. Yü Szu 語絲, 29th. of June, 1925. Yü Szu was a weekly magazine edited by the brothers Chou Tso-jen 周作人 and Lu Hsun 鲁迅 which ran from 1924 to 1931.
especially long for this very purpose. When the class is dismissed, the weeping Fu-sheng is obliged to remain behind and continue his study of the *Three Character Classic*. This concludes the first section of the story. The action here is slight, and it is the teacher's words and the thoughts and feelings of all the characters that are the centre of attention. This is characteristic of most of Shen's stories, but here it also had the effect of slowing down the action, as it were, to convey the tedium which is felt by teacher and pupils alike. This effect is heightened by the way in which certain small details are vividly described, as though it were these essentially static perceptions rather than the course of the lesson which occupy the children's minds: the teacher's long fingernails, for example, the trickling of the tears, when Fu-sheng is being punished and tilts his head in pain, from one eye into the other, or the way in which Fu-sheng, sitting with downcast eyes, sees each departing pupil only as a pair of legs disappearing through the door.

The last two parts of the story are much shorter. Fu-sheng, left alone to study, soon falls into a reverie, just as Shen used to do when he was made to kneel alone as a punishment. He imagines past scenes by the river, with the children playing in and around the water.
Someone may call out that Fu-sheng's mother is coming, and he will hide in the water while the others tell his mother that they have not seen him, as used to happen when Shen's brother came looking for him. Or it may be the teacher who is said to be coming, and then they will all plunge into the water and float there with only their faces showing "like so many melons". If it is only a false alarm, they will resume their play, laughing.

This leads naturally to the concluding part, for at this point Fu-sheng's daydreaming is rudely interrupted by the teacher's voice "like a clap of thunder next to his ear", and he has to resume his recitation. When the task is done he is again reprimanded by the teacher, but he pays no attention, for the sound of cooking in the kitchen reminds him of his empty stomach. On his way home he passes a group of skylarking boys, but, conscious of his red and swollen eyes, he passes them by, and even a bowl of goldfish which he sees a little later cannot deflect him from his course.

On this rather unsatisfactory note the story ends. Although it is short, it is enough to show that by 1925 Shen had already developed considerable descriptive and narrative skill. He has clearly taken care also in the construction of the story, linking the three parts together by repetition. Thus the teacher interrupts the class's reverie in the first part and Fu-sheng's in the
second; his imagined arrival in the second section antici-
pates his actual arrival in the third; he reprimands
Fu-sheng at length in both the first and last sections;
and the passing of time is indicated by reference to the
sunlight climbing up the door-screen at the beginning of
the story and again near the end. However, all this
cannot conceal the fact that Shen has not yet mastered the
art of bringing his stories to a satisfactory conclusion,
and "Fu-sheng" merely comes to a stop when the events
with which it is concerned are over.

Even in this early story one can notice many of the
features typical of Shen's work: the predilection for
autobiographical material, the vivid description and skil-
ful evocation of atmosphere, and the concern for character
rather than plot, for thought and feeling rather than
action. "Fu-sheng" is also like Shen's other stories
in the ordinariness of the characters and events with which
it deals, for Shen, despite a tendency to romantic ideal-
ism which appears most clearly in his Miao stories, is
essentially a realist, an observer of what he calls "human
life". This is not to say that his characters and the
things they do are not often remarkable or odd in some way,
but their strangeness if the strangeness of everyday life
as Shen has experienced it - as, for example, in the case
of the young beancurd-seller who abducted his dead
sweetheart from her grave, or of the former bandit chief Liu Yün-t'ing. Here Shen would agree with Somerset Maugham when he says:

I have been more often concerned with the obscure than with the famous. They are more often themselves. They have had no need to create a figure to protect themselves from the world or to impress it....They display their oddities because it has never struck them that they are odd. And after all it is with the common run of men that we writers have to deal....The ordinary is the writer's richer field. Its unexpectedness, its singularity, its infinite variety afford unending material.¹

The next story, "The Adjutant" ² is like "Fu-sheng" in length and style, but this time Shen has drawn on his memories of army life and turned them to more satirical purposes. The events related take place during the young adjutant's morning on duty. When the story opens, he is busy plucking his scanty moustache, using the glass in the clock as a mirror and a pair of copper coins as tweezers. The bugle sounds for roll-call, a little late, and the adjutant hurries to the parade-ground. Here he calls the roll, inspects the soldiers, slapping or reprimanding those who are not standing straight or who are carelessly dressed, rebukes

the guard's sergeant for a minor oversight, and returns to his office. He summons the sergeant-bugler and the two young buglers, and when they arrive he swears at the latter, accuses them of having been asleep, and tells them to stand outside in the sun for half an hour. He then upbraids the sergeant-bugler for the laxness of his discipline, dismisses him, and, having completed his day's report, resumes the plucking of his moustache.

This story resembles "Fu-sheng" in several respects: in length, in being concerned with character rather than action, and in examining the relationship between those who possess authority and those who are obliged to submit to it. Common to both stories also is a preoccupation with time, and particularly with the slowness of its passing for those who are bored. Again like "Fu-sheng", "The Adjutant" has three parts, the middle one having a different location from the first and the last, which are set in the same place. This time, however, all sections are of approximately equal length, and the story concludes in a more satisfactory, though somewhat artificial manner, by returning to the same scene with which it opened.

"The Adjutant" also differs from the earlier story in a number of other ways. For a start, it is less obviously autobiographical, and in dealing with army life,
it anticipates a great many other stories that Shen was
to write and which almost form a special genre in his
work. Secondly, the interest is centred on one character
throughout, giving the story a greater degree of unity
and simplicity than "Fu-sheng", where the thoughts and
feelings of the teacher and the other pupils were also
given prominence. Thirdly, there is much greater use of
dialogue to reveal character, and in this respect the
story reminds one of the short plays that Shen was writing
at this time. And finally, it has a clearly satirical
purpose which distinguishes it from the gentler "Fu-sheng".
Although Shen treats the adjutant more with amusement than
anger, as he usually does with the characters of his other
satirical stories, he nevertheless makes it obvious that
he is idle, vain and a bully, and contrasts him effective-
ly with his well-meaning and terrorized subordinates.
Partly for this reason, "The Adjutant" lacks the charm
which in "Fu-sheng" helped to compensate for the slight-
ness of the story.

A couple of months before "The Adjutant" was published,
there appeared, also in Contemporary Review¹, a short
autobiographical essay called "Jottings of a Timorous Man:
The Sound of Fowls" 怯步者筆記 — 雞聲 . In it

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Shen gives expression to his nostalgia for country life and his discontent with the artificial life of the city - something that was to become a constant theme in his work. Sitting reading in a grove of trees in a "semi-rural school", where he has come to escape the constant din of the trams in the city, Shen can hear, for the first time since he came to Peking, the sound of domestic fowls and the lowing of cattle. He recalls how the whistle of the trains had delighted him when he first came to Peking, but now he realizes that the calls of these birds, so familiar to him from his life in the country, give him a much deeper pleasure.

Then he remembers how he had once been wakened in his boarding-house room by cock-crows that he had never been able to hear during the daytime, when they were presumably drowned by all the noises of the city. At last he had seen some of the birds at the vegetable markets, but they were mute in their bamboo baskets. Perhaps, he thought, they were silent through fear, anticipating "the keen knife and the boiling water", but he knew that fowls destined for a similar fate in the country were still able to call loudly and cheerfully.

And then I felt the strangeness of Peking, and, as I gazed at the calm and silent deep blue sky, pondering this strangeness, a faint weariness came over me for those successive fowls' cries. Little creatures in the sunlight moving freely and lightly, the annoying and yet
likable mosquitoes, twinkled like shooting stars in the sky. They seemed happier and livelier, and I recalled the classical quotation: "Soaring like startled geese, sinuous as swimming dragons".

This is the first of many references to shooting stars in Shen's works, where they often appear as symbols of beauty and freedom. The subject of the essay also reminds one of Shen's special affection for baby chickens, which finds expression in his tender description of the ones he saw at a country fair when he was playing truant, and in the important role which such chickens play in the stories "The Day Before Absconding" and "Huei-ming".

The most interesting thing about the essay, however, is that it shows that Shen already felt a stranger in the city and was growing nostalgic for the peaceful, natural life of the countryside. Thus he seems to identify himself with the fowls, trapped in an alien environment, and to envy the freedom of the mosquitoes. Perhaps there is even a suggestion of fear that if he remains in the city, he may one day find himself unable to write, just as the caged birds can no longer utter their natural

1. Ibid., p.18. The quotation is from the fu of Ts'ao Chih 曹植 (192-232) The Goddess of the Lo River 洛神賦.
2. "At Private School", p.96. He actually took one of the little birds home with him.
sounds. At any rate, he was clearly growing aware that the true source of his inspiration as a writer lay in the countryside that he had left behind him rather than in the city to which he had come.

The theme of imprisonment also finds expression in two poems which Shen wrote at about this time. In the first, it is once again an imprisoned animal with which Shen seems to sympathize, in this case a baboon. The poem consists of eight four-line stanzas, generally rhyming aabb. The length of the lines varies from eleven to thirteen characters, although in all but two cases there is a regular pattern within the stanza. Presumably Shen had actually seen a caged baboon in Peking, and saw in the animal's plight a reflection of his own, "imprisoned" by an environment with which, as the essay just discussed shows, he had begun to feel that he had little in common. The baboon's regret at being unable to exert his natural strength may be intended to symbolize Shen's sense of frustration at being prevented by poverty and an un congenial environment from exercising his creative ability to the full, in the way that he would like:

"Baboon's Sorrow"

The baboon also has his baboon's sorrow;
Gazing dumbly at his protruding muscles,
He sighs that the strength of his two arms
finds no use;
Like worms, strong muscles crawl concealed
beneath his skin.

Such a sturdy, beautiful pair of arms
Should at least find some application!
Why not use them to embrace a young woman's waist,
Or go and jostle in the crowd for a while?

The vast numbers of people in Peking no doubt often appeared to Shen just as the baboon's spectators do to the baboon:

Those people are just like fishes in a net......
Big fishes and little fishes, almost gill to gill.

If only times were different, thinks the baboon, and he were able to show off his "Spartan" (sic) heroism, then the women would smile at him. Here Shen would seem to be mocking his own daydreaming, as the baboon imagines himself receiving "a very slight wound" while defending some woman's honour, and her binding it up with silk. But

...rubbing his arm, he finds that he has been daydreaming:
The baboon still has a baboon's indefinable sadness.

Everything is unchanged, and

Unfortunately, that sturdy, beautiful pair of arms
Up till now has still been unable to find any application!
Another poem\(^1\) also deals with the theme of imprisonment, and would appear to be a pessimistic description of Shen's own situation in his "cramped and musty study", somewhat in the style of the story "Existence". It is called "Prisoner\(^3\) \(\text{ID} \text{I} \text{...}\)\), and is written in free verse.

**Prisoner**

With ash-gray eyes\(^2\) he gazes at the blue sky,
Even profounder than poets have fancied.
He sees the ants climbing the steps, moving
in a slow column,
And he knows that it is now midsummer once
again.

The big clock that tells the hour has become
thoroughly infected by the
bitter sufferings and sorrows
of friends.
It makes his heart tremble, like cock-crow in
the dead of night,
Forcing him to recall dreams he had forgotten.

In daylight, before his window, he enjoys him-
self like a child.
He puts a timid and feeble hand on the window-
sill
To receive the sunshine, and warm a heart
turned to ice.
But the daylight is indifferent, and goes
away.

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2. "Ash-colour", 艳色, is the usual Chinese word for "gray", but the last line and the general context suggest that Shen has the literal meaning of the word very much in mind here.
No need to give rein to his feelings: from his two eyes tears flow inexhaustibly; No need to dwell on memories of illusions long since vanished. Through the long night, he counts the sounds of the watchman's rattle, and breathes a cellar's musty air, As his hair turns to snow and his heart to ashes!

The third poem, published a month or so before "Prisoner", is also in free verse. It is a love poem, drawing on the folklore of Fenghwang. Shen explains the allusion in a footnote at the end of the poem: "On the border of Hunan there are many caves, and all young women who are beautiful and die at an early age are considered to be daughters of the god of the caves, and to have been received back by him".¹

Untitled 無題²

Daughter of the Lord of the Caves, I curse you; Too soon you have been taken away by those whom your father sent! After you have been laid quietly to rest beneath the ground, You will come to understand everything that now you do not know.

You have given your happiness to the envious women who were your companions, And your body to feed the worms; There is left only the image of your beauty, Engraved in your lover's heart.

2. I.e. a love-poem. From Li Shang-yin's untitled love poems. For Shen's reading of Li Shang-yin, Cp. above, p.124.
The image that is left in your lover's heart
Is even brighter than the multicoloured clouds
that the setting sun paints in
the sky.

He holds your young soul firmly in his embrace,
Never to release it for all eternity.

Those who held you then by force,
Have also bound a great many other women with
their chains fashioned of gold
and silver!

Of their feigned passion
There now remains only a faint glimmer like
that of a firefly.

You may use your flame that burnt unextinguished
while you were alive
(Which is the blue phosphorescent fire emitted
from your bones)
To illuminate as much of your surroundings as
you can,
And prove that my words are no empty ones.

"Time is like a huge water-buffalo,
Walking over the earth and trampling all
youthfulness to fragments":

It is only you who, because of your lover's songs,
will be young for ever -
So long as the stars and the moon still hang in
the sky,
The image of your beauty will hang in the hearts
of men.

Shen wrote other love poems,¹ and, apparently, other
poems about the Miao people of Western Hunan.² But after
his first volume, poetry appears in his available published
works only as the folk-songs of some of his country
stories, or as the songs which his Miao heroes and heroines
sing to each other.

¹. A translation of one may be found in Modern Chinese
Poetry by Harold Acton and Ch'en Shih-hsiang,
². Ibid., p.172.
As well as stories, essays and poems, Shen also tried his hand at plays during this initial period in Peking. Nine of them appear in his first book, *Duck*¹, and two of these, including the title play, were first published in *Contemporary Review* under the pseudonym Mao Lin 毛琳. They are brief, stylized farces, amusing enough within the limitations of their genre, but of no great literary value. They bear little relation to anything in his later work, although the practice in writing dialogue that they gave him was no doubt useful.

"Duck"² has only two characters, a seller of roast duck and a "rogue" 瘋子. The rogue, hearing the duck-seller crying his wares at night, comes to see if he can get a free piece of duck out of him. The duck-seller, however, knowing his customer, waits till the rogue looks away for a moment and then transfers the duck from the basket to his capacious pocket. With his wares safely hidden, he offers the basket to the rogue, urging him to choose a piece, but when the rogue opens it and discovers that it is empty, the duck-seller accuses him of having stolen the meat. The rogue, alarmed by these accusations, protests his innocence and suggests that the duck-seller

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1. Ibid.
should be on his way. The latter finally agrees, and when he is out of sight round a corner, puts the duck back in the basket and begins once more to cry his wares. The rogue is astonished to hear the duck-seller trying to sell goods that he has lost, and he goes home and returns to bed, from which the duck-seller's cries had originally woken him.

The second play, "Lamb" 羊羔 1 is very similar, but the setting is more clearly defined and this time the rogue succeeds in obtaining the piece of meat. The two main characters are a sergeant 捕殺 in what is clearly a country town in Western Hunan, and a butcher. It is nearly New Year, and the sergeant, who is on leave, is bored and short of money. He walks down the main street, where the sight of a Miao with a pole-load of chicken and duck makes him hungry, and when he sees the butcher with only a single piece of choice lamb left to sell, he approaches him with the intention of getting it as cheaply as possible. The butcher, who has identified the sergeant as an "old rogue", greets him warily, and the two men begin a polite conversation, haggling obliquely over the lamb. At last, when the noon gun sounds, a noodle-seller approaches, and the sergeant buys the butcher

a bowl of noodles, brushing aside his professions of gratitude. They are good friends, he points out, and such a trifling matter requires no thanks. Then he begins to praise the lamb again, and this time the butcher is obliged to concede defeat and allow the sergeant to take it. The sergeant promptly removes the lamb from the hook and returns home, while the butcher, watching him go, mutters: "Old rogue, it's just no use being polite to him".

Both these farces are much less "modern" or Western-influenced than the stories and poems just dealt with. They make constant use of the aside, and stage directions are frequently put into the mouths of the characters themselves, as when the "rogue" in "Duck" first makes his appearance, saying: "Wait till I open the front door and have a look. The front door is open, and looking around on all sides I can see...." etc. "Lamb" is the more interesting of the two, partly because the setting is more vividly evoked, by the sergeant's long opening speech, by the use of such details as the noon gun, and by the introduction of two extra characters, an apprentice and a noodle-seller; and partly also because the comedy is slightly subtler, being more of manners and less of situation.

In April and May 1926 Shen published serially in Contemporary Review a much longer and more complex story
than the two already discussed. Called "Under a Separate Administration", it is a semi-epistolary story in ten sections, eight of which contain a letter or (in one case) an oral message. The story is briefly as follows. A young man, Shih Tao-i, has set himself up as leader of a well-organized and well-equipped "bandit" army in the hills outside his native town of Liyeh. He is twenty-four years old, and seeks to marry his cousin, the only daughter of the widow Sung, who will be twenty this year. The widow is at first very reluctant, and only fear of what her nephew might do prevents her from refusing outright. Soon, however, there is news that a general amnesty is to be proclaimed, and her attitude changes. Shih finally agrees to accept the amnesty, out of consideration, he explains, for his future mother-in-law and her daughter, and for the peace of the countryside. The troops occupying Liyeh move out, and Shih's men move in to take their place, the wedding being held on the same day. When the young heroine had first learnt of her impending marriage from a friend, only concern for her mother had prevented her from running away or killing herself. When she finds, however, that her cousin is not

the swarthy, bloodthirsty bandit she had imagined, but instead a handsome and courteous young man, her fears vanish, and in the last letter of the story she writes to tell her friend, the wife of a secretary in the army, of the happiness she has found with her husband. In addition to the main story, there is a brief subsidiary tale, given in the fourth letter, concerning Bald Yang 楊秃子, a cowardly informer who had been captured and killed by Shih's men.

The method of narration is peculiarly complicated, being a mixture of letters, dialogue and conventional narrative. Unfortunately Shen's skill is not yet sufficiently developed to allow him to weld these disparate elements into a harmonious whole, and he sometimes makes matters worse by resorting to clumsy devices, such as the unexplained impersonal opening, in the style of an official report:

A packet of letters which passed between the bandit chief encamped on Paman Mountain and the Sung family, concerning the former's request for a wife.

I. First letter: This letter is written on large eight-lined note-paper. At the beginning are printed the words "Paper for the use of the Border Guards' Headquarters"...1

Or such as the awkward intrusions of the author himself with remarks of this sort: "So far I have said nothing

1. Ibid., No.72, p.15.
at all about the mountain stronghold, and it occurs to me that you would all like to know about it.¹ Or: "it was simply a was simply a...was what? I cannot say!"²
Or: "I have forgotten to mention the door-curtains of the row of rooms".³ The structure of the story is further weakened by the ending, which comes as something of an anticlimax after all that has gone before, and by the insertion of lengthy digressions, such as the detailed description of the bandits' headquarters (an old temple such as Shen had stayed in during his years in the army) or the story of Bald Yang.

Nevertheless, Shen's powers of description and his obvious affection for his characters and for the countryside in which they live, give the story a vividness which helps to compensate for its structural deficiencies. One notes in particular the delight in physical detail which, as his Autobiography shows, characterized him from his childhood, and which is one of his chief strengths as a writer. It emerges clearly from his careful description of places, events (like the wedding ceremony) and the appearance of some of the characters; from single memorable details, such as the still-steaming cup of tea which

¹. Ibid., No.73, p.16.
². Ibid.
³. Ibid., No.73, p.17.
Shih, departing as swiftly as he arrived, leaves behind him on the counter of the shop to which he has come to deliver a letter;¹ and from the lists of such things as the comforts Shih has arranged for his bride², the food the heroine is to provide for her friend³, and the wedding presents sent by Shih.⁴

Humorous touches are apparent throughout the story, as in the simple comedy provided by the nervous young prisoner to whom Shih entrusts the third "letter",⁵ or the somewhat overdone "whimsical" (sic: 笑容可掬)⁶ style of the heroine's letter to her friend. More important, however, is the comedy of character, particularly as seen in the gently satirical portrait of the widow Sung. This illiterate old woman is shown to be greedy and self-centred, caring more for her family possessions and her social standing than for the welfare of her daughter, and is also full of self-pity and false piety. Nevertheless, Shen's compassion for her in her distress is clearly genuine, and so he is able to bring her to life as an individual, instead of allowing her to remain a stock

1. Ibid., No.72, p.17.
2. Ibid., No.72, p.16.
3. Ibid., No.74, p.11.
5. Ibid., No.73, pp.17-18.
6. Ibid., No.74, p.11.
figure like Bald Yang or the characters in his plays. In this respect, "Under a Separate Administration" is characteristic of most of Shen's later satirical stories, where sympathy usually outweighs anger, and where Shen's interest in the individual characters tends to weaken the general point of the satire at the same time as it strengthens the realism of the story (for satire is hindered and realism helped by rounded and life-like characterization).

The hero and heroine of "Under a Separate Administration" are also of special interest, for they represent recurring types in Shen's fiction. Shih Tao-i is in effect a model of physical and mental perfection. He is young, strong, clever, brave and handsome; fierce, but gentle and considerate; feared, but also loved and respected; ill-educated (through no fault of his own), but intelligent and respecting learning in others. In other words, Shih combines in himself two kinds of excellence, rarely found together: the vigour, courage and robustness which Shen admired in men like Tseng Ch'in-hsun and Liu Yün-t'ing but which he felt that he himself lacked, and the sensitivity and intelligence which he did possess. In relation to Shen's own feelings, then, Shih would appear to be a kind of fantasy figure, an unreal solution to the conflict in his creator's mind between the "country" and the "town", between the military traditions of his family and
his own artistic and intellectual inclinations. Consequently Shih, like the virile but sensitive Miao heroes who are to some extent his successors in Shen's stories, never comes to life as a real human being. For all the detail with which he is described, he remains little more than an abstract collection of virtues.

This is not the case with the heroine, however. Vivacious, sensitive and affectionate, she is the first of a series of similar young women who play a leading role in many of Shen's best stories. The precise reason for Shen's preoccupation with this maiden-figure is not clear, but there seems no doubt that it has inspired some of his finest writing, and although the heroine of "Under a Separate Administration" is not drawn so well as some of her successors, she is still the liveliest of the characters in the story.

Three months after "Under a Separate Administration", Shen published a brief autobiographical story, "By the Stove", under the pseudonym Yüeh Huan 余焕. Narrated in the first person, it describes an evening during Shen's childhood when he, his young brother, his young sister, and his mother are sitting around the stove.

1. SSM, Vol.17 No.8, August 1926.
2. Yüeh-meng , the ninth and youngest of the family; she was later to live with Shen in Shanghai for a time, and to figure, her name slightly disguised, in the story "Quiet".
while the children recite from their school reader and wait for some supper. In the street outside, they hear the noodle and dumpling seller come and go, and the sweet-seller arrive. This man, with his little bell, his one-legged stool and his tray full of sugar figures, is a stranger from Hupei and is the first sweet-seller the town has had. Ts'ung-wen by silent glances persuades his sister, who is the only one with money, to go and buy something, but her mother prevents her and scolds the younger brother for putting the idea into her head, to his great indignation. The children's supper is now ready, but the departure of the sweet-seller leaves them feeling rather forlorn.

This little sketch is of interest as the first available example of Shen's purely autobiographical stories—as distinct from stories like "Fu-sheng", where the autobiographical element is disguised by third-person narration, or from autobiographical essays like "Jottings of a Timorous Man", which are purely discursive and descriptive and do not have the form of a story. Otherwise, however, "By the Stove" has little to recommend it.

Another autobiographical essay seems to have been written just before Shen left Peking for Shanghai. Called "At Private School", it is described as

"an autobiographical narrative of a discharged soldier"
and is given as written in "November in the Cramped and
Musty Study in Peking".¹ Written as if addressed to some
anonymous person, it describes aspects of Shen's early
schooldays: the setting and staff of the school, Shen's
studies and his attitude to them, his visit to a country
market and his first punishment for truancy. Less
gracefully written and evocative than his briefer treat­
ment of the same period in the Autobiography, composed
several years later, it nevertheless marks a big advance
over slighter pieces like "Jottings of a Timorous Man"
and "By the Stove", and shows that Shen had by now become
a skilled and self-confident writer with a definite bent
towards autobiography.

The works discussed above are no doubt only a small
sample of what Shen actually produced during these years,
but they are sufficient to illustrate the trend of his
work at this stage in his career. Their variety shows
that this was a time of practice and experiment for him,
but they also display many features that were to become
characteristic of his later work.

¹. Ibid., p.99.
In 1926 Shen's first book, *Duck*, appeared. It contained nine plays, nine stories, seven essays and five poems. Of the works discussed above, only the two plays are included. The next book, *After Entering the Ranks* 入伍後, was published in 1927. Longer than its predecessor, it contains only ten works described as stories, although one, "My Primary School Education" 我的小學教育, is presumably straightforward autobiography, while another, "About Lu T'ao" 記陸稡, appears to be an essay in memory of the friend whose drowning at Paotsing had been a major factor in Shen's decision to leave the countryside for Peking. "By the Stove" also appears in this volume. A third book, *Sweet Mandarines* 蜜柑, containing a further eight stories also appeared in 1927, but this time under the imprint of the Crescent 新月 company (the previous two books being published by Pei Hsin 北新). By now Shen had clearly decided to devote himself to short-story writing and the occasional essay, and some of his best stories were to be written during the following three years.

1. This and the following information comes from the *Comprehensive Anthology of China's New Literature*, Vol.10, pp.291, 334, 340. The publication dates given in Jos. Schyns and others, *1500 Modern Chinese Novels and Plays*, Peiping 1948, p.77, are a year later for two of these first three books.
In 1926 the Nationalist armies, under the command of Chiang K'ai-shek, marched northwards from Canton to the Yangtse. By October Wuhan had been taken, and some of Shen's politically active friends in Peking left for the South. Despite the hortative letters which soon came from Wuhan, however, Shen, Ting Ling and Hu Yeh-p'in decided to remain where they were for the time being, for literary prospects, which were their chief concern, did not seem likely to be any more favourable in the South than in the North. In March 1927 Nanking was also taken, becoming the Nationalist capital in the following month, and the South began to appear more tempting to the three friends. In Peking a demand for frivolous literature was growing, while Shanghai was becoming a centre of serious publishing activity. The editorial board of Contemporary Review moved to Shanghai, and some of Shen's work had already been published there when he abandoned the vague plans he had formed with Hu and Ting Ling of going to

3. Ibid., p.75.
4. Ibid., pp.127-8.
study in Japan, and, towards the end of 1927, left Peking for Shanghai.

On the 11th of January 1928 he wrote to Hu and Ting Ling, who were still in Peking, telling them of his new lodgings and signing himself Hsüan-jo 瑤弦若 (one of his pen-names). He complained of the noisiness of his neighbours, who were all university students, and said that he was looking forward to the (lunar) New Year, when the students would go home for the holidays and leave him in peace for a while. A couple of months later, in the spring of 1928, Ting Ling and Hu Yeh-p'in left Peking and joined Shen in Shanghai. For a while, the three of them lived together in Shen's rooms - an arrangement that

1. Ibid., p.128. The dating of Shen's movements is difficult, since the evidence is often contradictory. In this case, most of the evidence points to 1927 as the year in which he arrived in Shanghai, and one can only assume that he is mistaken when he says that the story "Pai-tzu" was published before he went to Shanghai (Ting Ling I, p.127), for it is clearly dated "the 25th of May, 1928" (A Portrait of Eight Coursers 八騏圖, Wen-hua Sheng-huo, Shanghai, 2nd. edition 1936, p.117).

2. SP, pp.147-9.

3. Ting Ling I, p.128.

was not very satisfactory from Shen's point of view, for he had to endure his friends' often violent quarrels.1 Eventually, however, Hu and Ting Ling moved to Ko-ling 葛傾, by West Lake in Hangchow, where they spent three happy months together, like a honeymoon couple, as Shen observed after visiting them there.2

The three friends undertook a number of literary enterprises together during these years in Shanghai. When Hu was given the editorship of The Red and the Black 紅與黑, the supplement of the newspaper Chung Yang Jih Pao 中央日報, they had the idea of publishing a magazine of their own, and they soon brought out The Red and Black Monthly 紅黑月刊, which was followed by the equally short-lived The Human World Monthly 人間月刊.3 At first they were full of hope, and Shen tells how they went around to all the bookshops when The Red and Black Monthly first appeared, to see how much interest it was arousing.4 Ultimately, however, their experiment in publishing proved to be a "very romantic and risky undertaking",5 and had to be

1. Ting Ling I, pp.129-36, 139-41.
2. Ibid., p.143.
3. Ibid., pp.152-3, 159.
4. Ibid., pp.160-1.
5. Ting Ling, op. cit., p.123.
abandoned, leaving them in considerable debt.¹

At this difficult time they received much help and encouragement from Hu Shih and Hsu Chih-mo, both of whom were then under attack by left-wing writers. (Later, they helped Hu Yeh-p'in again when he was arrested as a Communist, while, Shen remarks bitterly, his "so-called comrades" did nothing.)² Apart from the sale of his stories, Shen himself also managed to earn money by teaching. For a while he taught in the China Institute of Woosung,³ where his future wife was a student.⁴ He also gave a course of lectures on "The History of Chinese Fiction" in the Literature Department of Chi-nan University,⁵ and in August 1930 he went to Wuchang to teach at Wuhan University,⁶ a job which he lost in April the following year.⁷ In May 1931 he returned to Peking.⁸

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1. Ting Ling I, p.171.
2. Ibid., p.172.
4. Ting Ling II, p.185.
5. Preface by Wen Tzu-ch'uan to SP, pp.1, 3.
8. Ibid., p.137.
If Shen originally went to Shanghai with any of the "obscure hope" that impelled Ting Ling and Hu Yeh-p'in to follow him,¹ his later account of the conditions that he found there suggests that he must have been quickly disappointed. He soon discovered that literature was closely involved with commerce and politics, and that authors needed political connections or connections with the book companies if they were to prosper.² Various cliques emerged, neglecting creative work in order to argue over theories or struggle for money or social prestige. Political activity was having an unhealthy effect on young writers, and "no one at all saw anything strange in the phrase 'literature is propaganda'.³ Social life also consumed much time and energy, and Shen himself was one of the four or five hundred authors who attended a "literary soirée" 文學夜會 in Nanking. The illustrious gathering was described at length in the newspapers, but after the soirée the authors vanished as suddenly as they had appeared, without having made any observable contribution to literature at all.⁴

¹ Ting Ling, op. cit., p.122.
² "Actuality", p.91.
³ Ibid., p.92.
⁴ Ibid.
Typically, Shen is particularly distressed by the constant turbulence of the literary scene in Shanghai. "Does noise and bustle constitute progress," he asks, referring to the soirée, "or offer the slightest hope of progress?" Shanghai, which "for wrangling over slogans and terms, truth and falsity, profit and loss, was the centre of the South", became for him a symbol of all that was wrong with contemporary Chinese literature, and he describes life there in sardonic terms:

In order to adapt to the environment, one had special need of a sharp eye and a quick hand, as well as the ability to shift suddenly from one thing to another. Those who were cursing and reviling one another yesterday would be shaking hands and speaking amicably again today. Today someone would have just published an audacious piece of criticism, so that everyone would be concerned for his safety, but a day later he would have already been accepted back into the fold somehow or other. Or again, somebody would be doing a thoroughly professional job as manager of a dance-hall and a gambling-house, and at the same time be writing love poems with a green pen and revolutionary poems with a red one....

Shen was not very happy in Shanghai, and his teaching work, whatever its financial rewards, seems only to have added to his worries, as the following extract from the semi-autobiographical story "The Lamp" shows:

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p.95.
3. Ibid., p.91.
What sort of a life was this? On a certain day, I would mount the rostrum, with what solemnity, what earnestness - and what hypocrisy. I would stand on the little square wooden platform and talk of this and that, saying some useless or untrue things, such as that this book says thus, and that book also says thus. And when I had spoken for a while, I would seem to have hypnotized myself, and I would gradually come to feel that I had got to the heart of the problem. Only when a certain noise reached my ears, rousing me to self-consciousness and drawing my attention to the students again, would I realize that several young scholars who were shortly to wear square caps after graduating this term had in fact dozed off over their desks. Because of this, I would completely lose the thread of what I was saying....Returning home from school, I would sit down at my desk, which was covered with draft manuscripts and new books and magazines, do my best to clear a little space, then put down the bundle of essays I had brought back from the school and go through them line by line....Suddenly I felt a slight resentment....the world I was living in now was not the one to which I was accustomed. I was tired of city life, tired of existence. I was ready to leave all the advantages of this world and go back to being a slaughter-tax collector at fourteen strings of cash, and sit in the militia office listening to the green frogs croaking in the little pools formed by the rainwater in the courtyard, while I copied out So Ching's Ch'u Shih Sung 出師頌 and Chung Yu's Hsüan Shih Piao 显示表 with a To-chin 素金 brand brush.  

1. Specimens of calligraphy. Chung Yu has been mentioned above, p.127. So Ching 素靖 of the Chin 晋 Dynasty (265-420) was noted for his "grass style" script.  

Shen's autobiographical stories also give a fairly gloomy picture of his life during these years in Shanghai. "Straggling" begins with Shen being prevented by a sense of shame at his lack of achievement in life from accepting the offer of an old friend, who had written to say that he would send Shen money for travelling expenses, if he was not happy in Shanghai and wished to return to Hunan. A few weeks later, after a severe illness which had required a week's stay in hospital, Shen was visited by another old friend from his army days, one Ch'eng Hsi-shun from Hankow. Ch'eng, who was now an adjutant, was as prosperous as Shen was poor, and Shen's earlier correspondent, a mutual friend, had written to Ch'eng asking him to seek Shen out and give him some money. Ch'eng then took Shen shopping, forcing him to accept the gift of a new pair of trousers, and afterwards treated him to a meal and a visit to the cinema.

The next day, Shen called on Ch'eng and was introduced to "Intendance Officer Hsiang", another fashionably-dressed young soldier. Hsiang's obvious disapproval of his shabby appearance made Shen feel ill at ease, but at the same time he was, characteristically,

impressed by Hsiang's skill in story-telling and his easy self-confidence. "I could not," he says, "help feeling envy in my heart for the unaffectedness of this sort of man". His self-esteem was somewhat restored, however, when Hsiang, who had only been given Shen's surname, claimed to have met the well-known writer Shen Ts'ung-wen, and went on to boast of his own activities in promoting modern literature. He was discomfited for a moment when another visitor, a great admirer of Shen's work, arrived and revealed Shen's identity, but before long he was quite at his ease again. Later the four men went out, and the newcomer also offered Shen money to take a holiday and perhaps visit his native district. Shen was obliged to refuse, however, partly because his mother and sister, who were dependent on him for support, were still in Peking.

When Shen got home, he found a letter from his sister saying that his mother was very ill with tuberculosis. A week or so later, when his friends had left Shanghai, he was able to send some of the money they had pressed on him to Peking, using the remainder to pay some debts, give help to a needy friend, and meet his own living

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1. Ibid., p.9.
2. The text has "Shen X X".
expenses. A year later his circumstances were little changed. He was still earning a very precarious living by his pen, still suffering from regular nose-bleeding, and now his mother and sister had come to live with him. Oppressed by poverty and sickness, and conscious of "straggling" behind his prosperous friends, he would often lie on his bed brooding, and for a time he even contemplated suicide. Only his hope, he says, sustained him.

A more detailed picture of this latter period may be found in the story "Living Upstairs" 樓居. Here he describes a hot summer's day in the two upstairs rooms in Shanghai which were now occupied by himself, his mother and young sister, and also his elder brother, who had arrived from the country three months ago. Shen is awake before the street-lights are off, although the stifling heat had prevented him from going to bed early. He has been suffering from sleeplessness, and his brother is ill and has not eaten for four days. His mother is dying of tuberculosis, but doctors have proved only a useless expense. Shen feels unable to cope with the situation, and is distressed by his inability to afford to send his mother to hospital, although she no longer

expects him to do so, for she had "grown older and could forgive me, knowing my uselessness".¹

Even his writing disgusts him, for he can no longer afford to tear up work that he is dissatisfied with. As a result, "the inexcusable fact is that the more I write the worse my writing gets".² Sometimes he hurls his pen out of the window in anger, and at other times, when he has been unable to think of any ideas for a story, he dreams of suicide, as though that would solve the family's problems.

After a meagre breakfast and a nostalgic conversation with the others about the countryside, Shen sits down wearily to work, reflecting bitterly that despite the advice on how to write that he has given in response to many "moving and sincere" letters from distant readers, he himself can think only of whether his work can be sold and of how many words it contains. Eventually he begins to write "The Vegetable Garden"³, but after completing five pages he stops to talk with the others about the heat. He achieves little during the rest of the day, and after dinner he finds his mind a blank again. He persists, however, and finally manages to resume writing, by candle-

¹. Ibid., p.582.
². Ibid., p.585.
light now. When he stops, late at night, he feels
tired and confused, and his nose has begun to bleed. It
takes him three days to complete the story, but when he
has finished he boasts to his mother of his fluency in
writing, and assures her that it will not be long before
he has earned enough money to get them all back to the
country. She only gives him a look, however, which
seems to him to say: "You lie all the time lately".
But hope is all they have to comfort them now: hope that
they will one day be able to return to the country, and
hope that the cooler weather will bring an improvement in
his mother's health.

Another autobiographical story, "Tiger Cub", records a curious incident that took place in 1930.
Already, shortly after Hu Yeh-p' in had been given the
editorship of The Red and the Black, he and Ting Ling had
taken a fancy to their landlord's handsome wife, and,
together with Shen, had formed a plan (which went awry)
to separate her from her husband and re-educate her.\(^2\)
Now Shen himself became interested in the young soldier

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1. "Completed in the New Cramped and Musty Study on
the 15th. of May 1931", it appears in the book Tiger
Cub, Hsin Chung-kuo, Shanghai 1932. It was first
2. Ting Ling I, pp.156-8.
who was attending his young brother, when the latter came to visit him. He was very impressed by the lad's good looks, his candour, his modest and yet self-confident bearing, and his quick intelligence. With proper training, he felt, he might one day become a great man, and he pleaded with his brother to release the boy into his care. His brother pointed out that in fact he was utterly unsuited to anything but soldiering, and argued long and scornfully against what he considered his elder brother's folly, but in the end he was obliged to yield to Shen's persistence, and returned to Hunan alone.

More than a month went past, during which the boy's education progressed satisfactorily, for Shen's friends were happy to tutor his "young genius", while their pupil was dutifully eager to learn, and it was with indignation that Shen received a letter from his brother suggesting that he hand the boy over to one Battalion Commander Wang 王, who would be calling on him shortly. Wang proved to be an old schoolmate of Shen's, and while they talked, Shen's protégé was permitted, at Wang's insistence, to go out with the latter's young attendant and amuse himself. The next day, Shen returned late at night from a visit to Wang, to discover that the two boys had gone out together that afternoon and not yet returned. Since his "tiger cub" had also taken his uniform, Shen
concluded that he had run away, and went panic-stricken to see Wang. All next day and night he searched Shanghai, finally falling asleep over a pot of tea in a tea-house, but when he returned home in the morning he learnt that the boy had been and gone again, so he set out in search once more.

Returning home that night, he discovered a note hidden in his bedclothes. His brother had warned him that the boy's docile appearance was misleading, and that he had once tried to kill a man because of a trivial insult. At the time Shen had only laughed and praised the boy's spirit, but now he learnt that he had actually killed a man in a quarrel the other night, and that Wang's young attendant was also dead. Although Shen watched the death notices in the newspapers carefully thereafter, and even published an appeal to his protégé, he found out nothing more about the affair.¹

Shen has been gently satirical at his own expense throughout the story, and in a brief epilogue he laments his uselessness and stupidity. Addressing his readers directly, he confesses that he does not deserve the praise they have generously bestowed on him for his

1. Not till three years after writing the story at any rate, when he rediscovered the "tiger cub" in Hunan. See below, pp.369, 371.
skill in character analysis, for he cannot even penetrate behind the outward appearance of a mere boy. He still seems to feel a certain pride, however, in coming from a district which breeds such untamed "tiger cubs", and the humility of his final admission that he must be considered uncouth by the standards of "you who have grown up in the big city" is clearly ambiguous.

Despite the frustrations and sufferings which oppressed him in Shanghai, his literary work continued to progress. He mixed with the writers connected with the Contemporary Review and the Crescent Monthly, and published a great many stories and a number of books. One source lists six books published during the years 1928-30: The Honest Man 老實人; Alice's Travels in China 阿麗思中國遊記, a satire based on Lewis Carroll's "Alice" books, which had been translated by Chao Yüan-jen 趙元任 and published by Commercial Press; On the Night of the Fourteenth 十四夜間, apparently a story collection; The Shaman's Love 神巫之愛; Shen Ts'ung-wen's First Collection 沈從文集; and a collection of six stories called The Inn

1. Ting Ling, op. cit., p.122.
2. Jos. Schyns and others, 1500 Modern Chinese Novels and Plays, Peiping 1948, pp.77-8, 280.
4. Discussed below.
A great many more stories are available from this period of Shen's life than from his first period in Peking, and they include some of his best. Many of them are dated by Shen himself, and these will be discussed in order below. The remainder will be dealt with at what seems the most suitable point, or else left till the end of the chapter.

"A Certain Married Couple" 萬夫婦 1 deals with an unnamed young couple's plot to extort some money from a friend who is in love with the wife. The wife is supposed to lure this young man into a compromising situation and give a signal to the husband, who will then come in from his hiding-place outside and "discover" his friend's treachery. After her husband slaps her during a violent quarrel, however, she decides to get her revenge by submitting to her lover without betraying him, so when the young man emerges from the house he finds the husband still waiting outside:

"Ha, I've been waiting for you for an hour old chap, but you didn't come. I've been keeping your wife company for a long while...."  
"Have you? I'm very sorry. Come and sit down again."

1. A Portrait of Eight Coursers, pp.65-75. Written in Shanghai in 1927, and revised at Peking eight years later.
The guest looked at his watch and said: "I haven't got time now. I'll come again tomorrow."
"There wasn't anything in particular that you wanted to discuss with me?"
"Nothing important. Tomorrow in the park will do."
"What time?"
"How about seven in the evening?"
"Fine, I'll definitely be there at seven."
In his haste, the guest had arranged to meet his host at the time he had agreed on for a rendezvous with his hostess, but it was too late for second thoughts, and he hurried off.

When the husband goes inside and realized what has happened, he "pounces on" his wife, who is feigning sleep, with "a great shout", and when their friend comes round two days later to find out why the husband had not met him in the park, he learns that the young couple are both in hospital.

The young couple of the title clearly owe something to Hu Yeh-p'in and Ting Ling, who also quarreled violently and also had a friend, their tutor in Japanese, who fell in love with Ting Ling. The story itself, however, is presumably intended to satirize the unhealthy quality of life in Shanghai and urban life in general. A similar point is made by "Learned People" 有學問的人.

1. Ibid., pp.73-4.
2. See Ting Ling I, pp.129-140.
3. A Portrait of Eight Coursers, pp.47-63. It was written in Shanghai in 1928 and revised in Peking in 1935.
although here the characters are too paralysed by the "spiritual malnutrition"¹ which Shen came to feel was fostered by city life to do more than contemplate the immoral acts which they have not the energy to commit.

The scene is Peking, and the two main characters are "Mr. X X", a physicist in his middle thirties with a five year old son, and "Miss Chou", a divorced woman ten years younger than Mr. X and a friend of his wife's. They sit side by side on the sofa in X's room talking, while night falls outside and the darkness slowly deepens. Each of them is bored with life and attracted by the thought of a love-affair, but although the passion has gone out of X's marriage (as he explains to Miss Chou), doubts, inhibitions and simple indecisiveness prevent him from making any overt advances to his companion. He is perspicacious enough to realize that Miss Chou is not unwilling, but "this learned man" finds himself simply incapable of acting. Miss Chou for her part is too languid to offer him open encouragement, and, feeling that it is the man's part to make the advances, she waits hopefully but passively for him to do so.

They discuss the drinking of wine², speaking symbolically

¹ Hunan Journey, p.116.
² A Portrait of Eight Coursers, p.60.
of life, as Shen unnecessarily points out\(^1\), but although they speak of drinking, "they both seemed to agree that merely smelling it was the healthiest method".

Finally, X bows to the hopelessness of the situation and switches the light on. Both of them immediately feel a sense of relief, "as though the lamp had saved them from danger by its light, and they smiled at one another". Shortly afterwards, the wife returns home with her little son, and asks her husband:

"X, what were you and Miss Chou talking about when I arrived?"

"Ha, we'd just been speaking of drinking wine." He laughed but without losing anything of his gentleman's air of cultured dignity.

"Really? Then Miss Chou drinks wine?"
The wife seemed sceptical.

Then their guest said: "No, but if I were encouraged I'm afraid I wouldn't be able to help having a mouthful."

"That's how I am too - Shih-fen, (he turned to ask his wife) aren't I just like that?"
Their guest hugged their little boy more tightly, and just smiled foolishly.\(^2\)

The deliberate use of symbolism here is worth noting, for it is not uncommon in Shen's stories. But perhaps the most interesting thing about the story is that, unlike any of the others so far discussed, it ends in a way that seems both natural and satisfying, summing up all that has gone before by means of the wine-drinking

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1. Ibid., p.61.
2. Ibid., p.63.
metaphor and by the final image, which effectively underlines the emptiness of Miss Chou's life.

"The One Who Came to Town" is another satire, but this time directed at countryside evils, although it also attacks, through its narrator, "you city people" who are "really comfortable" and spend "the whole day holding meetings, and talking about the emancipation of women and economic independence" while the countryside suffers. In five brief sections, a countrywoman tells how her village was looted by soldiers, with the result that she has had to come and live in town, while her husband had joined the army, so that in future he will be able to "do what they did". Her chief concern is for her black ox, an intelligent and sensitive animal (such as Shen was to write about the following year in the story "The Ox") which was also taken away, despite its sore leg. She is sure that her husband will keep his promise not to take anyone's ox if it has a sore leg, for "he is a good man", but after five years he is less clear in her memory than the ox, and she is no longer confident of recognizing him if they should meet again.

2. Ibid., p.118.
In October, and November of this year, under the pseudonym Chia-ch'en 甲辰, Shen published a pair of consecutive stories, "Enticement and Rebuff" and "The One Who Became a Man for the First Time", which were apparently written the year before.¹ The hero of these stories is a failed student and slightly more successful writer called Mu-chün 木君. He is in the habit of frequenting cinemas, partly because he derives a certain amusement from seeing the well-to-do taking their pleasures in company with the less respectable, and partly in order to admire the young women there. On this occasion, however, sitting alone at the back of the cinema, he is depressed by the feeling that life is a play to which he is only a spectator. He is startled out of these melancholy reflections when an attractive young woman sits down just in front of him, and his mind turns to erotic daydreaming instead.

When the woman gives him a steady, enigmatic look over her shoulder, an elaborate comedy of "enticement and rebuff" begins. She lays her hand provocatively on the

¹ SSM, Vol.19 No.10, Oct.1928, pp.1147-1156; and SSM, Vol.19 No.11, pp.1279-1286. If these stories were written in Peking, as the note at the end of the first one claims, then the "July" and "August" during which they were composed must refer to 1927.
back of her seat, but when he leans forward (marvelling at his own boldness) and kisses it, it is promptly withdrawn. He stretches out his legs till he touches her feet, and they move away. He puts his hand on the back of her seat, and she turns to gaze at him again. How is he to interpret her behaviour? Is she a respectable woman, a whore, or perhaps a mad woman? At interval, he is returning inside the cinema when he meets her coming out. He turns to follow her, but she turns again, disconcerted and goes back in, followed again by Mu-chûn.

After the film, he follows her as she walks home at a fixed distance, for she quickens and slows her steps as he does. At this point Shen makes the woman's feelings clear. Rather like the heroine of the 1930 story "A Slight Coolness", she longs for a "real man"," but she is far from certain that Mu-chûn is what she wants, and so, like Miss Chou in "Learned People", she is waiting for some definite advance to be made to her. At last Mu-chûn draws abreast of her, and they stop while each waits nervously for the other to speak first. Finally Mu-chûn reaches out a hand, with the romantic notion of taking the chrysanthemum she is wearing. His strength fails him when his hand is halfway there, but

1. Ibid., p.1154.
fortunately she has misunderstood the gesture, and she timidly gives him her hand to hold. So they return to her room together, with Mu-chün feeling that for once "he had acted as a man should". 1

Although the indecisiveness of the two characters makes this story reminiscent of "Learned People", their youthfulness and the positive though slightly ironical ending give it something of the quality of a genuine love-story. The satirical tone here seems to include a large element of self-mockery, for Mu-chün has much in common with his creator. Like Shen, he ekes out a living by selling fiction at three dollars per thousand characters, 2 is skilled in drawing women characters and "often praised by others for the subtlety of his analysis" of their psychology, 3 and is called a "straggler" by "clever people". 4 He also shows characteristics which Shen sometimes attributes to himself, such as timidity with women, 5 poor health, and a tendency to make day-dreaming a substitute for action. 6

1. Ibid., p.1156.
2. Ibid., p.1149; "Straggling", p.16.
4. Ibid., p.1149; cp. the autobiographical "Straggling".
One might describe "Enticement and Rebuff", then, as a satire in the process of becoming a love-story, and in its sequel the transformation is completed. "The One Who Became a Man for the First Time" opens the following morning, with Mu-chûn awake in bed and the woman still sleeping peacefully beside him. He is deeply grateful to her for what she has given him, and he feels happy and contented. After she has woken up and they have begun to talk, however, his mood is shattered by her description of herself as "second-hand goods". How much, he wonders bitterly, are second-hand goods worth, and he gives her twenty dollars, half of what he had recently got from his publishers. She is alarmed by his generosity and protests that people will think she has cheated him, but his eyes only fill with tears at this further evidence of her deference to the narrow-minded moralism of the respectable world. He tells her that he will come every day, paying in advance, but then she dumbfounds them both by blurting out that she would like to marry him. He remains silent while she begins to weep, for they both know that their circumstances will not permit marriage. He returns to his room and ponders the question, but decides that he must clear up his own affairs before involving anyone else in them. He notes in his diary that he has "become a woman's man for the
first time", and that evening he goes out again to visit her.

The heroine of this love-story is clearly one of the type that Shen had in mind when he spoke of his debt to Tseng Ch'in-hsüan\(^1\), and the story itself, like many of Shen's other love stories,\(^2\) illustrates the conflict between love and the social conventions which seek to inhibit it. The chief weakness of the story, not an uncommon one with Shen, is the length of the discursive passages, where he enlarges on some favourite topics raised by the story, such as the virtues of prostitutes and the inadequacy of words for expressing feelings.

"After the Rain" 雨後 \(^3\) is also a love-story, but this time set in a green and peaceful countryside like that which forms the background of many of Shen's best stories. After a brief thunderstorm, young women are moving about in the sunshine as they gather bracken in the hills. One of their number, however, remains in

1. Above, p.48.
the thatched hut where she had first taken shelter, and
waits for her lover Szu-kou
When he arrives, they talk for a while, but Szu-kou is in an amorous mood.
His sweetheart's young sister, who is gathering bracken, notices them, and sings a song to tease them:

Up in the sky rises cloud upon cloud,
Down in the ground is dug grave upon grave,
The pretty maid washes up bowl upon bowl,
In her bed people lie, man upon maid....

But when she calls out: "Szu-kou, you're misbehaving again! I'll tell!", Szu-kou threatens her with a beating and she moves off. Again the young couple talk, and she recites a couplet that she has read:

Someone stands alone amid falling flowers,
Swallows fly in pairs through light rain.

But although Szu-kou praises the poetry, his mind is still on other matters. After making love, they lie there contentedly for a while, and then Szu-kou, ignoring his sweetheart's protests, goes off down the hill to get a drink from the well. She watches him disappear into the bamboo grove, but afterwards she continues to lie gazing up at the sky, while her sister begins to sing again:

1. Ibid., p.123. Shen quotes this song again in "Hsiao-hsiao" and "The Lamp". See SF, pp.13-14, 125.
A steep slope leads to the maiden's door,
Others go less but her lover goes more.
Sandals made with iron have been worn through,
For whom should it be if not for you?¹

This seems a simple idyll, but running through it is a concern with that conflict which is perhaps Shen's central preoccupation - the conflict, that is, between the values of the country and the city, between the senses and the intellect, the "big book" of nature and the "little book" of words. Szu-kou, in complete contrast to Mr. X of "Learned People", is the perfect natural man, living in his senses and caring for little beyond the present moment. For this very reason, he enjoys a freedom of action and a capacity for simple and whole-hearted pleasure that is forever denied the learned but effete Mr. X. He drinks the "wine" that Mr. X can only smell.

Nor is Szu-kou lacking in sensitivity, but, like the young Shen Ts'ung-wen, it is natural beauty that moves him:

Szu-kou was illiterate, so he saw no poetic significance in his surroundings. But to hear the calls of all the big and little insects, to hear the grasshoppers flying everywhere after they had shaken the water off their wings, to hear the raindrops plunging earthwards from the leaves of the trees, or the pattering heart-beat of the one by his side: all this was poetry.²

¹. Eight Coursers, pp.130-1. This verse also occurs in "Hsiao-hsiao": See SF, p.17.
². Ibid., p.125.
His sweetheart, however, knows some book-poetry, and it makes her thoughtful and melancholy:

She took her arms from around Szu-kou's waist and went to pluck some withered grass from the ground. "Szu-kou, you know, I am bound to wither too one day - everything will wither by the eighth or ninth month. I shall wither even earlier than the rest of you." She remembered from a songbook that from olden times rosy cheeks had often suffered an unlucky fate. And she remembered a great many stories in which a woman had found no security.¹

She is therefore in danger of becoming like Mr. X and Miss Chou, and losing the ability to understand and respond to the promptings of her heart:

Beautiful flowers cannot bloom for long, and so, knowing that withering is swiftest of all, one should love all the more deeply....If there is still something lacking, in spite of being deeply in love, this must be the fault of literacy.²

Fortunately, Szu-kou's instincts are sounder, and he ignores the words of the couplet she quotes:

Szu-kou said: "Hey, that's a pretty good poem!" - but he was not talking about the poem, for he had no understanding of poetry at all. He only meant that the reciter and the present situation were good. He did not have the words to express his happiness. He was very happy.³

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1. Ibid., p.121.
2. Ibid., pp.125-6.
3. Ibid., p.126.
So he is able to communicate his happiness to her, and save her from her books and her morbid thoughts:

Szu-kou gave her vigour, strength and tenderness. She grew drunk on these things, till she was unconscious of all human affairs. When she had recovered, she was faintly tired, and her whole body was still very weak, but she felt content. The books she had read were all forgotten.1

In "Pai-tzu" 柏子2 Shen paints another portrait of a man who lives entirely in his senses, but this time he does so with greater subtlety and skill, and this story is, of those discussed so far, the first fully mature work of art. It seems to have been one of Shen's own favourites, for he singles it out in an essay as an illustration of a countryman's attitude to life,3 and he was reminded of it in 1934 when he again passed through Shenchow and "saw innumerable sailor Pai-tzus and their sweethearts".4

Pai-tzu is a sailor whose boat has just moored at Shenchow, and Shen opens his story with a long and vivid description of the scene at the wharf. That night

1. Ibid., p.129.
2. First published in SSM Vol.19 No.8, August 1928, under the pseudonym Chia-ch'en, it appears in both Eight Coursers and A-chin.
4. Hunan Journey, p.31. Pai-tzu is also mentioned on pp.29 and 34.
Pai-tzu makes his way through the wind and rain to visit his prostitute sweetheart. After some coarse, good-natured banter and the woman's discovery of the gifts Pai-tzu has brought for her, they spend the evening making love, smoking opium, drinking tea and talking. Much later, Pai-tzu lights his torch and leaves: "having finished his business he was going back to the boat".¹ Despite the mud and heavy rain, he is well content:

The woman's laughter and movements were fixed as firmly as a leech in his heart. And this was enough. What he had had more than made up for a whole month's toil, for the wind, rain and sun of the boat's journeys, for his losses at cards, for...he was even drawing in advance on the happiness due on his next trip downstream. He knew quite well that this was another fortnight or a month away. Afterwards he would work, eat and sleep cheerfully because tonight he had got everything that he had hoped for. What he had tasted tonight, he would be able to savour for a full two months, and in less than two months he would be back again.²

"After the Rain" had ended at this point of fulfilment, but Pai-tzu's cheerful hedonism is somewhat subdued by what he hears when he reaches the boat:

When he reached the gangplank, he crossed it very carefully, no longer daring to sing "The Eighteen Caresses" as he had been about to do - for the captain's wife was feeding her infant son, and he could hear the child being coaxed and the sound of its sucking at the breast.³

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2. Ibid., pp.59-60.
3. Ibid., p.60.
Thus Pai-tzu is confronted at the end by another kind of love, one which suggests by contrast the ephemeral and unfruitful nature of his own. In the image of the child at the breast there may also be a hint of the innocent but essentially infantile character of Pai-tzu's own relationship with his woman. The story concludes with a brief epilogue which seems to hint at the impersonality of these transactions between sailors and prostitutes:

Each of the various groups of merchant vessels along the river-bank at Shenchow has its fixed mooring-place, and there is no confusion among them. But each ship, when it has unloaded its goods, must go somewhere else to load up again. And so, after Pai-tzu had gone ashore twice across the shaking gangplank, his ship departed.1

In other words, just as each ship moors in its appointed place and moves on again as soon as it has discharged its cargo, so each sailor has his particular woman to whom he gives "a month's accumulated money and energy"2 in one brief night of pleasure, before he too must leave again to earn another month's pay.

"Pai-tzu", like most of Shen's best writing, impresses above all by its realism. The riverside bustle, the wet night, the atmosphere in the woman's room: all this is

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p.54.
evoked with a vividness which makes the pastoral landscape of "After the Rain" seem slightly artificial despite its freshness. The characters too are more convincing, being precisely defined in terms of their environment, whereas the identity of Szu-kou and the source of his sweetheart's education are never made clear. And finally, there is less naivety here in Shen's treatment of his theme. In "Pai-tzu" the rain is still falling, and although Pai-tzu is happy, his happiness is bought at the expense of hardships of which Szu-kou knew nothing, and its value and permanence are questioned in a way that the earlier story did not allow.

"A-chin" 阿金 seems to have been a popular story,¹ but it is inferior to "Pai-tzu". It tells how the villager A-chin plans to marry a beautiful young local widow, but is thwarted by the well-meant interference of his friend the constable. The constable holds a low opinion of women, and when the story opens he is explaining to A-chin the disadvantages involved in marrying one. He finally extracts from his reluctant friend a promise not to visit the matchmaker till the following day, in order to have time to think the matter over.

1. Completed in December 1928, it has appeared in The Inn and Others (Schyns et. al. op. cit., p.280) and A-chin, and also, with slight revisions, in SF and Hsiao-hsiao, Kuo-kuang, Hong Kong 1961.
Once he is away from the constable however, A-chin's desire for the young woman's "plump, snow-white body" increases, until he can bear it no longer and sets off for the matchmaker's, despite his promise. At the entrance to her street, however, is a dog-meat stall, and here A-chin runs into the constable and is obliged to retreat. Two more times A-chin is frustrated in this way, and when he learns that the constable is telling everyone of his promise, he finally gives up and tries to pass the time by joining in some gambling. Because his mind is on other matters, he plays carelessly, and when he sets out for the matchmaker's for a fourth time that night, he discovers that his money is all gone and that marriage is therefore out of the question.

The story is a simple one, and after "Pai-tzu" the setting seems too lightly sketched - with little more detail, in fact, than in the play "Lamb", which might almost be set in the same village. The most interesting thing about the story is the curious figure of the constable, at once benevolent and sinister, like the water-bailiff in the 1930 story "The Husband". Despite his constantly reiterated claim to be acting in A-chin's best interests, this big, garrulous man has a definitely menacing aspect from A-chin's point of view. On one occasion he even seems for a moment to be literally

devouring his friend: "He shook A-chin's right hand, then picked up the knife from the table, cut off (some meat)\(^1\) and popped it into his mouth. (It was dog meat that he cut off!)"\(^2\) Once again one is reminded of the water-bailiff, and the way in which he devours the husband's chestnuts without waiting to be asked.

The weakest thing about "A-chin" is the dénouement. There is no evidence that A-chin is a compulsive gambler, and it is scarcely credible that he would lose his money so carelessly when the money was his only means of obtaining the woman he desires. By way of compensation for this weak point, the ironical ending shows that Shen has now definitely mastered the art of bringing his stories to a satisfactory conclusion. When the constable learns a few days later that A-chin did not marry the widow, he supposes that he had taken the constable's advice, and, realizing at last that beautiful women do not make good wives, had pleaded lack of money as an excuse.

The constable still fancied that he had done a friend a very good turn, and, with a big gourd of strong wine, he went at once to Yellow Ox Village to see A-chin and congratulate his old friend on his decision.\(^3\)

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1. No object of the verb is given in the Chinese.
2. Ibid., p.34.
3. Ibid., p.38.
At about this time Shen wrote "The Story of a Story-teller" in which he gave a brief and nostalgic account of his carefree life in Lungtan, and related the story of the former bandit chief Liu Yün-t'ing. The events are the same as those described in the Autobiography, although there are some slight discrepancies between the two versions, and the story displays an occasional clumsiness and prolixity from which the later account is free.

"Before the Wedding" takes up again the theme of "After the Rain". This time the young lovers, Wu-ming and A-hei, are to be married shortly, and Wu-ming is finding the temporary restrictions placed on his relations with A-hei rather irksome. Wu-ming's aunt (who is also A-hei's adoptive mother) has taken it on herself to instruct A-hei in sexual matters, but although her information is of theoretical interest to the young couple (for A-hei passes most of it on to her sweetheart), her assurances that there is "no need to be afraid" are already quite superfluous. In fact,

Wu-ming is particularly unhappy because he has not had a chance to be alone with A-hei for some time now, and he is delighted when, about a week before the wedding, his parents invite his aunt, but not A-hei, to dinner at their house.

Although Wu-ming had pretended to be bashful when his aunt had jokingly suggested that he stay with A-hei and keep her company, once he has taken his aunt to his place, he returns quickly to his sweetheart. He is eager to make love, but she is reluctant. The weather is too cold now for going to the hills, and she is afraid to misbehave in the house because she remembers the aunt's warnings that "bodhisattvas, gods and spirits" are there, and that "one may succeed in deceiving living men, but one cannot deceive gods and spirits". Eventually, however, after Wu-ming has angrily chased away a messenger sent to fetch him, A-hei takes pity on his unhappiness:

A-hei contemplated his comical air and said:
"Have a glance in the mirror and see how miserable you look!"
"It's enough if you can see my misery. Why should I have to go and see for myself how miserable I look?"
She really did look then, for a long time, until she could see how miserable he was, and afterwards she showed Wu-ming the pillow that was to be hers after her marriage.
The weather that day was not very cold at all.

2. Ibid., p.13.
The similarity to "After the Rain" is clear, but "Before the Wedding" seems less contrived than the earlier story, partly because Shen makes his point here more by implication than by direct statement, and partly because the characters and the background are drawn in more and finer detail. Of special interest in "Before the Wedding" is the slight change in the relationship between the lovers that has taken place since "After the Rain". On the surface there is little difference. Wu-ming, like Szu-kou, is impulsive and "of such natural simplicity that when he wanted something he had to have it at once regardless of rain or shine"; and, again like Szu-kou, he finally overcomes his sweetheart's scruples and achieves his desire. This time, however, it is the woman who appears to be the stronger character. Untroubled by the doubts of her predecessor in "After the Rain", A-hei also displays a quiet intelligence and self-possession which contrast strongly with Wu-ming's childlike impatience:

A clever woman can always show one kind of virtue to one kind of person and another kind of good quality to another kind of person, managing things so well that she wins favourable comment from all sides. For example, the old aunt was pleased with (A-hei) because she thought she was quiet and well-behaved, while Wu-ming loved her like the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin precisely because she was a bit irresponsible in some ways.

1. Ibid., p.2.
2. Ibid., pp.2-3.
So, as in "Under a Separate Administration", the heroine tends to outshine the hero, and Shen himself presents the story as part of the "history" of A-hei, not Wu-ming. Shen seems to have been inclined to the belief that women are in general superior to men. In a couple of places he explicitly says as much, but the best evidence for his feelings on the matter may be found in the series of young heroines who dominate many of his best stories.

Another episode of A-hei's "history", presumably written earlier, may be found in the story "Autumn". Here, the marriage has not yet been arranged and the story begins with a lyrical description of the beauty of the season and the love of A-hei and Wu-ming. An account of the doings of their families then leads to a discussion of A-hei's marriage prospects. All realize that Wu-ming will inevitably be her husband, but when he is asked he says he does not want to marry her. In that case, they tell him, he will get a beating if he is seen with her any more, but he runs out of the room and goes straight to tell A-hei what has happened. At first he teases her by saying that they are both to

1. See below, pp.335-6.
2. It appears in Ju-juei, but the date of its original composition is not given.
be married off to different people, but he soon confesses the truth (softening his stated refusal to marry her to a refusal to commit himself), and the story ends with the young lovers gazing contentedly at the sun setting over the fields "unaware that in the outside world tears and other such things still existed".

Two months after "Before the Wedding" was published there appeared the autobiographical story "Straggling", which has already been mentioned. Two months after that, Shen wrote another story, "Husband and Wife" 夫婦, in which young country lovers feature again. This time, however, they are no longer the sole focus of interest, and the countryside is no longer wholly friendly.

The central figure this time is in fact a city­dweller, a man surnamed Huang 黃, who seems to be a fairly important Kuomintang official. Suffering from some unspecified "nervous debility", he has come to an obscure country village for a rest cure. Attracted by a clamour outside the house he is staying in, he follows a crowd to the outskirts of the village, and here he finds that the villagers have caught a young couple who had been making love "in broad daylight". He sees that they are

1. Written in July 1929 and later revised in November 1933. It was first published in SSM Vol.20 No.11, November 1929, and appears in A-chin.
both bound, and that bobbing on the woman's head there is a bunch of wildflowers, apparently put there as a gesture of derision. Huang, noting the pleasantness of the weather, is touched by sympathy for the captives, but the crowd is anxious to see them flogged.

Before long a man addressed as "Company Commander" comes hurrying up and begins to interrogate the young couple, while the crowd continues to offer suggestions for their punishment. He learns that they are from another district and inquires about the young man's family. Then he discovers, unexpectedly, that they are not eloping lovers but a respectably married couple on their way to visit the wife's parents. This alters the situation in their favour, and now Huang speaks up for them. The Company Commander still insists that they be punished, but when someone informs him of Huang's status, he becomes more deferential and agrees to take the matter to the Regimental Commander.

The young couple are subsequently freed, and after thanking Huang and promising to come and see him in a few days, they set off again for their destination, this time by starlight, for it is now quite dark. As Huang watches them go, the breeze brings him the scent of flowers, and he remembers the bouquet which the woman had been wearing and was now carrying in her hand. He calls out to her to
leave it by the roadside for him, but her husband walks back to Huang and hands it to him. As the couple are lost to sight in the darkness, Huang sits down by the bridge, breathing in the fragrance of the half-withered flowers and feeling his heart "faintly stirred by an obscure longing":

He recalled all the events of that day, and he felt that his own world was a very constricted one. Supposing that he himself had had such a wife, unforeseen dangers would have been lying in wait for him too now. And so he began to feel that this was a tiresome place to stay in. Although the scenery was beautiful, the people in the countryside were just as uninteresting as those in the city, and he made up his mind to go back to town the day after tomorrow.¹

In this story, together with two of his favourite themes, the debilitating effect of city life and the joyful innocence of young love in the countryside, Shen has combined a third: the ugliness and cruelty that is also to be found in the countryside. This third theme is not uncommon in his works, but nowhere else does he portray ordinary villagers themselves with the uncompromising harshness, almost amounting to caricature, which he shows here. They are depicted as uniformly cowardly, prurient and sadistic. Even the children are delighted when someone suggests that the young couple be stripped

¹. A-chin, p.103.
and flogged, and, remembering the number of times they have themselves been thrashed "with the stick used for beating the cows" by their fathers, they run about looking for suitably thorny sticks.\textsuperscript{1} It is particularly their narrow-mindedness that Shen deprecates, reminding one of how the "busybodies" of respectable society were seen to threaten true love in "The One Who Became a Man for the First Time":

What they had done was by no means really uncommon. What was uncommon, of course, was that they had done it "in broad daylight". For in broad daylight the people of this village ought to be either working or taking a nap. Anything else seemed quite improper, and still more so if it was done out of doors.\textsuperscript{2}

It is unusual in Shen's stories to find a city-dweller treated more sympathetically than country folk, yet that is clearly the case here. Unlike the villagers, Huang understands the young couple's feelings as soon as he sees them:

A faint evening breeze brushed against Huang's face, and up in the hills he could hear someone playing a flute. He gazed up at the sky and the pink sunset clouds there, and he thought to himself that one surely needed a woman when the setting was so poetic.\textsuperscript{3}

\begin{itemize}
\item[1.] Ibid., p.94.
\item[2.] Ibid., p.98.
\item[3.] Ibid., p.92.
\end{itemize}
His sensitivity is at once apparent to the young man, who "had already perceived that Huang was someone who sympathized with him", yet in the end Huang is defeated by his urban habits of thought and feeling.

The precise nature of Huang's illness is not explained, but the following passage gives a clue as to its probable origin:

The city-dweller's life is too hurried and confused. The sounds and sights that meet his ears and eyes are over-tiring, and what is more he often does not get enough sleep or nourishment. So although he always seems quick in his responses, in fact, apart from his awareness of sexual desire, his other faculties are all somewhat dulled.

Because of this, Huang, like Mr. X in "Learned People", suffers from paralysis of the will. Although he wants to help the young couple, he continues to watch events passively till the Company Commander arrives, and even then he "did not utter a sound", but waited to see what the newcomer would do. Only when he has "understood the affair from beginning to end" is he capable of any action. Consequently, although the young couple show him that the world he lives in is "a very constricted one", he is unable to break away from it. At the end he dismisses

1. Ibid.
3. A-chin, p.94.
4. Ibid., p.99.
from his mind the "beautiful scenery" that he had been aware of when in the presence of the lovers, and reflects instead on the "uninteresting" villagers. So he decides to return to the city that had brought on his illness in the first place, and while the happy lovers vanish in the night, he is left alone with nothing but memories and someone else's fading flowers.

The next story, "Rottenness", is of a completely different type: a piece of social criticism, strongly influenced by Dickens. It has no plot to speak of, but merely describes a slum quarter in Shanghai, passing back and forth in irregular fashion between night and day, and between the general scene and the lives of individuals. The opening paragraph sets the tone:

The evening wind, carrying a little of the remaining heat of the day, blew from Woosung across Cha-pei in Shanghai, taking in all the Rice-straw Canal in the city, with its dirty sewer-water, and spreading abroad a stench to which the neighbouring poor were quite accustomed.

The smell is offensive, however, to the well-dressed men and women travelling by bus through the foreign settlement on the other side of the canal:

1. Written in Woosung in July 1929, it appears in Eight Coursers, and, with slight revisions, in Spring, Wen-li, Shanghai 1960.

2. Spring, p.90.
They would all frown and block their nostrils with small white handkerchiefs of fine linen, while they freely criticized the Bureau of Public Safety to their fellow-travellers for not doing its job. They felt that these men were receiving taxes without doing any of the things that they ought to be doing, since they could neither drive all the poor people away nor effect any improvements in this filthy area.1

It is a hot summer, and the women in the slum go about naked to the waist, while their ringworm-scarred children play and fight on the rubbish heaps. The centre of the district is a large cleared area where the children have room to play freely, and where adults may transact business and seek amusement. Here, as night falls and the street-lights shine brightly across the canal, a middle-aged fortune-teller and physiognomist sits alone by his stall and his tiny lamp. On fine nights he does good business with customers from the foreign settlement, but tonight is windy and rainy, and there is no one about. He passes the time by chanting poetry and casting his own horoscope, and at nine or ten o'clock he returns home for a pot of tea and some opium.

The most squalid part of the slum, and its most unsavoury inhabitants, may be found right next to the canal. Here an evil-tempered and dissolute woman of about forty keeps a boarding-house. She relieves her

1. Ibid.
frequent fits of anger by beating her nine-year old child. The child, whose father is unknown, has a head covered with scabs and spends the days playing, fighting, swearing, and, when the opportunity arises, stealing.

The policemen in the area are responsible for the collection of innumerable taxes and the exaction of fines, but otherwise they are not unduly busy, and often leave their beat to relax in a teahouse or chat to the physiognomist.

At this point in the story it becomes apparent that Shen is dealing with the events of a single night, as he follows one of the policemen on his beat. After the physiognomist and those sleeping in the open have been driven indoors by mosquitoes and a shower of rain, only the dumpling-seller is left in the open area. Night-soil boatmen are his main customers, and the policeman joins them. When the dumpling-seller leaves, the boatmen visit the prostitutes in the boats on the canal and the policeman continues his beat. After walking for some time, he encounters a small boy who is watching a gecko catch insects by the light of a street-lamp. The boy runs away on being questioned and the policeman gives chase, but when his small quarry falls into a ditch of water and the policeman sees how wet, miserable and frightened he is, he walks off again, satisfied of having done his duty.
The boy watches the policeman go, and then climbs out of the ditch and bursts into tears. He soon stops crying, however, and gazes at the illuminated sky above the foreign settlement. He recalls the sights he had once seen there—the bustling crowds, the abundance of food and drink, and the wonderful things in the shop windows—and how he had been chased by a Sikh policeman. He has no idea whether things are still the same there, "but the lights were still really there; their glow lit up half the sky, as though a part of the sky had caught fire and was burning".¹ He is sitting on a garbage tin, but suddenly he realizes that his hand is touching something soft and foul-smelling, and he gets up cursing and begins to weep again. Too tired and hungry now to take any interest in the car sounding its horn as it crossed the bridge, he turns a corner and is swallowed up in the darkness.

Near the bridge one of two sleeping night-soil boatmen wakes up and goes to squat down and relieve himself into their boat. At this point a small boat, in which a child can be heard crying, approaches and wakes the man's companion. The prostitute on it offers her services, but the boatman is not interested. Meanwhile the first man,

¹. Ibid., p.105.
having finished his business, comes up to the woman and fondles her breasts, but when she realizes that he has no intention of giving her any money for anything, she swears at him and her boat goes away again. A few moments later the men hear the child crying loudly as though it had just been beaten.

Somewhere, something fell into the water with a plop as though a toad had heaved itself into the canal from the bank. Slowly the stagnant water in the canal began to stir, as though it were shivering slightly in the cool air. The tiny ripples fretted at the side of the boat, making a minute sound which was followed by a profound stillness.

Somewhere else a cock crowed, but it sounded as though it had been put in a big jar, and the direction of the call could not be clearly discerned. The two boatmen knew that they would soon be busy at their work, and each of them squatted on a block of stone, planning his own life. In the sky a shooting star fell down, leaving a long bright line behind it. It was very beautiful to see.¹

The influence of Dickens here has already been noted, and is apparent at the very beginning of the story, which, with its sombre tone and its panoramic social view,² is far removed from the more detached attitude and the concentration on the individual that one normally associates with Shen. In fact, one may notice a certain conflict in the story between social criticism on one hand and simple

¹. Ibid., p.110.
². Cp. for example the opening of Bleak House or Little Dorrit.
observation of "life" on the other. The most striking example of this is the prominence given to the figure of the physiognomist, who is little affected by the surrounding squalor and seems to be in the story merely because he is an interesting character. By way of contrast, there is the episode of the little orphan boy, which is given a truly Dickensian pathos. Shen also seems a bit uneasy in his attempts to paint a broad social picture of the area, and he finally abandons this approach in favour of the more characteristic method of concentration on selected individuals.

The story has no plot and no apparent pattern, but by gradually settling down to the events of a single night and closing just before dawn, Shen manages to end in a sufficiently conclusive manner. He also gives the story a degree of unity by the recurrence of certain images, people or places, such as the open area, the physiognomist, the beaten child (in the boarding-house and again in the prostitute's boat), the lights of the foreign settlement, the canal, and the night-soil boats. The images of dirt, disease and human excrement which run through the story, and convey the "rottenness" of the area, have a similar effect. These "dark" images (in which the night itself should be included) are contrasted with symbolic lights: the "five-inch" circle of the
physiognomist's tiny lamp, the blaze of opulence above the foreign settlement, and finally the true light of heavenly beauty in the falling star.

With "The Ox" Shen takes up again the idea of an intelligent and sensitive but maltreated animal which he had touched on in "The One Who Came to Town". Although the man who owns the ox of the title loves it like his own son, he has a quick temper, and on this occasion has beaten it so severely on the hind leg as to cause a serious injury. The following day he examines the wound, while the ox looks at him as if to say:

"Master, I bear no grudge against you. You usually treat me very well. If you beat me and hurt my leg, that was yesterday, and we should make up today. It's only slightly uncomfortable, and I'll be better in a couple of days."

The man feels guilty, but pretends to think that the ox is only malingering, and he takes it out to plough again. Eventually however the animal's patient obedience and its painful limping soften his heart, and he apologizes for his behaviour. The tired ox is allowed to rest, and it falls asleep to dream that its horns are bound with

1. Spring, p.92.
2. First published in the Crescent Monthly Vol.2 No.6/7, September 1929, it was slightly revised in 1957 and appears in SF and Hsiao-hsiao.
3. Hsiao-hsiao, p.17.
red cloth while its master wears new clothes. The man realizes now that the injury could prove a serious matter, and after lunch he goes to see the local cattle doctor, who is also a minor official. The doctor agrees to come and see the ox, but is immediately called away on business, and the farmer is obliged to apply some of his own medicinal herbs to the ox's wound, for want of anything better.

The ox is worried too now, fearing that if it is no longer of use it will be sent, as has often been threatened, to the butcher, and it imagines itself fleeing from the butcher or "goring this fierce man with its horns, in mortal combat with him". ¹

That night both master and beast dream of prosperity, of ploughed fruitful earth and mountains of grain. Waking, the man visits the ox in its stall, but he sees no change and, blowing out his candle, returns with a sigh to bed.

Each of them wept. They could both see that the things of which they had dreamt were miracles without hope of realization, and their hearts were full of grief at the nature of life. ²

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1. Ibid., p.23.
2. Ibid., p.25.
The next day the man fetches another doctor from further away, who treats the animal and predicts that it will be better in three days. The farmer still feels suspicious and unhappy, however. He abuses a well-meaning neighbour who tells him where there is good beef for sale, and then threatens to have the hapless ox, already suffering from feverishness and the doctor's needles, slaughtered and stewed, to "see if that'll fix your leg or not". ¹

His anger soon cools, however, and he sets out to see if he can borrow someone else's animal so that he can continue with the ploughing. The best he can do is to engage two labourers for the following day, when the ox rests and watches while the three men plough the field. The ox is distressed by the conversation, for the hired men maintain that malingering cattle are good only for beef and leather, and afterwards it tries to reassure its master with its expressive eyes that it will be better tomorrow and that it will not let the fine weather go to waste for him. The man is also annoyed with the workmen, for they are not as efficient as his ox, and he says loudly: "I hate them. They cost me a lot of money today, and yet they said that my little ox's hide was good for

¹. Ibid., p.20.
making money-belts. They're real robbers!"¹

After the fourth day the ox recovers and the ploughing is rapidly completed. That night the farmer dreams that he has four head of cattle in his pen, and the next day he announced loudly to his "partner": "You ought to have a companion my friend. That'd be the thing. We'll see how matters stand in the twelfth month."

His partner worked out the number of days till the twelfth month, and then he nodded: "Right, the twelfth month it is."²

This could well be the end of the story, but the final paragraph abruptly changes everything:

When the twelfth month came, all the cattle in the village were commanded by the yamen and sent off to some unknown place. Old Uncle Ox was reduced to spending the day looking for jobs to do at the headman's place. Whenever his eyes strayed inadvertently to the wooden stick (that he had beaten the ox with) which he had thrown into a corner of his own room, he would feel sorry that he had not given a blow heavy enough to break the animal's leg.³

The bitterness of this, as in "The One Who Came to Town" reflects Shen's feelings about the spoliation of the countryside, but it has wider implications as well, suggesting that happiness is only a fleeting dream which actually makes the harshness of reality seem all the

crueller by contrast. So, after the man and the ox have woken from their night-time dream of prosperity, Shen remarks:

Pleasant dreams are life's enemies, a kind of joke which the gods play on men. And so when Old Uncle Ox awoke, he felt much more aggrieved than he would have if, as was usually the case, he had not dreamt at all. 1

Like "Husband and Wife", "The Ox" is also concerned with moral values, setting a relationship founded on love against an indifferent and ultimately hostile environment. On the one hand there is the patience and gentle goodness of the little ox and the fairy-tale charm of its relationship with its master, and on the other there is the uncomprehending greed of a world which can see the ox only in terms of food or leather goods. The conflict is apparent in the mind of "Old Uncle Ox" himself, with his vacillation between kindness and cruelty, love and anger, between threatening to send the ox to the butcher, as the two workmen urge, and taking the ox's part against a world which finally destroys the happiness of them both.

"Huei-ming" 2 is Shen's tribute to the army cooks who had engaged his affection when he was a soldier,

1. Ibid., p.24.
2. First published in SSM Vol.20 No.9, Sep. 1929, it appears in Dark Night 黑夜, Wen-li, Hong Kong 1960, and, in a slightly revised version, in SF.
although its hero Huei-ming, unlike Pai-tzu, who was merely a typical river boatman, is an individual as much as a type. The time is 1926, and Huei-ming has been an army cook for fifteen years. He is tall and heavily-bearded, but his impressive appearance conceals "a commonplace mind", and while others have been promoted he appears to have made progress only in stupidity. Although he is not bright, however, he is "a good man at heart", with a character reminiscent of the little ox's in the previous story:

While he had grown up into a figure almost as awe-inspiring to the beholder as a god or a demon, he was actually as innocent as a puppy and as honest and gentle as a cow.¹

Huei-ming also has a dream, that one day his company will be sent to some far-off place to clear land and protect the frontier, and that there he will carry out the instructions of Ts'ai E², whom he had once heard say to "plant your banner on the strongholds".³ In anticipation of the great day, he keeps the company's old standard carefully wound round his waist - a secret which he mentions to no one. He does not know where this frontier area will be, whether in China proper or in some foreign

¹. SF, p.39.
². Above, p.50.
³. SF, p.40.
country like Japan, but he can imagine what life there will be like:

In the forest there would be no military judges making jokes, no lieutenants who loved to have everything spick and span, no medals, no money, and no ridicule and pettiness either.¹

When the company arrives at its latest destination, Huei-ming is impatient for battle to be joined, partly because he imagines that each battle will take him a step closer to the frontier post, and partly because he wants the fighting to be over before the weather grows too hot. Last summer in Hupeh he had seen the corpses rotting, swelling and bursting in the heat. Huei-ming found the sights and smells distressing, even though he knew that the dead men were "enemies", and he does not want to have to experience them again.

Peace talks are in progress, however, and time drags on with no fighting. Eventually Huei-ming ceases to wake in the night and listen for gunfire, and the inhabitants of the nearby village begin to return to the homes they had abandoned when the soldiers arrived. Huei-ming visits the village frequently now, and soon becomes friendly with the villagers, who are very impressed by his beard and listen willingly to his tales. He even tells them of the frontier garrison of his dreams, and

¹. Ibid.
on one occasion actually displays the precious banner to their astonished gaze. One day a villager makes him a present of a hen, and this gives Huei-ming a new interest which causes him to forget all about the war. Every day the bird lays a new egg, and her admiring owner begins to dream of little chickens who will call him "grandfather".

Twenty eggs are laid altogether, and when after about a month and a half they all hatch out, Huei-ming's joy knows no bounds. He "gives" a chicken to each young soldier who comes to beg one from him, but he continues to look after them all himself. He and the villager who gave him the hen congratulate one another like a couple of proud relatives, and Huei-ming all but weeps with delight. Shortly afterwards he is astonished to learn that peace has been arranged and that the company is to withdraw. Now his hopes of planting his banner on the forest stronghold still seem a long way from realization.

But he fed the chickens and looked after them very carefully. He had enough tobacco left over for at least forty days. All told, he was very lucky. The sixth month had come and the weather was extremely hot, but by good fortune not one man in the whole company had rotted. When Huei-ming smiled vacantly at these comrades of his, not one of them understood what his smile meant. After a while, when the spell of hot autumn weather had passed, the little chickens would flap their featherless wings and learn to cry "cock-a-doodle-do". All told, he was very lucky and quite content.1

1. Ibid., p.49. The last two sentences do not occur in Dark Night.
So Hui-ming is content to abandon his old dreams of the future for new happiness in the present, and compared with the ox of the previous story he is indeed "very lucky", for although the men who surround him in the army fail to understand his goodness and apparently torment him at times, they are not seen to persecute him in the story, and so far from destroying his happiness, they are eager to share in it when the chickens are born. Even the local villagers, callous and stupid in "Husband and Wife" and only slightly less so in "The Ox", are shown in a kindly light here, while it is the anticipated horror of warfare rather than anticipated happiness which comes to nothing in the end. The story in fact celebrates the triumph of life over death, and of peace over war. While Shen always looks back with nostalgia on certain aspects of his life in the army, he saw too much cruelty and senseless slaughter to feel any enthusiasm for war itself, and even during the war with Japan, he did not write any of the patriotic propaganda that most authors felt obliged to produce at the time.

At about the time when he wrote "Hui-ming", Shen produced another story dealing with army life called "The Day Before Absconding" 逃的前一天, 1 in

1. It was published in SSM Vol.21 No.7, July 1930, pp.1075-1084, where it is said, p.1084, to have been written in April 1929, and is described as "A Tale of the Little Soldier".
which new-born chickens again play a key part. It is characteristic of Shen that he has chosen to deal here, not with the actual events of his soldier's desertion, but with his feelings during the preceding day. The soldier has arranged to leave that evening, and now has nothing to do but fill in time while he waits. The day passes with painful slowness as he drifts aimlessly from one part of the village in which they are encamped to another, seeing familiar sights for the last time.

First he watches two soldiers having a friendly fight, and then he goes and joins the cooks where they are sunning themselves, till they too begin to quarrel. He then wanders off to see an old friend, a forty-one year old army secretary who has taken a fatherly interest in him, but is unable to bring himself to mention his imminent desertion, or to say goodbye as he had intended, and he soon leaves again. After paying back some money he owes to the washerwoman, he strolls down the main street of the village. All that he sees now appears remote and unreal to him. He makes his way to the mill by the stream, where his friend the old miller-woman shows him some new-born chickens and tells him that he can have four of them in four or five days. Her kindness and the sight of the tiny birds fill him with pain as he thinks of all the good things he must leave behind, and
of how lonely he will be in four or five days' time. He plucks a spray of peach-blossom from her tree as he leaves, and finds himself breaking into a run, for reasons which he does not understand.

At sunset that evening he sits on a hillside looking back over the village he is about to leave. The scene is beautiful and peaceful, and he thinks of what all his comrades will be doing at this moment. Over all rises the haunting sound of the bugle, and in the distance he can hear the gongs and drums of some village festival. He feels paralyzed by a sense of loneliness.

He seemed unable to stand by himself, or to dispel his weakness by something as unreliable as "will". He seemed to feel the need of assistance or some kind of encouragement in order to live. With his right hand he felt the hard rock he was sitting on. It gave out a faint warmth, for it still contained the leftover heat of the day. He smiled, and placed his left hand on the rock as well.

The day was already over.¹

There is a great deal of Shen's own life in this story, and this no doubt accounts for the feeling of nostalgia which pervades it. Many scenes make it clear that the village is in fact Huaibua, and even the soldier's borrowing of a classical novel from the secretary reflects Shen's borrowing of another novel from a superior officer

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¹ SSM Vol.21 No.7, p.1084.
Similarly, the secretary's reminiscence of his early schooldays, and how he and his friends used to outwit the teacher in order to go swimming, is taken from Shen's own childhood. Shen's personal involvement in the story helps to account for the deep feeling with which he has invested it - a feeling which, by being carefully built up to a climax and then allowed to subside swiftly and gently in the last paragraph, gives to a story which appears aimless and static at first an unexpectedly strong structure and satisfying conclusion.

"The Vegetable Garden" is a very different story, and contains a bitterness which perhaps reflects the circumstances under which it was composed. The garden of the title is owned by the widow Yu Ei. Her husband had been a Bannerman serving the Manchu government, and before the overthrow of the Ch'ing dynasty he had brought some special cabbage-seeds back home from Peking. After his death, his widow proved a capable gardener,

1. Ibid., p.1077; Autobiography, p.85. Some of the scenes described in the story may be also found in "My Education".
2. SSM Vol.21 No.7, p.1079; Autobiography, p.11.
3. SSM Vol. 20 No.10, October 1929. It also appears in SF, where it is erroneously said to have been "written in 1930".
4. See above, pp.194-6.
and the excellent cabbages which she grew and sold eventually brought her and her son a modest prosperity.

It is now 1926 and the widow is fifty, while her intelligent son is twenty-one. Together they live a tranquil and contented existence, and on summer evenings they stand enjoying the peaceful atmosphere of the garden:

For a long while the two of them remained without speaking, listening to the long-drawn notes of the cicadas flying about in the willow-trees, or to the sound of the stream which wound about the garden and flowed away to the east. The water was so clear that one could see right to the bottom, where there were always shrimps and little fishes, too small to be of use for anything except giving pleasure to the beholder. At this hour the fishes were probably resting too.

When the evening breeze stirred there came mingled with it the fragrance of white scented lilies and jasmine flowers, for there were many flowers and trees in the garden. As the light wind ruffled her hair, the mother counted the stars beginning to appear in the parts of the sky that showed through the willow branches, and she thought of the poems and songs of the men of old.¹

But the peace of summer gives way to winter, and then the snow-covered pile of cabbages in the garden looks (as Shen remarks in what turns out to be an ominous simile) like a large grave-mound. The son has just turned twenty-two, and he gains his mother's reluctant permission to go to Peking to study. After an absence of three years, he returns for the summer vacation.

¹ SF, p.111.
Unexpectedly he brings a wife, and the mother, after getting over her initial disappointment at not having been told of the marriage, is overjoyed and feels "ten years younger".¹ Her son seems busy with social matters and a little haggard, but otherwise unchanged, and now there are three of them to stand in the garden in the evenings. Her mother has a bed of chrysanthemums planted, because her daughter-in-law is fond of the flowers, and when she "saw the young couple tending the flowers in the chrysanthemum bed, she entertained harmless and perfectly natural dreams of becoming a grandmother".²

But here again, as in "The Ox", dreams of future happiness are abruptly shattered. The young couple are summoned to the yamen. The next day they are executed as Communists and their bodies are thrown into a muddy ditch outside the town. This double disaster shocks the mother profoundly, but she eventually recovers and continues her life as before. The chrysanthemums flower beautifully in autumn, and the garden becomes popular with the local gentry, who like to hold parties there, admiring the flowers and composing poetry as they get drunk on wine. Three years later, the garden has become known as the Yü family flower garden, but the widow's

¹. Ibid., p.117.
². Ibid., p.118.
life is lonely. That winter, when the snow falls and her son's birthday comes round again, she feels that she cannot bear to see the spring and summer return, and she hangs herself with a silken cord.

"The Vegetable Garden" resembles "The Ox" in theme, but it is better constructed, dividing neatly into two complementary halves, and written in a less diffuse style. The catastrophe also, while it comes as abruptly as in the earlier story, is softened by the epilogue to form a more graceful and natural ending. The story has been singled out for criticism by Han Shih-heng,¹ who objects to the "frivolity"² and the "oddness" and "unintelligibility"³ of its style. He mentions the passages where the mother welcomes her son and his wife home, and where the young couple are asked to come to the yamen as examples. Here, he complains, the impact of the mother's happiness and of the subsequent tragedy are "spoilt by the slightness of the author's narrative style", so that the mother's grief fails to engage the reader's feelings.

1. "Shen Ts'ung-wen's Fiction" 沈從文先生的小說, Literary Criticism 文學評論集, Hsien-tai, Shanghai 1934.
2. Ibid., p.91.
3. Ibid., p.92.
Understatement is not necessarily a defect, however, and all that has preceded the son's arrival - from the peaceful evenings spent together in the garden to the preparations the mother has just been making so eagerly - should allow the sympathetic reader to sense the mother's happiness on this occasion without any superfluous assistance from the author. As for the summoning of the young couple to the yamen and their subsequent execution, the poignancy of this lies precisely in its unexpectedness, and would be lost if the events were treated at greater length. As Shen well knew from his years in the army, hopes of future achievement and happiness can easily be shattered in a single, fatal instant, and the abruptness of his narrative here is in accordance with his theme. Finally, Shen seems to have prepared adequately for the mother's grief by the detailed account he has given of her former happiness and hopes. After this account, the mere contrast of her later with her former condition speaks for itself, and the terseness of the conclusion should not prevent the reader from being able to imagine the feelings that lie behind the widow's "frequent fainting" and her "bitter smile".  

1. SF, p.118.
"Hsiao-hsiao" ¹ is an important story, for it signals the completion of a type of portrait for which the young heroines of earlier stories - "Under a Separate Administration", "After the Rain", "Before the Wedding" - now appear as preliminary sketches. Hsiao-hsiao, in addition to representing the completion of a process of development in the early stories, is also the first of a series of young maidens who resemble her closely and play a prominent role in much of Shen's later work. In particular, she anticipates the heroines of three other stories, of increasing length and importance: San-san in the story of that name (1931), Ts'uei-ts'uei in the novelette Border Town (1934), and Yao-yao in the novel The Long River (about 1938). All of these young country maidens are "the embodiments of first love", as C. T. Hsia puts it² (although he would exclude Hsiao-hsiao on the somewhat dubious grounds that her "self-consciousness remains dormant"), and have arrived at that stage of life when the innocent happiness of childhood, in which A-hei was still immersed, is beginning to awaken to the sorrows of the adult world.

¹ Written in 1929 and first published in SSM Vol.21 No.1, Jan. 1930; reprinted in The New and the Old, and, with corrections, in SF and Hsiao-hsiao.
The story opens with a brief description of the country wedding processions which "by the twelfth month are taking place every day".¹ Usually the bride is locked inside her gay sedan-chair and sobbing, but "there are also those who do not weep when they are married. Hsiao-hsiao was such a one."² Hsiao-hsiao is not greatly perturbed by her change of status, partly because she has no parents of her own, and partly because her "husband" is still only two years old, ten years younger than herself. (Such marriages are common in this part of the country.) Apart from helping about the house, Hsiao-hsiao now spends her days cheerfully caring for and playing with her "little brother", as she calls him, and her nights in dreaming, while all the time she is rapidly growing.

One summer evening, when the family is sitting talking in the courtyard, the grandfather causes considerable amusement by mentioning women students, and then suggesting that perhaps Hsiao-hsiao will become one when she has grown up. Although Hsiao-hsiao knows nothing of women students or the grandfather's quaint ideas concerning them, she realizes that they are regarded as figures of fun and indignantly rejects the suggestion. The

2. Ibid.
grandfather persists, however, saying: "If you're like a woman student, you've got no alternative"\(^1\); and Hsiao-hsiao, becoming flustered, retorts that "If I have to, I will. I'm not afraid".\(^2\) The nature of these strange creatures is then explained to her, but "suddenly her heart was touched by a vague desire"\(^3\), and although she now treats the whole thing as a joke, she often finds herself going on bizarre journeys with women students in her dreams at night, and she answers unthinkingly to the nickname "Student", by which her grandfather has taken to calling her.

One day, a year and a half after her marriage, she learns that the twenty-three year old workman Hua-kou has been teaching her husband some love-songs. She asks Hua-kou to sing her a "respectable" song, but he responds by singing of a wife who is ten years older than her husband and is therefore free to do as she pleases. She understands enough of this to pretend that she understands it all, and Hua-kou becomes alarmed lest she tell her parents-in-law. He distracts her with a story about women students, although he subsequently cannot resist making another suggestive remark which she

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1. Ibid., p.4.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.5.
fails to comprehend. When she has gone, the other work-
man rebukes his friend: "Hua-kou, you're a bad lot.
She's a thirteen year old virgin. You'll have to wait
another twelve years before you sleep with her."¹ But
Hua-kou only cuffs him and goes on picking up the jujubes
that he had been gathering.

Another year and a half pass by. The grandfather's
latest joke is that she should cut off her plait in order
to be "free", and although she does not take this seriously,
she cannot resist examining her reflection in the water
and trying to imagine how she would look. One day, when
she is in the hills gathering grass with her little
husband, Hua-kou joins them, manages to persuade the boy
to go off in search of berries, and finally succeeds
in seducing Hsiao-hsiao. When her husband returns, his
hand has been stung by an insect (a good example of
Shen's restrained but effective use of symbolism) and
Hsiao-hsiao is filled with remorse. A month later she
realizes that she is pregnant, and asks Hua-kou's advice.
He can offer none, and a fortnight later he runs away.

Hsiao-hsiao, left alone, thinks of suicide. "But
why should she have to die? She still enjoyed life and
wanted to go on living."² She becomes worried and

¹. Ibid., p.9.
². Ibid., p.13.
irritable, and tries unsuccessfully to induce an abortion. Eventually she too tries to run away, but she is caught and her condition is discovered. The family is uncertain what to do with her now. According to custom she should be drowned, and the clan elders "who had read 'the Master said'" (i.e. adhered to conventional Confucian morality) recommend this. Her uncle disagrees, however, and since he is the one who had been responsible for her upbringing, he is allowed to have the final say, and a more compassionate course is chosen: it is decided that Hsiao-hsiao will be sold as a concubine. As time passes and no buyers are found, however, her husband, who had been pining for her, is given back into her care and daily events gradually resume their normal course. At last she gives birth to the baby, and since it turns out to be a boy, she is accepted back into the family.

Ten years later she and her husband are formally married, and after another two years her son is also married to a girl six years older. Thus the story concludes as it began, with a wedding procession:

On that day Hsiao-hsiao had not long been out of confinement, and her child was just three months old. Nursing her newly born infant¹,

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¹ Mao-mao 毛毛. Hsia, op.cit., p.202 takes this as part of a proper name, but it seems to mean little more than "baby". Cp. the similar use of the term in "An Ordinary Romance", SP pp.64, 78.
just as she had held her husband ten years before, she watched the excitement from between the bamboo fence and the elm- and wax-trees in front of the house. The baby cried, and she crooned soothingly to it:

"There there little brother, look: the bridal chair is coming. See how nice the bride looks in her pretty clothes! Now now, you mustn't make a fuss! You really must behave yourself, otherwise I'll have to get angry! You see, there are women students coming too! One day when you're grown up, we'll find you a woman student for a wife!" ¹

Hsiao-hsiao is, as was suggested above, something more than Hsia's "simple farm girl", although it must be admitted that the liveliness and sensitivity which set her apart from those around her are emphasized by a number of small changes made only in the later version of the story. While, for example, the story shows an affinity between Hsiao-hsiao and the students of whom she dreams, it is only in the revised version that the grandfather says explicitly that she is "like a woman student", and that the story ends as above, with her mind turning again to the students. Similarly, the ability to compose her own songs, which only the revised version gives her, also helps to illustrate her greater sensitivity.

¹. Hsiao-hsiao, p.16.
³. Hsiao-hsiao, p.3.
In Hsiao-hsiao, as with her successors San-san and Yao-yao (but not Ts'uei-ts'uei), there is a conflict between the values of town and countryside. Somewhat unexpectedly perhaps, it is if anything the former which emerges superior here, for Hsiao-hsiao's half-suppressed desire to become a student is treated sympathetically, while the peasants still have some of the unpleasant characteristics of the villagers in "Husband and Wife". In "San-san" city values will be treated with more suspicion, while The Long River is an unequivocal celebration of the virtues of the countryside.

Also of interest in "Hsiao-hsiao" is the way in which the relationship between Hsiao-hsiao and Hua-kou differs from that between the country lovers in earlier stories. Hua-kou resembles Szu-kou and Wu-ming in his eagerness to satisfy his desires, but he seems older and lacks their youthful innocence and naivety. Consequently he has no such hold over Hsiao-hsiao's affections as the other two have over the affections of their sweethearts, and the trend already noted towards the dominance of the woman in such relationships here finds its logical conclusion in a story centred entirely on the woman and named after her.
"Gentry Wife" is a story in a new vein: a satire on the life of the upper classes. It is divided into five titled sections, of which the first, "Their Household", describes the family of the unnamed "gentry wife" of the title. Her husband is forty-five years old, and for the past couple of years, having retired from public affairs for unexplained reasons, he has been "living the life of one of the gentry" - a life, which, in spite of superficial dabbling in religion and art, is essentially frivolous:

The average member of the gentry will amuse himself by often chanting the Buddha's name and learning to sit in meditation; he can do t'ai-chi boxing and is able to discuss the rules of physiognomy; he listens to Peking opera, and knows how to appreciate epigraphy, calligraphy and painting; apart from this, he drinks a little wine and plays mahjong.

This particular member of the gentry also spends a great deal of time eating and sleeping, but his favourite "pursuit", as with most of his fellows, is adultery. Unfortunately this leads to frequent quarrels with his wife, after which she will go out to play mahjong with

1. Written in 1929, it appears in Shen Ts'ung-wen's Second Collection (Crescent Book Co., 1931), in SP. and, with revisions, in SF.
2. None of the characters are given proper names.
3. 太極拳
4. SF, p.50.
a friend. But since she does not tell her husband where she is going, he will eventually be obliged to try and find her, first by telephone and then, if unsuccessful, by car.¹

The Gentry Wife herself is only thirty-two and looks even younger, but so far she has remained faithful to her husband. She is said to be very fond of her children, and "when a child cried or fell ill, she would hasten to ring the doctor, at the same time abusing the maids".² But apart from occasional excursions to the park she does not see a great deal of them, for she is usually too busy visiting friends, receiving guests, or quarreling with her husband. She is often moody and irritable, but this may be partly the result of her husband's constant infidelities and the ensuing quarrels.

The story proper begins with the second section, "Another Gentry Household" 另外一個紳士的家庭. The head of this household, to which the Gentry Wife has come for a game of mahjong, is referred to in the story as "the Cripple", because of the paralysis from which he suffers. In addition to his wife, he has three concubines, or secondary wives, referred to only as "A", "B" and "C".

¹ Hu Yeh-p' in was similarly obliged to search Shanghai for Ting Ling when she walked out after their quarrels. See Ting Ling I, p.135.
² SF, p.53.
His eldest daughter is a university student, and his eldest son, who has recently returned from America, is destined for a job in the Ministry of Education in Nanking. While the table is being prepared for the mahjong, the Gentry Wife takes the Eldest Daughter aside and tells her that she saw her with C in a gambling parlour to which she had gone to look for her husband. The Eldest Daughter begs the Gentry Wife not to tell her father, and after a brief conversation with C, the women proceed to the game, which lasts all day.

After a sumptuous dinner, the game continues that evening by electric light. The Eldest Son, having returned from an outing, watches the game for a while and then goes to his room. His father has already retired, and before long C also leaves, her place being taken by B. Soon the Gentry Wife herself leaves the game and goes out into the courtyard to admire the magnolia tree flowering in the moonlight. Drawn by the sound of voices from the Eldest Son's study, she is embarrassed to discover that a couple are making love in there. She is called back to the game, and shortly afterwards C returns to watch. When somebody complains of C's excessive use of perfume, the Gentry Wife suddenly realizes that it was C she had heard in the Eldest Son's study. By remarking on the beauty of the moonlight in the courtyard, she alarms C,
who withdraws troubled to the shadows at the back of the room.

The next section, "Something New" 一 黑反新的事情, shows how the Gentry Wife becomes involved in the relationship between C and the Eldest Son. The latter comes to see her husband the following morning, but since he is absent, he takes the opportunity to invite the Gentry Wife to come and play mahjong with him and C. In the car, the Gentry Wife tries to adopt the role of "aunt", dispensing good advice to the younger generation in accordance with her status, but she is uncomfortably aware that in fact her friend's son is little younger than she is herself. Meanwhile the young man, misunderstanding her embarrassed blush when the affair with C is obliquely referred to, and conscious of the warmth of her body as she sits next to him, has decided on a plan, and when they get out of the car he gives her hand a slight squeeze. C greets her affectionately, and the three of them go together to the Eldest Son's study, where the young couple finally prevail on the protesting Gentry Wife to accept an expensive gift, and to promise to go gambling with them that night.

At eight o'clock the three of them drive to the gambling-hall, where they first take some refreshments in a private room upstairs. C goes down alone to gamble,
while the Eldest Son praises the Gentry Wife's beauty and makes some tentative advances, which she rebuffs. C returns with her winnings, but since the Gentry Wife is still afraid of being recognized downstairs, she says that she will go down again by herself. The Gentry Wife begs her not to go, but she only laughs and leaves. When the Gentry Wife finally returns home, she is richer by four hundred dollars, her share of C's winnings, and for once she does not ask her husband where he has been (to his great relief). As they undress for bed, she tells him of the Eldest Son's morning visit, and her husband praises the young man's intelligence. The Gentry Wife smiles, but she is "thinking of something else".1

The fourth section, "Something Newer", sees the Gentry Wife going gambling with her two friends again about three days later. She herself gambles a little this time, and again C gives half her winnings to her. On Sunday, however, she is startled to learn from the Eldest Daughter that C has in fact lost a large amount of money recently, and C herself is later obliged to confess to losing "a little". (Presumably C had been pretending to win in order to have an excuse for bribing the Gentry Wife.) Shortly afterwards C and the

1. SF, p.70.
Gentry Wife go to a restaurant where the Eldest Son has been waiting for them in a private room. After a whispered conversation, he and C withdraw into the adjoining room while the Gentry Wife, left alone, contemplates her reflection in the mirror, recalling how C had praised her beauty and thinking with some distaste of her husband.

At last she goes to see what the others are doing, and is slightly startled to discover that they are kissing, with C sitting on her lover's lap. A little later C rejoins the Gentry Wife and shows her a booklet, apparently containing indecent pictures, of which she had spoken to her before. The two women look through the booklet, while the Eldest Son comes and stands quietly behind them. When she returns home that night, the Gentry Wife complains of a headache and asks her husband to sleep in the study.

The final section, "A Year Later", begins with the party to celebrate the Gentry Wife's fifth child's first month of life. (One gathers that the father of the new baby is in fact the Eldest Son.) C is the child's adoptive mother and is now a constant visitor to the house. News of her affair with the Eldest Son has just reached the ears of the Gentry Wife's husband, and when he learns one day that the young man is to be married, he smiles as he passes on the news to his wife.
He hints at the rumours and horrifies his wife by saying "it seems that our child's...". But when he continues "our child's adoptive mother", she is greatly relieved, and scolds him for "a shameless old reprobate".¹

Left alone, the Gentry Wife broods over the past and her own hypocrisy, and she weeps bitterly into the baby-clothes that she is making. Her husband overhears her and, feeling guilty, persuades a friend of hers to call and take her to the park, after which he stays virtuously at home. When she returns, his wife is surprised to find him still in his study, where he is kneeling and chanting before the Buddha-image, and her heart softens towards him. Later, when he is undressing for bed, a maid comes and announces that his wife wants him. Without knowing why, he finds himself feeling like a bridegroom again, for the first time in many years, and he hurries upstairs to her.

The next day C calls to tell the Gentry Wife of the Eldest Son's engagement, but while they are talking the baby begins to cry and the Gentry Wife has it brought to her. It stops crying then and gazes knowingly at C, who takes it and says loudly, half coaxing and half in anger:

¹ Ibid., pp.75-6.
"Little wretch, you know me! You're not allowed to cry! If you cry again your daddy will get rid of you! All the men in this world are scoundrels, and think only of deceiving women. But when you've grown up, you must be obedient and do as your mummy tells you!"

The Gentry Wife did not know why, but the child showed no sign of crying, and she had the nurse quickly take it away again.¹

The satire in this story is often trenchant and sometimes funny, as Shen lays bare the idleness and futility of the lives of his gentry, and the constant boredom which drives them to seek distraction in gambling, adultery and interminable games of mahjong. The luxury which they take for granted reminds one of the contrasting poverty of the slum-dwellers described in "Rottenness", but it is the hypocrisy of his characters which Shen singles out for special criticism. It can be seen in the general pretence of respectability, in the Gentry Wife's professed concern for the children whom she is too "busy" to see much of, or in her husband's explaining the all-too-visible result of his gluttony to his son by saying (recalling a story about Su Tung-p'o) that he has a "belly full of public affairs".² Religious hypocrisy in particular is constantly attacked, as can be seen in the Gentry

¹. Ibid., p.78. The last two sentences of C's speech occur only in SF.
2. Ibid., p.51.
Wife's husband's supposed visits to the Buddhist Society, which he uses merely as a cloak for his adultery\(^1\), in the dissolute Eldest Son's aggressive adherence to Christianity\(^2\) and the Bible which he always keeps by his bed,\(^3\) or in the affair which one of the Cripple's secondary wives is having with a Buddhist monk.\(^4\)

Clearly the paralysis of the Cripple is no less symbolic than that of Clifford Chatterley in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*,\(^5\) but despite his satirical intentions Shen does not treat his characters with a total lack of sympathy. Although they have the vices of their class, they still lack what a Communist critic calls "class character"\(^6\), for they remain living individuals in which virtues can coexist with faults, and they are still capable on occasion of feeling genuine shame or tenderness. Here as in most of his satirical stories, Shen's interest in the individual and his sympathy for all forms of "human life" prevent him from regarding his characters

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1. E.g. *ibid.*, p.69.
merely as embodied vices, and he treats the targets of his satire objectively and even with compassion. So he warns in a prefactory note to "Gentry Wife": "I have not created a woman at whom you may cast your stones; I have made for you upper-class people a mirror."¹

"Lung-chu" 龍珠 ² is a much slighter story, but requires some comment as the earliest available example of Shen's Miao stories, which form a distinctive if minor part of his work. Lung-chu is the son of a Miao tribal chieftain, and a paragon of physical and mental perfection. Indeed so handsome is he, and so skilled in composing the love-songs by which young Miao men and women woo each other, that he suffers from a painful loneliness, for while all women admire him extravagantly, none of them dares to vie with him in song or to aspire to win his heart for herself. So the years pass from his seventeenth to his twenty-first birthday without his finding a mate, and eventually he can no longer bear even to go hunting, for
everywhere there was singing, and everywhere in the mountain glens there were lovers sitting or sleeping side by side on makeshift beds of dry grass strewn with wildflowers.³

1. SF, p.50.
2. Written in Shanghai in 1929; published in Shen Ts'ung-wen's Second Collection and, with revisions, in Spring.
3. Spring, p.28.
One day one of his slaves, who is a dwarf and a skilled singer, comes to complain of having been defeated in song by a woman from another tribe who was bold enough to declare herself ready to challenge even Lung-chu. Lung-chu goes with his slave and dictates songs for him to sing to the unseen young woman, but she still scorns him and at last Lung-chu himself pours his heart out in a song of surpassing beauty. The woman is unable to reply and she flees without the two men catching a glimpse of her. That night Lung-chu dreams that she appears to him dressed in white, and that he carries her off to a hill cave.

The next morning, the dwarf discovers that she is one of the daughters of the chieftain of the nearby Yellow Ox Village, and Lung-chu hurries over there, followed by the dwarf. He comes upon his sweetheart washing vegetables alone at the well and recognizes her at once. The dwarf introduces himself and his master, takes her basket of vegetables, and goes off, leaving the young lovers alone. The story ends, in the later version only, with a reference to Lung-chu's subsequent betrothal and marriage to the chieftain's daughter.

"Lung-chu", like "Gentry Wife", is divided into a number of titled sections - in this case only three. It most closely resembles the much shorter "After the Rain",...
however, particularly in the lyrical freshness with which the peaceful countryside is described. Where it differs from "After the Rain", and from most of Shen's non-Miao stories, is in its air of exoticism and in the flatness and unreality of its characters. It may be that Shen is here retelling an actual Miao legend, but it is in any case clear that he is trying to create a world of which he has little first-hand experience or profound understanding. His style is often exaggerated, sometimes to the point of absurdity, and the characters are unconvincing - particularly Lung-chu himself, whose unlikely combination of the qualities of the lion and the lamb is no less unreal than an earlier hero's blending of tiger and lamb.

A more interesting essay in the Miao genre is the short novel The Shaman's Love. The young

1. His opening description of Lung-chu is justly ridiculed by Hsia, op.cit., p.198.
2. Ibid., p.21.
4. Published by Wen-li, Hong Kong 1961. The original date of publication is given in Schyns et al., op. cit., p.78 as 1929. References to Lung-chu throughout suggest that it was written not long after the story named after him. The Chinese wu seems to resemble the shaman of other cultures sufficiently closely for the word "shaman" to be used here. As Arthur Waley says: "Indeed the functions of the Chinese wu

(Continued on p.269)
shaman of the title, who is admired by all the Miao maidens for his physical beauty, and his servant Wu-yang are clearly modelled on Lung-chu and his dwarf. This is in fact made quite explicit, for Wu-yang is said to have studied under the dwarf and to have learnt and skill in song from him, while an old man calls the shaman a "second Lung-chu". Nevertheless, the greater length of The Shaman's Love involves a greater degree of realism, and the two central characters, unlike their models, become genuine human beings in the course of the story.

(4. Continued from p.268)

were so like those of Siberian and Tunguz shamans that it is convenient (as has indeed been done by Far Eastern and European writers) to use shaman as a translation of wu." (The Nine Songs, Allen and Unwin Ltd., London 1955, p.9.) There are significant differences however, for the wu does not go on the mystical journey of the spirit which characterizes shamans elsewhere, but instead becomes possessed by a god and acts as his medium. Thus Waley adds: "'Possession'...from the 2nd century AD onwards (and perhaps earlier)...was regarded in China as the typical form of shamanism.... It seems to figure little if at all in the shamanism of the Altai peoples and Mongols." (Op. cit., p.24.)

1. The Shaman's Love, p.5.
2. Ibid., pp.5, 34.
3. Ibid., p.87.
4. Ibid., p.25.
The action of the story takes place over three days, to each of which is allotted two chapters, one dealing with the events of the day-time and the other with the events of the night. There are thus six chapters in all. The setting is a small market town somewhere in the Miao territory of western Hunan and eastern Kweichow through which the shaman travels. When he arrives here, the shaman waits on the outskirts of the town till nightfall, in order to avoid the young women who are waiting to welcome him. He pretends that as a servant of the gods he has no right to bestow himself on this or that young woman, but in fact, while he is flattered by the women's adoration, he is also afraid of them, as his servant is scornfully aware.

That night, after being lodged in the headman's house, the shaman performs a long ceremony under the bright glare of many lamps, watched by an audience of nearly a thousand. In his second dance he impersonates the god, and many young women are permitted to come to him with a request, which is invariably to spend a night with him. One of them however, dressed in white, like the woman of Lung-chu's dream, kneels before him without

1. There is no suggestion in the story that the shaman is doing anything other than consciously acting his role as the god.
speaking, dazzling him with the beauty and eloquence of her eyes. He tells her to speak, but she only begins to weep, and then silently withdraws and disappears in the crowd.

The next day the shaman sends Wu-yang out in search of her, but later, to his great surprise, he himself encounters first a child who strikingly resembles her and then the young woman herself in the courtyard of the headman's house. He confesses his love to her, but she takes the child and leaves without a word. Shortly afterwards Wu-yang returns to tell his master that he has seen the young woman in white and found her home. The shaman accuses his indignant servant of lying and drunkenness, but when they are out hunting in the hills that afternoon he agrees to test Wu-yang's story by visiting the house in question that night.

They set out fairly late, and after running a gauntlet of songs by several amorous women, they arrive at the house, where Wu-yang crouches down under the window so that his master may climb on his back and peep in. It is indeed the woman in white, and the shaman, wondering whether there are perhaps two sisters, is uncertain what to do. At last Wu-yang, annoyed at his master's indecision, breaks into song himself. The woman, who had gone to bed, lights the lamp and looks out again, but only to
sigh and close the window once more. Then the shaman himself sings, but gets no further response, and the two men return home frustrated.

The fifth chapter begins with a long drunken conversation which Wu-yang has with the cook, from whom he is supposed to find out whether the headman has any daughters or granddaughters, and continues with an elaborate dream which he has when he falls asleep on the floor. He is awakened by the angry shaman, who orders him again to discover the information he wants. Wu-yang goes out and at last learns the truth from the old proprietress of a nearby shop. There are in fact two sisters, and both of them are dumb. The woman with the child is the headman's widowed daughter-in-law, while the woman in the house is the one who had knelt before the shaman at the ceremony. Wu-yang tells his master of this, but when he warns him that the young women's "tongues are wholly in their eyes", and the delighted shaman misunderstands him to mean only that their eyes are very expressive, Wu-yang has not the heart to be more explicit.

That night they set out through heavy rain at midnight, but when they reach their destination they find that the young woman is asleep although the lamp is still

1. Ibid., p.83.
burning. Wu-yang urges his master to climb in the window, and, after several abortive attempts which he cannot find the courage to carry through, the shaman finally succeeds in doing so. He approaches the bed, but as he begins to lift the mosquito net the wind blows the lamp out. He is startled, but has sufficient presence of mind to relight it.

When he had lit it; this young and inexperienced man, who would have been less afraid in the presence of a tiger, lifted the net again, his whole body trembling as he did so.

Then he received an even greater shock, for when he parted the mosquito net he found both sisters lying there side by side. The shaman wondered if what had happened that night was not all a dream...

Shen ends The Shaman's Love on this curiously inconclusive note, and it seems likely that he had in mind a sequel which he never got around to writing. The story is an odd mixture of the exotic romanticism which pervades the rest of his Miao pieces and the realism which characterizes his other country stories. The two main characters are, as has been said, modelled on Lung-chu and his dwarf, but this only makes their liveliness all the more striking by contrast with their predecessors. Although the shaman has Lung-chu's handsome appearance and bearing, he also has human weaknesses, such as

1. Ibid., p.91.
timidity and indecision, of which Lung-chu was entirely innocent, and by the end of the story he has become an almost pathetic and comical figure. His servant on the other hand bears no resemblance at all to the dwarf under whom he is supposed to have studied. He is a convincing character from the outset, and as the story progresses he seems to grow in importance, almost eclipsing his master towards the end.

The same mixture of romanticism and realism is also apparent in the style. There are a number of passages in the inflated style of "Lung-chu", as this for example:

The women of the Hua-p'a tribe seemed to have grown up to be celebrated beauties just so that all good men in the world might admire them. Even the most inferior of the most inferior of them at least had a pair of large eyes and long eyebrows that would make a perfectly willing slave or servant of the man who was once confronted with them.¹

But this style of writing does not dominate the story, and in fact becomes less common as it progresses.

Another factor which distinguishes The Shaman's Love from "Lung-chu" is the amount of intentional comedy which the former contains. This time the absurdity of his plot is frankly recognized by Shen at the outset, when he says of the shaman's fear of women that "of all the ludicrous things in the world there was surely none more

¹. Ibid., pp.1-2.
ludicrous than this". And later in the story he actually treats it in an appropriately comic-opera style, with such scenes as the furtive night journey of the masked shaman and his servant, when they are challenged in song at every step by the women they wish to avoid, or in the picture of the shaman gazing entranced through the window, oblivious of the sweating Wu-ming, on whose back he is standing. Comedy in fact lightens the whole story, in the form of both brief incidents and remarks, and sustained passages such as the drunken conversation of the fifth chapter.

Two other features of *The Shaman's Love* are worthy of note. One is the use of the dream as a literary device, and the other is the symbolic value given to stars in the story. Shen has already made use of dreams, either to reveal something of the dreamer's character or state of mind, as in "Hsiao-hsiao" and "Lung-chu", or to comment on the theme, as in "The Ox". In "San-san" (1931) and, less prominently, *Border Town* (1934) he will achieve both ends at once with this device. It is *The Shaman's Love*, however, which contains the longest and most elaborate example, in Wu-yang's drunken dream in the fifth

1. Ibid., p.13.
2. Ibid., pp.54-6.
It contains songs, bizarre reflections of earlier events and the preceding conversation with the cook, and other strange and occasionally sombre images which seem to express Wu-yang's disapproval of his master's attitude to women, as well as conveying something of his own more straightforward feelings about them. Although it thus provides some commentary on the story, it gives the impression, to a greater extent than the dreams in the other stories, of having been written largely for its own sake, for pleasure and as a test of skill.

Stars are frequently mentioned throughout the story, particularly at dramatic points, as when the first appearance of the woman in white is accompanied by a shooting star, or when both the hero and heroine gaze longingly at the stars and the shaman addresses his beloved in song as "my star". They seem to function here as symbols of beauty and inaccessibility, for "stars are inaccessible, and so a symbol for the unattainable loved one", as they

1. Ibid., pp.72-75.
2. Ibid., p.29.
3. Ibid., pp.56, 65.
4. Ibid., pp.61, 64.
5. Ibid., p.65. Other references to stars may be found on pp.11, 21, 71.
do also in "Middle Age", where Shen sees the stars themselves as a woman's eyes gazing at him "unwavering and unashamed" - the eyes of the companion that he longs for in his loneliness. A similar meaning, in a very different context, seems to have been implied by the shooting star which concluded the story "Rottenness". Elsewhere, however, shooting stars in particular seem to connote freedom: the freedom of Ting Ling and Hu Yeh-p'in when they were very much in love and enjoying a carefree life at Hsiang-shan in Peking, the freedom of the doctor in the story "The Doctor" after his escape from the cave in which he had been imprisoned, or the freedom of young Shen Ts'ung-wen himself sleeping under the open sky at night in Szechwan.

Finally, in order to further illustrate Shen's use of one of his favourite symbols, two other instances of different meanings being given to the stars might be mentioned here. One is from Hunan Journey, where the stars appear to Shen as symbols of an ageless serenity:

1. Tiger Cub, p.11.
2. Ting Ling I, p.64; but on p.66 Shen suggests that he also has the "beauty" of their life in mind.
3. Tiger Cub, p.144.
There was a large star in the sky which twinkled with a gentle light that gladdened the eyes, and I gazed long and steadily at it.

"This starlight is said to have taken three thousand years to reach the earth from outer space. It has passed through much: no wonder it is so tranquil. Am I capable of such tranquillity?..." 1

The second example is from one of his last works, and the symbolism, like the style, is more elaborate:

Late at night when all is still and the sky is a pellucid blue, the expanse of glittering starlight that constitutes the night scene is of an indescribable splendour and beauty. It is common knowledge that each beam of starlight at the time of its creation is actually far removed from all its fellows, estranged and solitary, existing always in isolation. However, although each of these stars has its distinctive mode of being, each one also seems to be bound by the attractive power of an unknowable will, which thus fashions them into the spectacle of the universe in all its complexity. Nor has it ever been otherwise with the human scene; and whether reviewing the past, contemplating the present or trying to fathom the future, whenever the Countryman (i.e. Shen), examining the pure sincerity and obscure faith which he has preserved in his own life and the feeble glimmer that he has created by applying these things in his work for twenty-five years, looks hesitantly all about him, he too seems able to see only a vast emptiness. But when he confronts this emptiness, he is in no way disconcerted or dispirited: on the contrary, it evokes in him a sense of awe. When he thinks of the prospect formed in the history of civilization by the wisdom and deep sincerity of mankind, with each luminary sparkling and shining, dazzling in its beauty, and of how the lives of each,

1. Hunan Journey, p.95.
while they lasted, escaped from actuality to fall into solitary isolation, then a reverent devotion akin to that of a religious believer wells up in his heart.¹

By the end of 1929 Shen had already mastered his art, written some of his best stories, and begun to develop most of the themes and styles that were to remain characteristic of his work. The stories remaining from the Shanghai period may therefore be grouped for convenience rather than arranged in chronological order - which is in any case often difficult to determine - and some at least of them may be dealt with more briefly than those already discussed.

"Dark Night" 黑夜² is one of Shen's few stories dealing directly with war. It tells how two soldiers make their way through enemy territory one pitch dark night, first by raft, and then, when the raft becomes hopelessly fouled, by land. They are eventually obliged to part company, the younger attempting to swim past the

¹. "Actuality", SP p.103.
2. Written in September 1930 but at Tsingtao, according to SF. The other two collections in which it appears, however, Ju-juei and Dark Night, give only the place, day and month, without the year. It is possible, therefore, that SF, which is not always reliable in such matters, is mistaken, and that the true year is 1931. The story is "written in memory of Cheng Tzu-ts'an 鄭子竒".
last obstacle, a heavily guarded bridge, while the older man, who has sprained an ankle, tries to get through on foot. The former is narrowly successful, but the sound of gunfire tells him that his comrade has fallen. The story is a simple one, but, within its limitations, is one of Shen's best. The characters of the two men, the relationship between them, and the atmosphere and physical details of their blind and dangerous journey are brought out with economy and skill.

"On a Mountain Path" 山道中 and "A Little Scene in Kweichow" 黔小景 belong together, for each is concerned with travellers who are brought face to face with death while passing on foot through wild country in south-western China. In the former story the travellers are three soldiers on their way home from Yunnan to Hunan. A little temple by a shady stream provides welcome relief from the heat, and they rest here briefly. They are soon joined by four merchants and two other soldiers, but the three companions, despite the protests of the youngest of them, press on without waiting for the other travellers, for their leader is

1. SSM Vol.21 No.12, Dec. 1930; it also appears in The New and the Old.
2. It appears in Tiger Cub (published Jan. 1932) but is itself undated.
anxious to reach shelter before nightfall. The country is sparsely populated, but at sunset they reach an inn in a small stronghold, where the local district magistrate also lives. The innkeeper turns out to be a fellow-Hunanese, and that night they fall asleep contentedly, to the sound of the magistrate reciting from Chuang-tzu. The next morning they learn that the four merchants had been waylaid and robbed at the temple, and that the two soldiers with them had been killed. The companions then resume their journey, reflecting uneasily on the twenty days' journey that still lies before them.

The preoccupation with death emerges even more clearly from "A Little Scene in Kweichow". This time the travellers are a couple of merchants, and again they find shelter at an inn in a deserted countryside. The story is of interest chiefly for the figure of the old innkeeper, who, like the old men of "Living"1 and the autobiographical "Night" 2 is so close to death that

2. Hsia, op. cit., pp.203-5 suggests a completely different interpretation of these old men. "Night" was written some time after "My Education" (pub.1929), which it mentions, and deals with an incident which took place when Shen was in Yushuwan. It is not discussed here, however, because it was available only in English translation in Chi-chen Wang's Contemporary Chinese Short Stories (Columbia University Press, NY 1944), where it appears under the title "Night March".
he is as if dead already, living only on empty memories. Although he usually goes to bed early, he sits up that night talking to the merchants, discussing relatives that he has not seen or thought of in years, and pretending, for reasons that he himself does not understand, that his son, who has recently died and lies buried in the garden, is still alive. Even after the others have gone to bed, he continues to sit alone by the fire, and in the morning they find him still sitting there, but he is dead. The merchants contribute some money towards his burial but are otherwise unmoved by the event, and although on the remainder of their journey they see many severed heads and corpses by the roadside, they remain more concerned with profits and expenses than with their own mortality or the sufferings of their fellow men.

Like the preceding two stories, the following four urban ones are comparatively slight pieces, but each has some point of interest. "The Pipe", the revised version of a story originally called "The Tale of a Comrade's Pipe", tells how "Comrade Wang Shih-chieh", a clerk in a Wuhan clothing and bedding factory with a fondness for

1. It appears undated in The New and the Old, and as "written in 1930" in SF.
2. SSM, Vol.20 No.12, Dec. 1929.
classical poetry and a connoisseur's passion for fine pipes and tobacco pouches which he cannot afford to buy, fears that a searching interview with the factory's chief inspector presages his dismissal, but learns the next day that he is in fact to be promoted. All his fears and resentments then vanish, together with his plans for going to Peking to find a new job, and the following day he appears at work with a new pipe and tobacco pouch like those that he used to admire in the window of the foreign goods shop on his way home from work. Shen seems to have a personal interest in pipes, for they appear often in his stories. Sometimes they reflect the smoker's character, as with the ivory pipe of the commander at Lungtan¹, or with the pipes of the husband in "The Husband" or Wang here, which represent the simplicity and humility of the heroes, in contrast to the urban sophistication of the wife's cigarette² or the ostentation of the section head's cigar.³

"Blood" ⁴ illustrates Shen's impatience with the stagnation which the loss of revolutionary fervour and idealism seemed to him to have brought about in China.

1. Autobiography, p.130.
an attitude which rarely finds such open expression in his stories, although there are traces of it in some of his essays and letters. The unnamed narrator, who perhaps represents Shen himself, goes to a military hospital to visit a friend who is recovering from three months of imprisonment and harsh interrogation inflicted on him for political reasons. As he waits on a bench inside the hospital and watches the busy young nurses, he recalls the savage battle between rival armies which had taken place here six months ago, and feels grateful that such things are now past, and that "all the bloodshed and fear are over". Hearing sounds of a violent quarrel from the registration desk, however, he returns there to find the clerk and the young soldier he had seen arguing before locked in combat over the counter. The soldier's fist is bleeding, and the clerk is spitting blood.

When he goes upstairs to see his friend, he finds him alarmingly thin and weak. They can talk little because the nurse is clearly eavesdropping, and as he returns home the narrator thinks of his friend's suffering and the "trifling and almost farcical bloodshed" he had witnessed. He is depressed by the contrast between the brave hopes of the past and the ugly or vapid realities

1. Ibid., p.370.
2. Ibid., p.372.
of the present, and he feels that the revolutionary movement in China has reached a stage of arrested development. Although he is often accused of being too unstable and radical in his thinking, he cannot bring himself to seek excuses for not "straggling" with the rest of the country. A phrase in a book reminds him of how he had seen revolutionary heroism parodied in the absurd quarrel in the hospital:

As I read I saw: "It is blood only if it spurts from the veins". The blood that I had seen in the hospital that day still seemed to be before my eyes, and I felt that this Lu Hsün was also merely one of the fools, for if he had seen more he would never have said such a foolish thing.²

This thoughtful and deeply-felt little story is not among Shen's major works, but it is perhaps a useful reminder that in addition to the countryman's conservatism which angered his left-wing critics, Shen was also capable of a romantic idealism which led him to friendships and beliefs that made him no less suspect in the eyes of many on the right of the political spectrum.

In speaking of the general unhealthiness of city life, Shen claims that while it tends to dull the senses,

1. Lò-wǔ, which, ironically enough, is how Shen had seen himself in the autobiographical piece of that title.
2. Ibid.
it also produces a morbidly heightened awareness of sexual desire,¹ and this would seem to be the theme of the next two urban stories. In "Ripples" ², Ch'i-sheng , a Shanghai taxation clerk in his late twenties, has fled the boredom of office routine to seek what he hopes will be a new life at West Lake in Hangchow. He finds himself still bored and unhappy, however, and he is glad when he meets Mrs. Wang, who is related to a friend and colleague of his, and her two young sons. A famous woman when she was younger, Mrs. Wang is now about forty years old but still very handsome, and Ch'i-sheng finds himself strongly attracted to her. He visits her several times, but although she also seems attracted to him, and although he is inclined and finally, as his sexual desires increase and erotic images begin to haunt his mind, determined to seduce her, her calm self-possession always defeats him, and their long conversations remain on a polite and respectable level. At last he returns to Shanghai with her and her sons, and settles down to his job again, resigned now to his lot as a clerk, despite a faint uneasiness which still lingers, for the spring, which appeared at the beginning of the story as "enticing as a wanton nun" ,³ is not yet over.

2. SSM Vol.21 No.6, June 1930.
3. Ibid., p.939.
So the waves of passion which Ch'i-sheng had hoped might sweep him into a new life turn out to be only ripples, and, less fortunate than Mu-chūn in "Enticement and Rebuff", but like Mr. X in "Learned People", his own inertia prevents him from acting to satisfy his desires. On the other hand, the heroine of "A Slight Coolness" 簹寒, whose feelings resemble those of Mu-chūn's sweetheart to some extent, is the victim of fantasies of passion and violence bred in her by her colourless urban environment. An attractive young teacher in a middle school, she is bored and contemptuous of her colleagues, especially the polite young men who seek to court her, and she dreams of strong men and soldiers in a "wicked" countryside: "Did soldiers really live by killing and burning? Were soldiers wickeder than people brought up in the city?" Her own life appears to her as useless as the discarded melon rinds which she sees in the street as she flees the school one autumn day.

In the park she encounters an ardent but tongue-tied admirer - one of the teachers from her school. He longs to confess his love, but his timidity and her coolness and eventual contempt defeat him and he runs away.

1. SSM Vol.21 No.9, Sep.1930; The New and the Old.
2. The New and the Old, p.145.
Her own desires had been previously stirred by the sight of a tall soldier with a heavy tread and "the air of a countryman":

She thought: This is a man who could kill people. . . . He passed before her. The weight of his every step seemed to sink into her heart. 1

Soon it is dusk, and when she sees the big soldier sitting admiring the lotuses, she boldly goes and sits next to him. She encourages him to put his arm round her waist and allows him to kiss her hands, but she will tell him nothing of herself. When they part he begs her to come again the next day, and she leaves well pleased with herself. It is clear, however, that even the soldier, now that he has become part of her real, everyday world, cannot measure up to the imaginary lovers of her fantasies, and that at bottom she is only using him to bolster her self-esteem, despising him no less than the other teachers. So the story ends:

She boarded the tram. The fresh autumn breeze blew on her face, and she smiled: "Men are all such stupid beasts." 2

This sort of essay in abnormal psychology is unusual for Shen, but "The Doctor" 3 also deals with an

1. Ibid., p. 146.
2. Ibid., p. 155.
3. Written in April 1931, shortly before Shen left Shanghai, it appears in SSM Vol. 22 No. 8, Aug. 1931, and in Tiger Cub. It should not be confused with the story of the same name based on a Buddhist tale and written a year or so later.
obsession, although of a different kind. It relates how a doctor who had been missing and presumed dead arrives back home just as his funeral is being celebrated, his property having already been divided up between the local gentry and the Christian Church to which he belonged. He then tells his surprised and not altogether pleased guests how an unknown young man had accosted him and forced him to hurry up into the hills at such a pace that he fainted (for he was already a little tipsy from drinking wine). He awoke to find himself locked in a cave with the corpse of a beautiful young woman which the stranger informed him that he had disinterred. The young man insisted that the doctor stay for seven days, by which time he expected the corpse to have revived.\(^1\)

The doctor, fearful of what might happen to him when the seven days had elapsed with no change in the corpse, pleaded with the supposed madman, but the only response was a smile. Finally, on the sixth day the desperate doctor tried to reach his captor's mind by appealing to (Christian) religious considerations, apparently with some success. He was beginning to hope that

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1. Cp. "Three Men and a Woman", The New and the Old, pp.72-3: "For he had heard that someone who had died by swallowing gold could be brought back to life if only she were embraced by a man before seven days had passed."
he would be freed after all when the young man seized him and struck him on the head. He awoke later that night to find himself in the open air, and he returned to town, where everybody agreed that he had seen a ghost. "The Doctor" could in fact be taken for a ghost story, although it is inspired by an actual incident which had much impressed Shen at Yūshuwan.¹ It is not a particularly good story, but it is interesting to compare it with the later and much superior treatment of the same incident in "Three Men and a Woman", for the two stories taken together illustrate the completely different ways in which Shen could work his original material.

"The New and the Old" 新與舊 ² is a better story. An old soldier, Yang Chin-piao 楊金標, was a skilled executioner during the last years of the Ch'ing dynasty, but the Republic brought new methods of execution, the firing-squad replaced decapitation, and people forgot the old ways - including the ritual that used to follow the execution, which required the executioner to "hide" beneath the altar in the temple of the guardian god of the town, from whence he would subsequently emerge to be "pardoned" and symbolically beaten before receiving his payment. Now Yang is sixty years old and his glorious

¹. Above, pp.68-9.
². Dated Peking 1930, it appears in The New and the Old and SF.
past is forgotten, but his old-fashioned weapons still
delight the pupils of the nearby school - just as Master
T'eng's had delighted Shen in his childhood\(^1\) - and the
young couple who run the school sometimes bring the child-
ren to watch Yang demonstrate some military exercise.

One day Yang is ordered to take his old sword and
go to the execution ground. As if in a dream, he obeys
and there decapitates two prisoners whose faces he does
not see. (They are the couple who run the school, and
like the son in "The Vegetable Garden" they are Communists.)
Afterwards he runs as of old to the temple and "hides",
but the women gathered there, failing to remember the old
custom, see him only as a madman with a bloody knife and
run shrieking into the street. Soldiers soon arrive to
shoot the "madman", but Yang surrenders his knife on
command and then the mob which has gathered outside
surges in, beats Yang and ties him to a pillar, whereupon
an acquaintance throws a bucketful of dirty water over
him. Eventually the furious Yang is questioned, the
mistake is cleared up, and it emerges that the decapita-
tion had been specially ordered so that the heads of the
victims could be displayed as a warning.

\(^1\) Above, p.56.
The story is of course concerned with the contrast between the old and new dispensations in China, and it is clear that the colour and ceremonial courtesy of the former appeal more to Shen than the latter's harsh impersonality. Yang himself is a living symbol of the old ways, still appreciated only by the children and the young couple whom he is ironically obliged to execute at the behest of the new order. Like "Husband and Wife", the story also suggests the abhorrence with which Shen regarded mobs. When the soldier asks Yang whether he has seen a devil, Yang retorts: "You yourselves are a pack of devils. Are there any other devils? I ask you!..."¹ And the story concludes by observing that after Yang's death "the joke about 'the last executioner'" became known to everyone in the district, and it was said that old Yang had "died when he saw devils in the daytime".²

The next four stories all appeared in Shen Ts'ung-wen's Second Collection 沈從文子集, which was published in May 1931. "Springtime" 春天 seems to be semi-autobiographical, for the protagonist resembles Shen in many ways. Like Shen, he is a writer and teacher of literature who is tired of his job,³ his room is in a

¹. SF p.150.
². Ibid.
constant state of disorder,¹ he sends money to his needy friends², he feels that he has a special affection for women and special insight into their characters³, he is given to lying on his bed and brooding⁴, and he suffers from nose-bleeding.⁵ The peaceful springtime of the title is contrasted with the unnamed hero's inner torment, and the story describes his dissatisfaction with his present circumstances at the university, his reactions to the letters and unwelcome visitors he receives, his violent rages, his illness and convalescence, and his final decision to resign and seek for freedom and peace of mind in some other place.

How far the events related are those of Shen's own life is doubtful, but his other writings show that he was often tired, lonely and irascible during this period, and he did eventually leave a teaching job to seek a more peaceful life in Peking. Certainly the story seems to reflect many of his own current annoyances, sometimes amusingly, as in the case of the aspiring young writer who persists in staying in the room to talk, even when his ailing and unwilling host feigns sleep:

1. Above, p.191.
5. Above, pp.194, 196.
The visitor was looking through a page of manuscript, and when he had read it he could not help bursting out again: "Mr. X, you mustn't be negative! You should have courage! You ought to be bold and fearless, to make war on suffering and old habits: that's what we need...."

He remained silent, but he thought to himself: "What are you saying? If I had courage I would have broken your head long ago. If I were bold and fearless, I would have kicked you downstairs...."1

"Construction", like "Rottenness", is a long story in Shen's Dickensian style, like "Rottenness" but this time with a well-defined plot. The background to the story is the large construction project which gives it its title. At the foot of a hill outside the town a Christian university is being built with "money and bitter toil". Winter has reduced the number of workmen employed there from over a thousand to three hundred. Not unlike the Court of Chancery in Bleak House, it is the source of a corruption which pervades the whole story. Here once again are images of dirt and squalor like those which dominated "Rottenness", as in the recurring references to urination, the vivid and frequent evocation of wetness, dirt and cold, and the unhealthy and neglected children.

The plot itself, which has an uncharacteristically melodramatic quality no doubt also derived from Dickens, is played out on the waterfront. Shen's waterfronts are

1. Shen Ts'ung-wen's Second Collection, pp.241-2.
usually colourful and interesting places, but this one, although it is actually described with the same phrases that he was later to use in his Autobiography, appears as a dull and shabby place. In a seedy but prosperous teahouse a young soldier and a workman from the construction project overhear two men arranging the sale of some guns for the following night, and decide to rob them. The plan misfires, but in the course of the night's events the workman is accosted by a tipsy and officious American missionary and unintentionally kills him in a fit of rage. The next night the soldier persuades the workman, who is a simple countryman, to visit one of the riverboat prostitutes, but some chance remarks alarm him and he flees.

A few days later the body of the missionary is discovered in the river and causes an international disturbance until, after two months' fruitless investigation, the Chinese government announces that it is a Communist plot to "disrupt Sino-American relations" and offers to contribute to the financing of the future university. So the affair is settled, and although the workman still has unpleasant dreams, in time even these fade and he forgets

all about the incident. The ending is ironical:

In the fourth month of the second year, when the Church selected a piece of ground on the construction site on which to erect a pavilion commemorating the pastor, ten men were assigned to dig the foundations and level the ground, and the countryman was among them. Because he worked with especial diligence he received a small bonus. He took the money to the boat he had gone to that day with the soldier, and spent the night with the woman with plump buttocks and big legs....

Everyone who saw this fellow felt that he was a good workman, for he was young and strong, and not lazy.¹

The remaining two stories in Shen Ts'ung-wen's Second Collection are among his most impressive, and "The Husband" 丈夫² is said to have been a favourite with Shen himself³ - not surprisingly perhaps, for it is one of his finest illustrations of the superiority of gentle country simplicity over urban sophistication. It is set on a waterfront along which are moored the boats of river prostitutes. Many of these women are young wives who

¹. Ibid., p.197.
². It appears in Shen Ts'ung-wen's Second Collection, A-chin, SF, Hsiao-hsiao, and SSM Vol.21 No.4, 10th. April 1930. The first and last of these give the place and date of composition as "the 13th. of April at Woosung". SF and Hsiao-hsiao add the year 1930, but this would seem to conflict with the date of publication in SSM.
send the money that they earn back to their husbands in the country - an arrangement which is profitable for the husbands but corrupting for the wives:

They come from the countryside, from families that plant fields and dig gardens, they leave the villages, stone mills, calves, and their young and sturdy husbands, and with a friend from the same district, they come to ply their trade on these boats. In plying their trade, they gradually become city people, growing remote from the villages, and learning evil ways that are only necessary in the city - and then these women are ruined.¹

When the young husband of the title comes to see his wife, "as if visiting a distant relative", he is at once struck by her city clothes and manners. When he takes out his pipe, she startles him by promptly replacing it with a cigarette. She has not lost all of her "simple village purity"² however, and puts her husband at ease by asking about "our two pigs", but they are interrupted by the noisy arrival of a drunken customer. The startled husband, in whose eyes the newcomer has the same air of importance as village elders and country gentry, hides in the after-hold and falls asleep there, only waking at midnight when his apologetic wife comes to bring him some sugar-candy.

¹. SF p. 79.
². Ibid., p. 80: the "simplicity" and "purity" are not mentioned in the first version of the story.
The next day the benevolent but slightly sinister figure of the water-bailiff appears. This man, who knows the inhabitants of all the boats well and exercises complete authority over them, is investigating some reported cases of petty theft. At first the husband, who has been left alone to mind the boat, is overawed by his important visitor, but the bailiff's willingness to hear about his family affairs and his life in the country soon puts him at his ease, and he chatters on cheerfully for a long while. At last the bailiff leaves, saying that he will be back that night and that the wife is to receive no customers. By noon the husband is still alone and growing hungry. His happy pride in his new-found friend, whom he takes for one of his wife's customers, has now given way to resentment and jealousy. When he is unable to light a fire with the damp wood, he flings it angrily into the water, only to see others pick it up and make use of it. Overcome with shame he decides to return home at once.

On the way, however, he meets his wife, the maid and the old pander-woman returning with a two-stringed fiddle as a present for him, so his good humour is restored, and he returns to the boat with them. Here they have lunch and afterwards they sing while the husband plays his fiddle. They are still singing in the evening when two
drunken soldiers come blustering aboard, demanding music, but the terrified husband has hidden in the after-hold again, and the wife has to restore peace by coaxing the soldiers to bed with her. After they have gone again, everybody goes to sleep, only to be wakened at midnight by the bailiff and a policeman. The men do not stay long, but the policeman leaves word that he will return to see the wife again for a "close examination" later. The husband does not understand this remark, but he is unhappy and wants to be alone with his wife.

The next morning the husband is determined to leave, despite his worried wife's pleas. Still thinking in terms of city values, she presses some of the money the soldiers had given her into his hand. When he still says nothing, she gives him some more money, but then he flings the notes to the ground, covers his face with his "big rough hands", and weeps like a child. This is the climax of the story, and now, in a symbolic reversal of roles, it is the turn of the pander-woman and the maid to hide in the after-hold, where the latter marvels that "such a big man should cry". When the bailiff comes a little later to invite the others out, he learns that husband and wife have already returned together to the country.

1. Ibid., p. 97.
All the characters in this story are particularly well drawn, and life on the boats is vividly described, with close attention to detail. The gradual transformation which the presence of the husband brings about in the wife's feelings, from her first inquiry about the pigs to her final decision to return home, is also finely done. A point of special interest in the story is the way in which Shen imparts a symbolic or quasi-symbolic value to certain objects. For example, the bailiff's tall, polished pigskin boots, which are the first things that the husband sees on emerging from the hold, seem to make him at once the virtual embodiment of authority. And whatever the exact significance of the chestnuts which the husband had picked from the tree behind his house to bring as a gift for his wife, the way in which the bailiff helps himself to them and later stuffs them into the policeman's pocket gives them a clearly symbolic function. Even the firewood which lights for others but not for the husband might be taken to represent the whole urban environment with which the husband is so ill-equipped to cope.

1. Ibid., p.84.
2. Ibid., pp.85-6.
3. Ibid., p.96.
Perhaps the most striking object in this connection is the little sickle at home which the husband had thought he had lost. He had blamed his wife for it, he tells the bailiff, and she wept, but now he has found it again and knows that his wife is not at fault. This sickle, the virtues of which he cannot praise too highly, seems to stand for the bond between husband and wife, and for the virtues of country life in general. Hence it is described as "a sickle such as the bailiff would never dream of", and the bailiff, though he appears politely interested, obviously fails to understand its significance:

"Don't you use it to cut grass?"
"Well! Goodness me, it's more useful than that you know. It's such a clever sickle - why speak of cutting grass? It can be used to peel a potato, whistle a flute - things like that. It's very small, worth three hundred cash, and a wonderful steel (for striking fire). We should all have a knife like that that we can keep by us, don't you understand?"

The water-bailiff said: "Yes I understand. We should all have one. I see what you mean."

He thought the water-bailiff really did understand, and so he went on talking.2

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1. Another simple countryman, Kuei-sheng, in the story of that name (1937), also has a useful sickle: SF pp.383-4. Like the husband here, he also has a pipe, which he lights with a steel: SF p.390.

2. SF p.87.
The other story, "The Lamp" seems, like "Springtime", to be semi-autobiographical in character. The narrator, like Shen, is a writer of fiction who has also been living and teaching in Shanghai for a couple of years, and who also served in the army when young, where he delighted in eating dogmeat and singing folksongs with his young companions. What is more, the careers of the narrator's father and brothers are identical with those of Shen's own father and brothers. On the other hand the story itself is fiction, only a fabrication of the narrator's, according to the epilogue, made up to satisfy the curiosity of a young woman friend. A brief prologue introduces the story:

1. Written on "the 24th. of May at Woosung", it appears in Shen Ts'ung-wen's Second Collection, Dark Night, SF and Spring Lamp, Wen-li, Hong Kong 1960. In the last volume it is accompanied by a note which explains that it was written because of a dream and published in the Crescent Monthly in 1930.
2. SF p.130.
3. Ibid., pp.120, 123-4.
4. Ibid., p.125. The incongruous disapproval of such songs as unrevolutionary and of the young soldiers as oppressors of the people which is put into the old soldier's mouth at this point is found only in SF. For his original reply see Spring Lamp, p.26.
6. Ibid., p.140.
There was a woman dressed in blue who often came to his place, and she saw on his table an old-fashioned oil-lamp, polished all over to a gleaming brightness. And because she wanted to know why this lamp was so valued by her host, he told her a story about it.

This story concerns a fifty-year old ex-soldier who had served under the narrator's father, and had now found his way to the narrator in Shanghai, offering to live with him and be his cook. Because of frequent electricity failure, he bought the old lamp one evening and put it on his master's table. Soon he began to take an interest in his master's doings. He understood little of his present job, but had great hopes for his future. He grew particularly anxious that his master should marry, and when a young woman who was a frequent visitor called to tell the narrator that she and her sweetheart were going to Peking to get married, the old soldier only caught the word "married" and went out to celebrate. When he returned he was drunk, and he finally burst into tears of sheer joy, only to suffer a correspondingly bitter disappointment when he learnt the truth. After this he became increasingly moody, and when he requested some money for a holiday in Nanking his master let him go. He did not return, but the narrator is sure that he is still alive somewhere, and if he lights the old lamp in the evenings he seems to see him still standing before him.

1. Ibid., p.120.
The young woman is deeply moved by this tale and begs the narrator to light the old lamp. She fears that the old soldier is dead, but the narrator points out that he is now living in her heart. Another evening she arrives dressed like the woman in the story, to the delight of her host. She asks for the lamp to be lit, but when he explains that he will have to get it from the maid, she begins to suspect that the whole story is untrue. The narrator is unrepentant, however, for he sees nothing wrong in a lie if it is "more beautiful than the truth".\(^1\) The woman is still indignant, but he mollifies her by protesting his good intentions and promising that he will go with her to Soochow and Nanking next week, and that they will see if they can find some news of the old soldier's whereabouts.

Shen's chief concern in this story is with the character of the old soldier:

> By what method could I capture the simplicity and beauty of this man's soul and set it down on paper? As I gazed at his face and listened to his voice I was aware of the banality of the lives of others that I had written about in the past.\(^2\)

The cook appears to the narrator as a bafflingly rich and many-sided figure, not so much for what he is in himself -

\(^1\) Ibid., p.140.
\(^2\) Ibid., p.126.
for his character is "simple" - but because of what he represents: a whole world of values which is also symbolized by the lamp with which the old soldier is identified.

As with the other old soldier in "The New and the Old", what is indicated here is essentially the world of the past. It may be the narrator's (and Shen's) past, as when the two men discuss their former life in the army \(^1\) or the narrator's family, \(^2\) for "he never wearied of talking about my family". \(^3\) Or again, it may be the past of China itself:

> Watching the old soldier's every movement, I seemed to see the sincerity of all those unknown Chinese friends, how sincere they were and at the same time how honest. It was as if the peaceful soul of this ancient far-eastern people had been carried away by time and set down in this turbulent modern world to which it was so utterly ill-suited. \(^4\)

Or the old soldier and the lamp may simply stand for the past in a nostalgic and more general sense:

> As we talked of these things I succumbed to the enchantment of the atmosphere and the voices. I was intoxicated with an ancient world, and deeply moved. \(^5\)

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1. Ibid., pp.124-5.
2. Ibid., pp.129-30.
3. Ibid., p.121.
4. Ibid., p.126. The version in Spring Lamp, p.28, differs in several ways.
5. SF, p.125.
Again, they may represent the country, where the values of the past are more faithfully preserved than in the cities:

"The good (songs) are all gone. Good people and good customs have all been carried away by a strange fate. It's just like this lamp. In former years when I stayed with your father in the country, all the lamps were like this one." 1

When the soldier himself has gone, the lamp takes his place, and when the narrator wishes to immerse himself in the world of the past,

I switch off the electric light and light this lamp. Everything in my room then loses its original aspect, and in the lamplight I always seem to see the red face of the old soldier, still wearing his army uniform: an old-fashioned man, an old family servant from the eighteenth century.2

Thus the world which the soldier and the lamp represent is remote both in time and space from the narrator's present urban surroundings:

To gaze at the clear brightness of the transparent lampglass, at the faint yellow light that it shed, and at the soldier standing before me with his old-fashioned air, always recalled to my mind the old temples in which the battalions of men and horses were stationed, and the inns in little villages, and I would dream many dreams. I have known these things too well, for the entanglements of city life are also all too remote from such worlds.3

1. SF, p.125.
2. Ibid., p.138.
3. Ibid., p.123.
It is here then that the poignancy of the story lies in the fact that "our world and his were two different things". This becomes clear to the old soldier himself when his dreams of a prosperous future for his master, according to his own old-fashioned notions, are so rudely dispelled. His disillusionment is then complete, and he soon vanishes from his master's life. Yet as a "beautiful lie", the narrator suggests, he can still live in the hearts of those who appreciate beauty. So the vanished past may be preserved in a work of art, as Shen also points out elsewhere:

He is by no means dead: like many other people he lives still. He still carries out his duties as a warrant officer stationed in an old temple, and early in the morning he goes with the company cook to the market town to buy vegetables, to the familiar riceshop to chat, and then to the river to buy firewood and watch the merchant boats come in to shore. When night falls, he sits on an ammunition box and reckons the day's provisions-accounts with the platoon and section leaders by the light of a "Man T'ang Hung" lamp, noting down the amounts on coarse paper and swearing mightily over small mistakes in the figures. Going to sleep on the hard boards of his high bed, he wraps himself up completely in the cotton-padded coverlet, and when he dreams it is surely of drinking wine with the tally officer, or of going to the countryside to catch bandits and eating steamed goose in the homes of the local gentry. This

1. Ibid., p.130.
3. Just as Shen himself had done: Autobiography, p.68.
man should go on living in the world like this forever, and he can at least survive in China for another twenty years. So even though no further letters came from him to ask after me, I believe that he is still living in this world.¹

It is appropriate to mention one last, undated story at this point, for it contains a reference to "The Lamp". Called "The Visitor" ², it describes an incident which occurred while Shen ³ was living in Shanghai. One day, just as Shen had enthusiastically begun to write what seems to be a first draft of "The Importance of Water to My Works", ⁴ an obviously well-to-do young man called to see him, bearing a copy of "The Lamp". Failing to recognize in the shabby figure that confronted him the "great writer" whom he had come from Peking to see before leaving for America, the visitor mistook Shen for a servant, and Shen, out of embarrassment or a desire to get rid of the young man, impulsively accepted the role that had been assigned to him.

1. SF, p.138.
2. First published in the Shun Pao Monthly 申報月刊, it appears in Eight Coursers.
3. The narrator is referred to only as "Mr. Chia" 甲先生, which might be taken as equivalent "Mr. A", but is presumably an allusion to Chia-ch'en 甲辰, one of Shen's pen-names.
4. Old Letters Preserved, pp.131-4; Eight Coursers, p.82.
While he waited for Shen to return, the visitor asked the supposed servant about his "master", read the few sentences that Shen had just written about his "education" by water, and at last, tiring of the seeming stupidity of the embarrassed "servant", decided to leave a calling card and go. After tearing up the first two cards, he left one bearing the words: "You were educated by water, I by fire". While Shen was reading this, however, the visitor unexpectedly returned and replaced the card by another giving only his name and title. This time he did not return, but Shen was now too depressed to continue his essay, and the story concludes with him wondering sadly what became of his visitor, who "should have gained his doctorate in America by now", and by what sort of fire he had been educated.

So Shen's years in Shanghai do not seem to have been happy ones, judging from his autobiographical writings, but as far as his creative work was concerned they were prolific and successful, and when he returned to Peking in 1931 it was as an established writer with a considerable body of admirable work already behind him.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE THIRD STAGE: A "LONG AND LONELY JOURNEY"\(^1\)

A. Peking and Tsingtao (1931-1933)

Shen had found Shanghai to be an uncongenial environment. Distressed by the general tenor of life there, and plagued as ever by constant noise,\(^2\) he had become nervous and irascible.\(^3\) He had also lost one of his closest friends, for Hu Yeh-p'in, together with some other young Communist writers, was arrested on January the 17th, 1931 and executed on February the 7th.\(^4\)

The following month Shen and Ting Ling had gone to see the latter's aging mother in Hunan. This was Shen's first visit to his native province since his departure from it many years before, but it was not a pleasant one, for he and Ting Ling had felt obliged to conceal the news of Hu's death from the old woman, in order to avoid upsetting

\(^1\) "Actuality", p.92.
\(^2\) "Middle Age", Tiger Cub p.4. This autobiographical piece, which was written in Peking in June 1931 and revised four months later in Tsingtao, appears only in Tiger Cub.
\(^3\) Ibid., pp.1-2.
\(^4\) Shen's account of his and Ting Ling's reactions to Hu's arrest, and of their efforts to visit him in jail and to have him freed, may be found in Ting Ling II, pp.43-106.
her. In April Shen had left his job at Wuhan University\textsuperscript{1},
and on the 16th. of May, after receiving an encouraging
letter from Hsü Chih-mo, he set off for Peking,\textsuperscript{2} where a
suitably quiet and secluded dwelling-place had already
been found for him\textsuperscript{3} in grounds attached to Yenching
University.\textsuperscript{4}

Shen generally speaks of Peking with affection,
and on this occasion he seems to have felt a sense of
freedom there which came as a relief after the hectic
bustle of Shanghai:

Peiping's north wind and sunshine were perhaps
better able than the commerce and politics of
Shanghai and Nanking to provide me with the
impulse and encouragement to scale a new peak,
to draw closer to nature, and to become more
familiar with human life.\textsuperscript{5}

Nevertheless, it did not take Shen long to find reason
for dissatisfaction with his new surroundings. At first
he was perfectly happy. The pavilion in which he lived
alone was set in large, quiet grounds which were con­
veniently close to the university. At sunset, he could
sit on the verandah and look out over paddy-fields and
rippling reeds, admiring the swallows and water birds

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1} Ibid., p.135.
  \item \textsuperscript{2} Ibid., p.137.
  \item \textsuperscript{3} "Middle Age", p.1.
  \item \textsuperscript{4} Ting Ling II, p.145.
  \item \textsuperscript{5} "Actuality", p.92.
\end{itemize}
and listening to the frogs. During the daytime, as the weather got warmer, he could even take his table and chair, his pot of tea and his writing equipment out of doors, and work peacefully in the open air. In this way he got a great deal of writing done.

Soon, however, he learnt that the pavilion was a favourite haunt of young lovers, and several times he returned home to find them sitting, kissing or even weeping on his verandah. Then he would be obliged to hide in the nearby pine grove till he thought they had gone. At other times, if he had forgotten to put his table inside when he went out, he would return to discover used teacups and an empty pot. Even when he was at home, groups of young women would come and talk on his verandah, unaware that the pavilion was occupied. All this afflicted him with a sense of loneliness and a longing for feminine companionship. Lying on his bed, he would recall a friend's fiancée's words to him, that he was "a man who will always be lonely" words, he felt which "go straight to the mark". Like the protagonist of "Springtime", he began to feel that he was past the prime of life, and he speaks of his "middle-aged, enfeebled heart" which ignores

2. Ibid., p.9. In "Tiger Cub" also he complains of being disliked by women: Tiger Cub, p.78.
the actual life before it to become preoccupied with fantasies. 1

So, after groups of young women had just departed, he would often walk up and down outside, carrying on an imaginary conversation with the companion that he longed for. Then he would sit down, still imagining her by his side, and gaze at the dusk in silence till his eyes filled with tears. One evening a young couple had been talking and kissing on his verandah while he lay inside on his bed, and the following morning the caretaker showed Shen a silk handkerchief. Shen promptly took possession of it, pretending that it was his. Later, the friend who had found the pavilion for Shen came to visit him, and as they gazed out over the reeds Shen asked him whether many students would be going home for the June vacation. His friend was not listening, however, and only observed that the loud calls must be those of a bird separated from its mate.

I said: "I asked about people, not birds." My friend still failed to understand, and he said: "People are different of course. People never make such calls, because they're much more advanced than birds." 2

Shen frowned at this comparison, and when his friend left, went to lie unhappily on his bed again. When a letter

1. "Middle Age", p.9.
2. Ibid., p.18.
came from Shanghai to ask whether he had found Peking an improvement, he replied that he would like to return to Shanghai.

In fact Shen did return briefly to Shanghai in the following year (1932) to "see some friends." He particularly wanted to visit Ting Ling, with whom his young sister Shen Yüen-meng was living at the time, although she joined Shen in the north shortly thereafter. He did not remain in Shanghai, however, but spent the next "three years travelling to and fro between Chin-chou in the north-east, Wuhan and Tsingtao."4

One of the results of his travels was his marriage, which apparently took place in 1932 or 1933. In the summer of that year he went to Soochow - the native place of his

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1. Ting Ling II, p.143.
2. For this sister, cp. above, p.181 n.2. She seems to have had some literary ambitions herself, and apparently wrote an essay about Shen called "Shen Ts'ung-wen - My Second Elder Brother" (See p.4 of the preface to SP by Wen Tzu-ch'uan).
3. Ting Ling II, pp.158, 176.
5. In the 1945 story "Housewife", he says that his wife had then been keeping house for thirteen years: SP p.40.
future wife, whom he had previously met at Woosung\(^1\) - intending to get engaged.\(^2\) Shen does not say whether he was successful, but the fact that he did not want to discuss the matter with Ting Ling,\(^3\) and that his intended fiancée did not come and see him soon as she had promised to do,\(^4\) suggests that he was not. A few of his stories also seem to reflect some difficulties in his own courtship. That winter, in the twelfth month of 1932, he went from Tsingtao to Shanghai to see Ting Ling. On the way, he visited his sweetheart again at Soochow and invited her to accompany him. They failed to find Ting Ling, but on his return to Tsingtao Shen received a letter from Ting Ling in which she apologized for having missed Shen and his "dark-faced fiancée",\(^5\) which suggests that he was now actually engaged.

In his essay "Exercise", Shen refers briefly and drily to his marriage:

> I too chanced to fall in love with a woman,
> I too became muddle-headed with love, and cast aside my proper daily tasks to spend the days and nights writing letters that were always

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1. Ting Ling II, p.185.
2. Ibid., pp.173, 177. It seems to be this trip that is alluded to in the 1936 story "Housewife": Black Phoenix, p.57.
3. Ibid., p.177.
4. Ibid., p.185.
5. Ibid., p.186.
unfinished and always unsatisfactory: and the upshot was that I got married.¹

The only other available information about his courtship and marriage is to be found in fictionalized and therefore unreliable form in the 1936 story "Housewife", but this story and "Three Women" (1933) contain affectionate portraits of his wife, while the other "Housewife" (1945) shows clearly how much his marriage and his love for his wife came to mean to him.

Although the three years of this "third stage" of his career were restless ones, the greater part of them seems to have been spent in Tsingtao, where Shen says that he stayed "for two years".² Here he once again found employment in teaching, but it brought him no more satisfaction than before. After finishing a lecture and leaving his students, he says, "an unutterable emptiness would weigh on my heart. What could these young people get from me? And what could I give them? I was very unhappy."³ What he chiefly wanted, and what his teaching no doubt hampered him in doing, was to go on writing without distractions.⁴ As always it was his faith in his literary work that sustained him:

4. Ibid., p.149.
Earning a living as an employee was never something that I could take at all seriously, so as far as everyday life was concerned, I was almost a total failure. But my faith in and hope for my work grew clearer and firmer every day.1

Nevertheless, in one respect at least Tsingtao did make a deep and favourable impression on Shen. Here for the first time he was living by the sea, and his delight in the novel beauty that he found there emerges clearly from the descriptions of the seaside at Tsingtao that figure prominently in some of his stories, such as "Dr. Jo-mo" (1931), "Ju-juei" (1933), "Three Women" (1933) and "A Portrait of Fight Coursers" (1935). In a sense, then, Tsingtao completed his "education" by water, as he himself suggests:

The silent education that I received from my long walks by the sunny sea-shore, from the clouds and sea-water that bordered the great ocean, and from the shells and residual bones washed bright as jade by the tides: this was something more substantial than all the theories of the literary luminaries of the day.2

It was in Tsingtao also that most of the available stories from these years seem to have been written.

2. Ibid.
"Hsien-hsien" 1 offers another sketch of Shen's ideal young heroine. This time she is a student in Shantung University, but she is of country origin and displays the familiar qualities of gentleness, vivacity and honesty. Her elder brother is a well-known writer of fiction who is said to have fallen in love with a woman who does not return his love, and to have written letters to her for three years without success. (This would seem to be a reference to Shen's own unresolved love-affair, which means that Hsien-hsien must be at least partly modelled on his young sister Yüeh-meng.) While out walking early one morning, Hsien-hsien meets an acquaintance, a student from Shanghai, who tells her the latest gossip about her brother while feigning ignorance of his actual identity. She had hoped to embarrass Hsien-hsien, but is herself embarrassed by the latter's candour and forthright indignation. The moral of course lies in the defeat of the city student's disingenuousness by the country student's honesty. The story is a slight one, but has a certain charm in the freshness with which the morning scene and the character of Hsien-hsien herself are depicted.

1. Written in Tsingtao but in March 1931, two months before Shen left Shanghai for Peking, according to the dating in Black Phoenix, in which the story appears.
"Dr. Jo-mo" is a more sombre story, as the ironical opening suggests:

Much of the space in my drawers is taken up with photographs of friends, more than half of whom are now dead. When those who are still properly alive examine my treasures and discover the photographs of these dead people mixed up with their own, they always appear startled and displeased. In their memories the impressions they retain of their friends are no doubt sorted into different categories, such as alive, dead, rich, poor and so on. But my temperament does not much incline me to that sort of classification.

The many groups that have been broken up by death, however, the narrator makes a point of keeping together, and he goes on to speak of the latest addition to this part of his collection: Dr. Jo-mo, his wife, and their little daughter, still alive and not yet six months old.

A year and a half ago, when Jo-mo come to visit the narrator in Tsingtao, the two friends had gone sailing on the "sapphire-blue and sparkling sea". Thinking that Jo-mo seemed to be taking his duties as steersman too seriously, and anxious to see his ever-present pipe removed from his mouth, the narrator had urged him to relax, and then engaged him in a long conversation about the need

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1. Written at Tsingtao in July 1931 and revised at Peking three years later, it appears in Dark Night and Spring Lamp.
2. Spring Lamp, p.83.
3. Ibid., p.85.
for seriousness in life, possible remedies for China's current ills, the importance of faith and so on, during which the two men had consistently taken opposing views. When Jo-mo, who was a Christian, had expressed his dis­taste for people of "the YMCA type" and for "sentimental women",¹ the narrator had recalled that he himself was due to be visited by a clergymen's daughter, on the ini­tiative of a mutual friend, and had speculated on Jo-mo's reaction to her, if she turned out to be as charming as she was reputed to be.

On returning to the narrator's home they had found the young woman waiting for them. The narrator had introduced her to Jo-mo, and, since she had come to Tsingtao to recuperate from an illness, had gratuitously offered her his friend's professional services. As he had anticipated, Jo-mo and the young woman had fallen in love. But then he had been indignant and a little hurt to find that the other two gave him no credit for bringing them together, and that they were in fact too occupied with one another to have much time for him at all. Shortly afterwards they had returned to Peking and got married, but now, sixteen months later, "there is left of the affair merely a shadow preserved in my own

1. Ibid., p.100.
memory"¹, for the young couple had gone to Hankow, where they both died "as a result of the same case"², under circumstances which are not explained.

The story would seem to be largely autobiographical, for the narrator, like the author, lives in Tsingtao, is a literary man,³ a "dreamer" who "looks to the future",⁴ is shabbily dressed⁵ and has "the air of a countryman".⁶ On the other hand, although Shen seems to have been capable of adopting romantically revolutionary attitudes on occasion, one might hesitate to identify him with the narrator when the latter is described as being "extremely left-wing", or as "hating the past" as well as "rejecting the present".⁷ Yet attitudes are easily exaggerated for the sake of friendly argument, and Shen is no doubt also moved here by the desire to emphasize the contrast between the narrator and his more conservative and pragmatic friend. There can at any rate be little doubt that Shen and the narrator are one in often finding their memories of so many dead friends "a heavy burden",⁸ and

¹. Ibid., p.107.
². Ibid., p.84.
³. Ibid., p.89.
⁴. Ibid., p.88.
⁵. Cp. "Straggling" and "The Visitor".
⁶. Ibid., p.102.
⁷. Ibid., p.88.
⁸. Ibid., p.84.
it was to commemorate one such friend, "Pien-chen" 采真,\(^1\) that "Dr. Jo-mo" was written.

With "San-san" 三三\(^2\) Shen returns to his country heroine, and the story stands roughly midway between "Hsiao-hsiao" and Border Town in date, length and theme. San-san is a miller's daughter. Her father had died when she was five, and she is now fifteen years old. It is summer, and a handsome but seriously ill young stranger has come to stay at the fortified village 堡子 less than a mile away from the mill. Fearful of this young stranger, yet fascinated by him in spite of her misgivings, San-san begins, gradually and only half consciously, to fall in love with him. At last she and her mother decide one autumn day to go to the village and invite him home for dinner, but when they get there they discover that he has just died.

\(^1\) Ibid., p.107.
\(^2\) Written in Tsingtao in August-September 1931, it was published in January the following year in Tiger Cub. It was revised in Kunming in 1941 - a task which seems to have saddened Shen, for he remarks: "Ten years have now elapsed since its composition. Man's life is truly a pitiable thing." (Black Phoenix, p.126.) Apart from Tiger Cub and Black Phoenix, the story also appears in A-chin, Hsiao-hsiao and SF.
Such is the outline of the story. If one compares "San-san" with "Hsiao-hsiao" and Border Town, one notes a growing tendency on Shen's part to simplify the plot and slow down the pace of the narration, thus allowing himself to give more attention to description of the tranquil countryside itself, and to a subtler and more careful examination of his characters' feelings and moods. Similarly, each of the two later stories is much longer than its predecessor, and ends in a more melancholy way. On the other hand, the prominent use of symbolism in "San-san" is not continued in Border Town.

The theme of "San-san", as of Border Town, is the loss of innocence. In "Hsiao-hsiao" the heroine, emerging from the security of her happy country childhood, had survived her disastrous love-affair to find another kind of security in contented motherhood. San-san and Ts'uei-ts'uei, however, are not so fortunate, for each of them, after the loss of her lover, is left at the end of the story still facing an uncertain future and haunted by the memory of someone's death - her lover's in San-san's case, and her grandfather's (as well as those of her lover's brother and, more remotely, her mother) in Ts'uei-ts'uei's. It is not difficult to see some basis for all this in Shen's own life, for he too had enjoyed a happy country childhood, had an unlucky love-affair, been
constantly surrounded by death, and left the countryside for a highly uncertain future in the city.

Whether San-san will actually go to the city, as her mother suggests and as Hsiao-hsiao had dreamed of doing, is not clear, however. It is perhaps more likely that she will remain where she is, for she is in a sense the symbol of the countryside itself, just as the handsome but sickly stranger is the embodiment of the city from which he comes. Conversely, the countryside may also contain features symbolic of the heroine and her peaceful and sheltered life. This is particularly noticeable where water and fishes are concerned, for these are closely identified with San-san. So she tells her secrets to the stream, and the fishes alone understand her dreams.\(^1\) But her closest relationship is with the shady pool near the mill. She regards the many fish here as her own, and is indignant if anyone fishes for them without asking her permission.

It is therefore as an intruding fisherman that the stranger first appears, for it is San-san herself that he will "catch". His pallor, his crutch and his ill-health, like the Cripple's paralysis in "Gentry Wife" or Huang's nervous disorder in "Husband and Wife", are clear symbols

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1. SF, p.165.
of spiritual sickness and show that he represents the city, as San-san's aunt perceives: "Who can make anything of the names of city folk's illnesses. If you ask me they like to get sick, and that's why they have so many names for their illnesses."¹ When San-san discovers him fishing with one of the bailiffs from the village in "her" pond, his first words to her, though spoken in jest, are a warning of what is to come: "San-san, come here: your fishes have all been caught!"² Like the fishes, the eggs which San-san and her mother take to the village also represent San-san herself and her peaceful country life. So when she dreams that the stranger is fishing in the pond again, the bailiff says to her "with a serious air": "We've come to buy eggs. You can have as much money as you want." The stranger then adds, with a theatrical flourish of his hand: "You are wrong: she can have as much gold as she wants." But San-san refuses: "But I won't sell you any. I don't want your money."³

It is not long, however, before San-san, returning from the village, shows that she is jealous of the nurse who looks after the stranger; and after a couple more visits from him, she and her mother surrender to the

1. SF p.169.
2. Ibid., p.166.
3. Ibid., p.173.
fascination of the city:

After the visit of the two guests, things were not quite the same as before in the mill. The frequency with the mother and daughter mentioned 'the city' in their conversations gradually increased, although of what the city was like and what virtues it had, neither of them really had the slightest idea.1

From now on San-san takes special care with her toilet before going to the village with the eggs, and she becomes more tense and moody. Autumn comes, and there are many weddings. Then the nurse invites San-san and her mother to come and visit her and her patient in the village, and San-san at last consents to go and see the "cityfolk". On the way, her mother dreams of marriages and the city, but San-san is still recalcitrant:

"You're bound to go to the city in future."
"Why am I bound to? I won't go to the city!"
"Of course that would be best."

They walked on further, and San-san suddenly spoke again: "Mummy why did you say I'd be going to the city? What made you think of that?"

Her mother hastened to soothe her: "You won't go to the city, and neither will I. Heaven intended the city for cityfolk; we have our mill of course, and we can't leave that."2

When they get to the village, however, they learn that the young man is dead. A woman sees the eggs and asks: "Who's the present for San-san?"3 Although San-san

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1. Ibid., p.180.
2. Ibid., p.318.
3. Ibid., p.186.
and her mother now return to their former mode of life, things cannot be the same again. When they return to the mill, San-san feels that she has lost something, but she cannot recall what it is. Her mother is looking for the oil bottle, but although San-san knows where it is, she says nothing. She is supposed to be putting the eggs back in the jar, but she does not do that either.

San-san gazed at the basket, and then she squatted down on the floor and counted the eggs in it. She counted them for a long time. Later, someone who was husking rice asked her why she was taking eggs away so early, and who they were for. San-san seemed not to have heard the question, and she got up and ran outside.¹

The year 1931 saw the publication, in May, of Shen Ts'ung-wen's Second Collection, which contained six stories: "Lung-chu", "The Husband", "The Lamp", "Construction", "Springtime", and "Gentry Wife". Two other books, Boat Carrying Marble and Old Dreams,²³ are also said to have been published in this year. At the end of 1931 Shen also wrote an open letter "To the readers of the Literary Supplement".⁴

¹. Ibid., p.188.
². Schyns and others, op. cit., pp.280, 78.
³. Ibid., p.78.
⁴. Wen-i 烏, the literary supplement to the newspaper Ta Kung Pao 大公報. Shen himself was later to become an editor of this supplement.
In it he complains of the rapid decline of modern literature, which he sees as being caused by preoccupation with theories, none of which are "of the slightest help in producing masterpieces",\(^1\) and by the influence of notions of "talent" 天才 and "inspiration" 灵感, which only discourage young writers and provide excuses for the lazy.

In January 1932 Shen published *Tiger Cub*, which contained, in addition to the title story, "Middle Age", "San-san", "The Doctor" and "A Little Scene in Kweichow". According to Schyns,\(^2\) three other books were also published in this year: *Life of an Actress* 一個女偽的, a novel about "a young 'star'" and her four lovers,\(^3\) perhaps owing something to Ting Ling's brief career as a would-be film star\(^4\); *A Woman of the City* 一都市一婦女 and *Mud* 泥塗.\(^5\)

The title story\(^6\) of the last volume is of the same type as "Rottenness" and "Construction", and opens with

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5. Literally, "mud-smeared". The word suggests corruption or low birth, both of which are relevant to the story in question.
6. First published in January 1932, it appears in *Ju-juei*, *Dark Night* and, with some slight alterations for aesthetic and political reasons, in *SF*. 
a scene in a pawn-shop, where a poor woman is pleading unsuccessfully to be given more money for some old clothes that she is selling in order to buy medicine for her sick son. After this incident, Shen proceeds to give the background to his story. As in "Construction" there has been an influx of foreign capital, and the town, which lies somewhere in the central region of the Yangtse Valley, has developed rapidly, with the consequent creation of slums like those of "Rottenness". In this story, however, the wind which blows over the slums carries disease as well as fetor, and there has been an epidemic of smallpox. The recent heavy rain has brought some relief, however, and this leads Shen back into his story.

Arriving home, the woman discovers her floor covered with water. It appears that a nearby factory is draining off water which subsequently spills down to invade the low-lying houses. A deputation is got together and is led to the factory by a fiery middle-aged man called Tsu-kuei and the neighbourhood "scholar", whose surname is Chang. The deputation's pleas are contemptuously rejected, and that night the factory catches fire and many of the surrounding houses are burnt down. Tsu-kuei and Chang play a leading part in fighting the fire and helping the homeless, but in the end his selflessness costs Chang his life. The old woman, learning of his
death, is upset. "Heaven shouldn't have -", she begins, but Tsu-kuei interrupts her: "There are many things that Heaven shouldn't do". By now it is morning, and the story ends at dusk that evening, with the woman contemplating Chang's coffin, which lies by the water alone and unattended, and recalling Tsu-kuei's remark, which of course applies to the whole situation depicted in the story. Then, "her eyes moist, she slipped quietly into her own little house."2

This story is better constructed than the two earlier "Dickensian" ones, and written in a more assured style. There is no artificial attempt at mystery or melodrama, as in "Construction", and there is a well-defined plot which is in close accord with the general background. Furthermore, the story seems to strike a more genuinely compassionate note than the other two, and the characters are developed in a more interesting way - notably in the relationship between Chang and Tsu-kuei, the scholar and the man of action, outwardly hostile but united by an inner bond of friendship and a common passion for justice. "Quiet" is a very different kind of story.3

There are six characters: the fourteen-year old Yüeh-

1. SF, p.216.
2. Ibid., p.219.
3. Written in Shanghai in March 1932 and revised in Kunming ten years later, it appears in Black Phoenix.
Yüeh-min, her consumptive mother, her elder sister, her sister's little boy Pei-sheng, her elder brother's wife, and a maid. Fleeing from some unspecified disaster, they have stopped at a little country town on the way to Shanghai and are waiting for a letter before moving on. There are two kinds of "quiet" in the story. One is outside the house, in the peaceful countryside which Yüeh-min can see all about her from the top of the house, and in the people who live there with such seeming content: the children playing with their kites, the sleeping ferryman, and the little nun washing vegetables in the river. But Yüeh-min, perched in symbolic isolation on the roof of the house, is unable to participate in all this, for she is claimed by the other quietness of waiting which pervades the house - waiting for news, and waiting for the death of her mother, who now lies in bed "as quiet as a corpse".¹ Both death and news come at the end of the story, but the death is that of her father, a soldier in Ichang, and not of her mother.

The conflict between the two kinds of stillness, as reflected in Yüeh-min's mind, is the theme of the story. The ambiguity of the prevailing quietness is also reflected in the recurring symbol of the runaway kite. At first it

¹. Black Phoenix, p.44.
seems to represent the freedom which is denied Yüeh-min, "tied" as she is to the house and to her loneliness and waiting. Later, however, when she learns that her mother has been coughing up blood again, she feigns cheerfulness in telling her sister and sister-in-law of the attempt to recapture the kite. It thus becomes apparent that the string which snapped could also stand for the thread of life, and the runaway kite for death. This second interpretation finds confirmation towards the end of the story, when another kite appears high overhead, careering about wildly and trailing a long white string, apparently as a portent of the news that is to come. Yüeh-min has been distressed by her visit downstairs, but now "her heart gradually (becomes) quiet" again as she gazes out over the countryside. Going downstairs later, she finds everyone asleep except the maid. Her heart leaps when she hears knocking and voices at the front door.

But soon all was quiet again. Without knowing why, Yüeh-min smiled faintly. The light of the setting sun cast the shadows of the corner of the house and the drying-racks on top down into a corner of the courtyard, just as, in another place, it was casting the shadow of the paper pennant that stood above the grave of the father they were waiting for.

1. Ibid., p.46.
2. Ibid., p.48.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.49.
Throughout this story, as Hsia notes in his discussion of it, "one can sense the presence of a subdued but strong personal emotion", and all the characters in it appear to be modelled on members of Shen's own family. It is "written in memory of my elder sister's dead son Pei-sheng"—rather curiously, since it is not the child who dies in the story. On the other hand, Shen's own father had died in 1931, and this is presumably reflected in the death which does take place in the story. As has been seen, Shen's mother also had been dying of tuberculosis in late 1929 or early 1930 when he wrote "Living Upstairs". And finally, the heroine Yüeh-min is clearly Shen's youngest sister Yüeh-meng, just as her absent "second elder brother" is Shen himself. It is, then, Shen's personal involvement in the story which accounts for the intensity of feeling that one senses behind its prevailing "quietness" of tone, and that makes the story, despite its simplicity and comparative brevity, one of his most memorable.

"Spring" is a much slighter piece. A young

2. Black Phoenix, p.49.
3. Autobiography, p.11.
5. Written at Tsingtao in June 1932 and revised two years later in Peking, it appears in Spring and Spring Lamp.
medical student, Fan Lu-shih (who presumably represents the Fan Hai-shan for whom the story was written), has come to his sweetheart's home with the intention of proposing to her. As they stroll about the grounds, he attempts to tell her of his desire to marry her, but she keeps interrupting him and is so relentlessly frivolous that he begins to grow silent and unhappy. Observing this, she relaxes her demands for clever conversation and allows Fan to hint at his proposal. Still she teases him for a while, but at last she confesses the truth: that she knew why he had come, and that her father had already given his consent, even going out of the house so that they might be alone together. So the two lovers kiss and are happy. An interesting feature of the story is the preponderance of dialogue in it. This emphasis on speech at the expense of action, which is also reflected in Shen's young brother's long speeches in "Tiger Cub" and in the conversation which occupies such a large part of "Dr. Jo-mo" for example, is one aspect of a long-apparent tendency on Shen's part to concern himself more with his characters' thoughts and feelings than with their behaviour. It becomes, however, sufficiently striking at this point to

be noted as a distinctive trend in his fiction - one which distinguishes a number of the stories he was to write from now on.

In August 1932, brief extracts from letters which Shen had written "to five people in one week" were published.¹ The first warns against allowing oneself to become "enfeebled" by memories or by reading old Taoist and Buddhist books - advice which comes strangely from a writer who had drawn extensively on his own memories for his stories and who was to produce, two or three months later, a number of stories based on old Buddhist tales. The second extract attempts to console a friend who has been disappointed in love. Shen's description of woman as the "mistress" of man is interesting in view of the superior role which women play in a number of his stories, and one may compare Dr. Jo-mo's statement that "woman is the god of the poet's imagination and of the libertine's senses,"² or the shaman's reaction to the woman who knelt before him: "She uttered no sound, but her eyes seemed to be saying: 'Come with me you servant

¹ First published in Hsien-tai Tsa-chih they appear in Old Letters Preserved.
² Spring Lamp, p.100.
of the gods, for I am a god!" 1

The fifth extract is a variation on the same theme raised in the second: God created woman beautiful and clever, but she has been degraded by man. The third warns a biologist with literary leanings that authors "beg for food with a golden bowl", that they are lonely, tired, helpless, cut off from life, and more to be pitied than envied. The fourth, apparently showing Shen in the "radical" mood of the narrator of "Dr. Jo-mo" arguing with his friend, urges the forsaking of the past for the future, despite the blood that will inevitably be shed in the process.

The following month (September) saw the completion of another Miao story called "A Little Scene in the Moonlight", which was to provide the title for a collection of stories published in November of the following year. It begins with a half-moon shining on No-yu, the only son of the chief of the village, who, like Shen's other Miao heroes is described as handsome, strong and skilled in song. He and his sweetheart, beside whom he is lying out of doors, are deeply in love, but because each is the other's first love they are .

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1. The Shaman's Love, p.28. "God" here is shen, whereas the Christian Jo-mo uses shang-ti. 
forbidden on pain of death to marry, according to an ancient taboo which dates from times when virginity was considered ill-omened. There is little narrative in the story, the bulk of which is taken up with conversation, song, the recounting of old legends and lyrical description of the beauty which surrounds them. At last the lovers decide that since they cannot live together they will die together. No-yu takes some poison from the hollow, jewelled hilt of his knife, dissolves it in his mouth and passes it into his sweetheart's. So they lie down happily to die, while the moon is veiled by cloud. As with "Lung-chu" the characters are flat and the description vivid but unreal. In accordance with a trend in Shen's work that has already been noted, the plot here plays a less prominent role than it did in "Lung Chu", and conversation and description take on a correspondingly greater importance.

The other stories in A Little Scene in the Moonlight\(^1\) are all based on old Buddhist tales. As Shen explains in his preface, he had become interested in the stories of the Six Dynasties, T'ang and Sung periods while teaching the history of fiction, for he felt that they had not been thoroughly studied. As he examined such books

\(^1\) Hereafter referred to as In the Moonlight.
as the Chen Kao 真説,  
1 Fa-yuăn Chu-lin  法苑珠林,  
and Yun-chi Chi Chi'en 雲笈七籤.  
he began to see that the stories in them had considerable literary merit 
as well as historical interest. Consequently he chose 
a number of stories from the Fa-yuăn Chu-lin and rewrote 
them, altering them freely, in order to show his young 
fourteen-year old relative Chang Hsiao-wu 張小五, 
to whom all the stories are dedicated, that "the men of over 
a thousand years ago... already knew how to tell stories".  
Later, he was to give his experiment a less modest 
interpretation:

So the methods that appeared in my work had to be broadened and refashioned by seeking and discovering something which lay outside my work's usual range, thus forming the new basis that freedom required. Consequently I attempted to disinter historical legends, even those as musty as the parables and morals of the Buddhist Canon. And by rearranging them so as to express my own feelings, I tried to see whether I could turn something old into something new.

2. Stories taken from Buddhist works and arranged by the monk Tao-shih 道士 of the T'ang 唐 dynasty.
3. Tales of marvels, compiled by Chang Chun-fang 張君房 of the Sung 宋 dynasty.
In fact, Shen's redactions of the stories are not entirely successful, and they remain for the most part a rather uneasy combination of the modern and the "musty", rather than the new synthesis for which he seems to have hoped. His method of combining the two elements varies from an expanded but fairly faithful treatment of the original story, keeping much of the archaic and elaborate phraseology of his model, as in "The Generous Prince", to a much freer handling, as for example in "The Bird-catcher's Story", where an Indian tale has been thoroughly 'Sinicized' and retold in a purely modern idiom.

Shen has given his collection a degree of unity by providing each story with the same setting: namely, a room in a country inn, where a large number of travellers have gathered about the fire to while away the long night by telling stories. This method also gives Shen the chance to do some character sketching on his own account, for each tale is introduced and told by a different individual who sometimes figures in his own story.

The first story, 

1. Written October 1932.
named Śāntā. Shen introduces the tale by way of a discussion in the inn concerning the treatment of women. Most of the travellers agree with a trader of mules and horses that they should be disciplined harshly, like animals, but one man protests that women are much to be feared, and tells the story of Śāntā, which he had once heard during a trip to Tibet, in order to explain why.

Apart from altering the ending, Shen has kept closely to his original here, even retaining much of its archaic language and its four-syllable rhythm. He has changed the story mainly by the elaboration of detail. A few touches, such as the reference to "mastery of the yin and yang" and to Hsi Wang Mu add a Chinese flavour, while others seem to express something of Shen's own feelings: as for example the comparison of sages to poets, the scornful remarks about "the intelligentsia in other countries", and the young sage's book-learning which excludes knowledge of real life.

1. A somewhat different version may be found in the Pāli Canon as the Naliniṇika Jātaka, No.526. A translation of the Chinese version may be found in Edouard Chavannes, Cinq Cent Contes et Apologues, Paris 1910-34, Vol.3, pp.233-7.
2. In the Moonlight, p.40.
3. Ibid., p.49.
4. Ibid., p.42.
5. Ibid., p.44.
6. Ibid., p.54.
The next story, "The Generous Prince" ¹ is treated similarly. A retelling of the famous Jātaka story of Prince Viśvantara, or Sudāna 須大擊, as he is called here,² it also keeps closely to the plot, language and rhythm of its original, with additions to the detail, or slight changes, as when the "poor brahmin" of the original³ is changed to a "retired soldier".⁴ Shen is now growing unhappy about the archaic style, however. He is apologetic about it,⁵ and the following stories are written in more modern language.

"The Doctor" 醫生⁶ is a brief story illustrating the virtue of patient forbearance, and is told by a carpet merchant in order to counter the opinion prevailing among the travellers that most doctors are unscrupulous quacks. It concerns a doctor who is blamed for stealing a pearl that has in fact been swallowed by a goose, and appears to

1. Tsingtao, October 1932. It was also published as a separate booklet by Liang-yu Book Co. in March 1933.
4. In the Moonlight, p.93.
5. Ibid., p.68.
6. Undated. Not to be confused with the 1931 story of the same name.
differ little, except in style, from the original.1

"A Ploughman's Story" is told in a straightforward modern style. Telling how a young man, hunted by the king as a criminal, nevertheless contrives to marry the princess in the end, it is essentially Indian in character, but Shen has tried to give it some Chinese colouring by references to such things as yamens3 and official examinations,4 while much of it, such as the meetings with the princess5 and the nurse,6 are written in his own characteristic style. As with "The Generous Prince", Shen concludes with a humorous scene in the inn, and some fun is made of a historian in the audience.

A tailor who has been describing his unhappy life expresses the opinion that only by being willing to die for a responsibility or an ideal can one live without fear.

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1. The version in Chavannes, *op.cit.*, Vol.3 pp.210-11 (which is, however, said to be from a different source) has an ascetic instead of a doctor and a parrot instead of a goose.
2. Tsingtao, the "New Cramped and Musty Study", April 1933; revised two months later.
3. *In the Moonlight*, p.126.
He then asks an old man to tell them a more cheerful story, and "The Quest" is the result. A discontented young man travels to a marvellous kingdom only to find that its king is also discontented with life. The king tells him how he had travelled to a Land of Cockayne he had read about, but found the people there unexpectedly grown old through the fear of death. The young man leaves the king and wanders for many years seeking a means of escaping the fear of death - which (for the young man is now the old storyteller himself) has just been provided by the tailor. Shen has not only added Chinese touches to the story, as in the magical trees which provide wine and curios along with the other necessities of life, and modern ones, as in the absence of mines and factories in his paradise, he has also fashioned his plot from three different sources and fitted it closely into his own framework.

"The Birdcatcher's Story" is perhaps the most successful of the stories, for by turning his material to satirical purposes Shen has made the fairy-tale quality, which conflicted with his own more realistic

1. Tsingtao, 17th. April 1933.
2. In the Moonlight, p.163.
3. Ibid., p.173.
4. Undated.
approach in the other stories, immediately acceptable, and has also provided a suitably up-to-date replacement for the moral lesson which was the basis of the original fable. The story itself is a well-known one: a tortoise holds on to a stick with his mouth in order to be carried to a new home by a pair of friendly geese. Hearing people making loud remarks as the strange trio flies overhead, the tortoise opens his mouth to rebuke them and falls to his death.

To this short and simple tale, Shen has added a great deal. For a start, he has thoroughly naturalized it. The geese fly over what is quite clearly China to Peking, not Benares, there is an allusion to literary life in Shanghai, and the tortoise is a student of Chinese literature, especially the Lao Tzu and the Chuang tzu. More important, however, is his treatment of character. The geese are depicted as restless and adventurous, but a little conceited and not particularly clever. They have wide experience of the world but at the same time they are "modern people", too shallow to understand the

2. In the Moonlight, pp.178, 182.
3. Ibid., p.178.
tortoise's analogies\(^1\) and believing that the progress of civilization depends on speed and money.\(^2\)

The tortoise, whom the geese scoff at as an "idealist" fares slightly better at Shen's hands. He understands that deep thought and feeling count for more than superficial agitation, and he knows that while freedom to travel is good, freedom of thought is even more important.\(^3\) Yet the tortoise is too placid and complacent, and although he argues correctly that what counts is to live well and understand life, he gets even this knowledge only from books,\(^4\) and knows little of the world outside his own pond. And of course it is the tortoise who foolishly lets go of the stick.

The remaining stories are of less interest. "Women" 女人\(^5\) tells of a king and a handsome young man who were deceived by their wives, and decided to travel the world together to see if they could discover any valid reason for honouring women. The last story, "Desire" 愛慾,\(^6\) actually consists of three separate tales.

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1. Ibid., p.185.
2. Ibid., p.182.
3. Ibid., p.183.
4. Ibid., p.186.
The first, called "The Love of a Mutilated Criminal" 被割刑者 of 1 comprises two different and ineptly combined stories, the second and more important one telling how a woman who thinks she has murdered her husband takes up with a mutilated beggar, until her husband, now become a king, exposes her crime. 2 Shen's additions to the story are comparatively clumsy, and a seeming promise of satire in the introductory section is not followed up.

The last two of the three stories are shorter but better constructed. "The Cheng-Player's Love" 弹筝者的後 tells how a widow, entranced by the music of a one-eyed cheng-player, accidentally kills her child. She subsequently confesses her love to the musician, but he ends by abandoning both her and his cheng, and she hangs herself. "The Love of a Doe's Daughter" 一匹母鹿所生的女孩的後 tells how the magical daughter of a hermit and a doe marries a king and gives birth to a large ball of flesh, whereupon she is disgraced through the machinations of the king's concubines. The ball of flesh subsequently produces a thousand noble young men, who redeem their

1. I.e. one who has had his feet cut off as a punishment.
mother. The queen lives happily till her great beauty begins to fade, when she commits suicide in the king's presence.1

Of all these stories only "The Birdcatcher's Story" really approaches success. In all the others, the Indian and Chinese, the ancient and modern elements fail to harmonize, and Shen is able neither to retell the original tales in a manner faithful to their original spirit, nor to use them simply as raw material to serve his own literary ends. In fact he seems uncertain which of these two courses to pursue, and the result is a rather unsatisfactory compromise. Although the experiment represented by this book is never less than interesting and may well have been instructive for Shen himself, in the last analysis, and judged by the standards of his own best work, it must be considered a failure. As Han Shih-heng says at the end of his not unsympathetic essay on In the Moonlight: "Although he has disinterred some beautiful corpses from remote antiquity, he lacks the power to infuse living blood into them and make them live again in the present day."2

1. This appears to be based on the story summarized in Chavannes op. cit., Vol.3 p.12. Another version is summarized ibid., pp.11-12, while a third is translated in Vol.1 pp.80-84.

In the Moonlight was published in 1933. A few other stories were written in the same year and later appeared in the collection Ju-juei, which was published at the end of the following year. Of these, "Morning - a Pile of Earth, a Soldier" 是一个非常简短的关于两个士兵在冬天早晨在火线上的情节。一个年纪较大的显示了一种非chalant bravery and fierce patriotism which inspire his young comrade, a student, to emulate him. At the end the student is killed and the old soldier is left to fight on alone.

Of more interest is "Three Women" which tells how three young women students, on holidays at the seaside (obviously at Tsingtao, although no name is given) go for a walk in the woods. In the course of their conversation, they reveal their different personalities and ideas. Since the youngest has pretensions to being a poet, they discuss the relationship between natural beauty and art, anticipating the more elaborate discussion in the 1946 story "Rainbow". Later, they speak of a missing friend, a young woman revolutionary whom they all admire. That evening, one of them,

1. March, Tsingtao, the "Cramped and Musty Study".
2. June 1933, Tsingtao. It also appears, after being twice revised at Kunming, in Black Phoenix.
Hei-feng ("Black Phoenix"), receives a telegram informing them that their friend is dead.

The story may owe something to Shen's memories of a long conversation between Ting Ling and two of her women friends in Nanking,¹ and it offers further illustration of the trend already noted in Shen's work, towards the dominance of certain stories by the characters' conversations or even their discussion of abstract issues. It anticipates the later "Rainbow" in this respect, as also in its elaborate landscape painting. Shen is noted for his "concrete evocation of landscape",² but the sort of painstaking attention to detail shown in the following passage, and in similar passages in "Rainbow", is unusual, and suggests the painter's eye rather than the storyteller's:

The evening wind grew keener and the whole forest stirred with a rushing sound, as if swept by an invisible hand. The three women fell silent and gazed at the sea, the surface of which had become veiled in the twilight with a layer of silver mist, which made it seem nearer. The little islands in the sea had gradually become indistinct, and their outlines could no longer be discerned. The sky, which had at first been pale white with a touch of azure, had now turned blue. Where the sun had set, it had already changed from silver-rose to deep purple, while several clouds which were originally purple had altered

¹. See Ting Ling II pp.87-8.
². Hsia, op. cit., p.207.
again to a pale gray. Elsewhere, however, a
touch of waning light on some tinier clouds
had burnt them inky black.¹

The same desire to capture the beauty of Tsingtao
is apparent in the opening passage of the story, which is
also noteworthy for the unusually subtle way in which the
characters are introduced. Shen generally begins in a
straightforward manner: "Kuei-sheng sharpened his sickle
beside the stream; he sharpened it till its edge was
gleaming".² Here, however, he is more indirect, passing
his eye slowly over the scene - the trees, the mountain
with its grass and wildflowers, the sea and the sailing
boats - till his attention is arrested by the sound of
a horn:

Somewhere a horn was being blown - either
from the little boats at the edge of the sea,
or from the cattle-pastures and sheep-farms at
the foot of the mountain. It sounded very
faint and longdrawn, far-off and remote. And
then, in one's hearing, in one's mind, or in
the atmosphere, it melted away. It seemed
to be calling, and also answering a call.
"Who is it calling?"
"Anyone who takes notice of it."
Three women were listening to it....³

Finally, the story is also of interest for its auto­
biographical character. In the twenty-year old Hei-feng
Shen has drawn the first clearly identifiable portrait of

his wife - which explains why the book *Black Phoenix* is named after her, although none of the stories have that title. Thus Hei-feng's fiancé in the story is called Hsüan-jo 繫, ¹ which is one of Shen's pen-names, and Hei-feng herself is described as having a "dark face and long eyebrows" 黑臉長眉 ² - the very words which Shen uses of his wife in the second "Housewife".³ The young revolutionary, then, is Ting Ling, as her name Meng-k'o 蒲荷 ⁴ shows.⁴ She had been arrested in Shanghai the month before the story was written (i.e. in May 1933) and Shen had presumably gone to Shanghai to search for her, as "Hsüan-jo" does in the story. Unable to find her, he must have assumed that she was dead, and sent a telegram to that effect back to Tsingtao.⁵ When he returned, he must have written this story as a tribute to her. Like the biography which he completed at the end of this year,⁶ it is deeply affectionate in the main, but contains

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1. Ju-juei p.90. In *Black Phoenix*, p.14, the name has been changed to X X .
4. It is the name of the heroine of Ting Ling's story "Meng-k'o". Shen mentions this story in *Ting Ling I*, p.92.
5. In fact Ting Ling had only been imprisoned. She was released on parole in 1936 and fled to Sian.
some thoughtful criticism, voiced here by the eldest of
the three women, who has, however, never met "Meng-k'o".

Two other stories also bear the date 1933. "Ju-juei" 玻 is the story of an unhappy love affair between
an older woman and a younger man. It is competently
and sensitively written, but has no special point of
interest other than its use of the "flashback" technique.
It begins in a hospital where Ju-juei, a prematurely
fading beauty of twenty-seven or so, is visiting a young
man seven years her junior. It soon becomes clear that
she loves him but he does not love her. The story then
returns to the time when they first met three years be­
fore, at a students' summer camp. A beautiful and talent­
ed woman, the daughter of a cabinet minister, Ju-juei
scorned men in much the same way as the heroine of "A
Slight Coolness", although with less morbidity in her
attitude. One day she was saved from drowning by a youth
whose naivety and good looks amused and attracted her.
He was dazzled by her beauty and she condescended to keep
him company, but by next autumn he had become engrossed
in his studies again while she had fallen hopelessly in
love with him.

1. June 1933, Tsingtao. Published in Ju-juei and, with
alterations, in Spring Lamp.
An accident in the laboratory three years after their first meeting had sent him to hospital, where Ju-juei was a constant and solicitous visitor. So the story returns to the point at which it began. Now illness has softened the young man's feelings, and by the time of his discharge he has come to realize how much he cares for Ju-juei. He tells her that he loves her, but his happiness only aggravates her sorrow - for now she is painfully conscious of her age and of the futility of their relationship. She becomes deeply depressed when they pass a cemetery, but her lover remains unaware of her thoughts. The next morning she is gone, apparently on a long-proposed trip to France. Her note explains that it is better to part now, while they are still happy together, but the young man, who believes that he really does love her, is left feeling sad and confused.

"Living" is set in a city square which, with its rowdy and fickle throng, bears some resemblance to the one described in "Rottenness". Here an old travelling puppeteer earns his living by staging mock fights between two large puppets. The white-faced one, which always wins after a desperate struggle, is named after his long-dead

1. September 1933, Peking, the "Cramped and Musty Study". It appears in Ju-juei and SF.
son, while the black-faced puppet bears the name of the person responsible for his son's death. Hsia\textsuperscript{1} compares the puppeteer to Wordsworth's Michael and Leech-gatherer, but Michael's determination, in the face of adversity, to look to the future,\textsuperscript{2} and the Leech-gatherer's cheerful demeanour and firmness of mind seem far removed from the puppeteer's obsession with a vanished past, and his pathetic attempt to undo his son's death by symbolically reversing the outcome of the original fight. The poignancy of the story lies rather in the contrast between the puppeteer's outward bustling amiability and his inner emptiness.

The remaining stories in \textit{Ju-juei} are undated, but they cannot be any later than early 1934, since the collection was published in May of that year. Three of them only have not yet been discussed. "Holiday" \textsuperscript{11} is another piece of social criticism with a squalid setting, and as usual in such cases, there is a Dickensian flavour about the opening, with its picture of the persistent fine rain casting a sombre shadow over the town as evening falls. After a gruesome explanation of why the local jail has been given the name of "The Flower Garden", the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} Op. cit., p.204.
\item \textsuperscript{2} "At eighty-four/ I still am strong and hale.../ ... I will begin again..." "Michael", lines 389-91.
\end{itemize}
story proceeds to examine conditions inside the jail. Because it is the Midautumn Festival, wine has been given to the prisoners, and two of them start a drunken brawl. When this is discovered by the sadistic prison-keeper, who is also drunk, he beats the two men so savagely that they are killed, although in the darkness of the cell the only person who realizes this is a new prisoner, who later discovers the coldness of the corpses. Shen's conclusion is appropriately bitter:

There were many wolves around the town of X, for great numbers of children died and people were killed at the yamen every day. Consequently food was never as scarce and difficult to get for the wolves as it was for the poor.¹

"Dusk" 黃昏 is similar, but less savage. Once again there is a dreary and impoverished little town, which seems to owe something to the more sordid aspects of Huaihua. Once again two prisoners are killed, this time by public execution, and once again the story opens in "Dickensian" style, with a description of the pall of smoke hanging over the town, and of the thin, red-eyed women and their ever-hungry children who are sent out to work at the age of ten. Yet despite all this the story has an air of calm and even tenderness about it which distinguishes it from "Holiday". The happiness of the

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¹. Ju-juei, p.240.
little urchins as they fish for eels in the dirty pond next to the jail appears to be genuine, and their excitement at the sight of the execution procession seems innocent enough if one compares it with the malice of the children in "Husband and Wife." for example. Similarly the prisoners, although one of them resists at first, seem more resigned than resentful. So one of them says to the recalcitrant one: "T'ien-pao, go when they call you. You mustn't be afraid. Everything is ordained by fate."¹

And in contrast with "Holiday"'s angry conclusion, "Dusk" ends on a note of serenity: "All the red in the sky turned to purple, on the ground all angles gradually blurred, and then it was night."²

"Daytime" offers a portrait of Shen's youngest heroine, little Ling-ling, who is only five years old. Her mother, like the Gentry Wife, spends most of her time playing mahjong with her friends, leaving Ling-ling at home. Today she has left Ling-ling in the care of her big sister, who is about twenty, and has promised to bring her an apple if she is good. The rest

¹. Ibid., p.294.
². Ibid., p.298.
³. It was originally named "Ling-ling", after its young heroine. It also appears, apparently unaltered, in Black Phoenix.
of the story follows Ling-ling's moods and activities throughout the day: her resentment when her sister, tired of being pestered by the boisterous little girl, sends her off to play by herself; her conflicting feelings towards her mother, her sister and the maid; an encounter with the maid's disreputable twelve-year old son; and finally a belly-ache brought on by eating too many jujubes, and a tearful reconciliation with her sister. There is a depth of feeling in this story which is not easy to account for, but which places it among Shen's most moving. In his sketch of little Pei-sheng in "Quiet" Shen had already shown that he could depict young children with sureness and sympathy, and "Daytime" provides confirmation of his skill in this respect, for Ling-ling is one of the most charming of his heroines and one of the most memorable of all his characters.

B. Hunan and Peking (1934-1936)

1934 was a crucial year in Shen's development as a writer. At the beginning of the year, in winter, he returned briefly to West Hunan, coming back to his native district of Fenghwang after an absence of 18 years.¹

¹ The Long River, Preface, p.i.
Here, he was startled to see how much the land of his childhood had changed, mostly, he felt, for the worse. The old rustic virtues of directness and simplicity seemed to have all but disappeared, to be replaced by more "modern" and materialistic ones. Cigarettes¹ and tin cans, he was later to complain, were circulating everywhere, and he has recorded the "painful impression" made on him by the fashionable young men, with their two fountain pens, their silver wrist-watches, and the sunglasses which they "hastened to put on" in the slightest sunshine.²

Shen was thus brought face to face with the world of his own past, and made to realize how rapidly it was disappearing. As a result, he seems to have become fully aware for the first time of the importance to him of his country childhood, and of the values, now threatened, which he saw in it. His trip to Hunan, therefore, was also a journey of self-discovery, and seems to have had a profound effect on his views and his creative work. Whereas he had still been ready less than eighteen months ago to warn against excessive concern for the past,³ he

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2. The Long River, Preface, pp.i-ii.
3. Above, p. 335-6.
now began to feel a "deep affection" for it, and to become a conscious propagandist for the old-fashioned values of the countryside, as against the corrupt, and corrupting, modern values of the city, which he now openly repudiated.

Accordingly, he wrote three book-length works of major importance celebrating the rediscovery of his native countryside and of his own past life: a short novel, Border Town, a collection of travel sketches, Fragmentary Record of a Journey through Hunan, and an autobiography, Ts'ung-wen's Autobiography. Border Town was prefaced by a kind of manifesto (also included in Old Letters Preserved) in which Shen proclaims his allegiance to values that already belonged to the past and defends his story against the anticipated hostility of critics and public. He begins:

1. 懷古的遐情: Border Town, Preface, p.4.
2. Wen-li Publishing Co., Hong Kong 1960. Also published in SF, where it is said (p.311) to have been completed on the 19th. of April 1934, revised at Kunming in October 1940, and, finally, checked again in January 1957 "at the Peking Museum of History, 23 years since it was first begun".
3. Cp. also the Preface to The Long River, p.iii: "Although the straightforwardness and sincerity of the characters in Border Town have now become things of the past, there should still remain something of their essence in the blood or dreams of young people, whose self-respect and self-confidence may be thereby rekindled in the right environment."
For farmers and soldiers, I have cherished an affection which words cannot express. This feeling is in all my works and appears everywhere in them. I have never concealed it.1

This is of course an exaggeration: not all the farmers and soldiers in Shen's earlier work are regarded by him with wholehearted affection, and one recalls, for example, the narrow-mindedness of the countryfolk in "Husband and Wife" or "Hsiao-hsiao", and the callousness of the soldiers in "The One Who Came to Town" or "My Education". Nevertheless, it is substantially true, and the exaggeration, together with the defensive note struck in the last sentence, suggests that Shen had now become fully aware of values to which he had previously adhered less consciously.

He goes on to make it clear that the essential aim of his work is now the celebration of the rapidly vanishing world depicted in Border Town, and the recording of the "loves and hates, the sorrows and joys" of the people who inhabit it. He is aware that this cuts him off from contemporary fashions, and will displease the literary theorists, the critics, and even the majority of readers, who only follow the lead of these first two groups. Shen, however, is defiantly unconcerned. He knows that the book is "useless" by contemporary standards, but even if the

book were not totally rejected by most readers, "the book's author has long since determined to reject this 'majority'." Shen concludes by describing the kind of open-minded reader he hopes for, and says that he hopes to follow Border Town up with a contrasting piece showing the devastation wrought in the countryside and the country people's souls by the last twenty years of civil war.

Border Town itself is a basically simple story, as is usual with Shen, but its twenty-one short chapters contain a harmonious blend of most of the features to be found in his earlier stories about the peaceful countryside. One notes again the presence of a ferryman, a young country maid, bridal sedan-chairs, boatmen, riverside prostitutes, waterfront streets, water-mills, soldiers and buglers, and such other favourite Shen motifs as love songs and songs to invoke the blessings

1. Border Town, p.3.
2. As in "Quiet". Shen's interest in such ferries dates from his early trip to Szechwan. See Autobiography, p.119.
3. Border Town, pp.5, 34.
4. Ibid., p.11.
5. Ibid., pp.10-11.
6. Ibid., pp.9-10.
7. Ibid., pp.57-8.
8. Ibid., p.8.
9. Ibid., pp.77-78, 84-85.
of the gods,\(^1\) shooting stars,\(^2\) and limpid water in which the fish and pebbles can be clearly seen.\(^3\) All this adds up to a vivid picture of Shen’s ideal countryside.

The characters, similarly, recall those of earlier stories. The two sons of the wharfmaster Shun-shun particularly the younger, are obviously descended from Shen’s other ideal young heroes, like those of "Under a Separate Administration" and the Miao stories, although here Shen has at last succeeded in reducing his heroes to life-size without sacrificing their ideal qualities. Ts’uei-ts’uei\(^4\) too is the last of a long line of young heroines. She is in fact very like San-san: as Liu Hsi-wei\(^5\) , in a warmly appreciative essay on Border Town published two years later, points out, these two characters, like their predecessors, "conform to a common type".\(^6\) Finally, the old ferryman, so close to a death which is continually hinted at and finally comes, is reminiscent of the old innkeeper of "A Little Scene in Kweichow" and the puppeteer of "Living", although here the memories of his dead daughter, which continually afflict him, are counterbalanced by the

1. Ibid., pp.46-48.
2. Ibid., p.120.
3. Ibid., pp.1, 7.
living presence of his grand-daughter, who "makes him feel the power of life when the sun rises, and, when it sets, keeps him from considering how he too is dying with it". As a result, he is himself much more alive than his two melancholy predecessors.

Each chapter of the story is a carefully constructed vignette, showing a particular stage in the development of the narrative, and depicting one or more characters from a slightly different angle, thus giving them a greater degree of individuality as events progress. Because the chapters have the air of being self-contained, they are linked together less by formal continuity of narrative than by the place of each in the development of the story as a whole, and by the recurrence of certain motifs. As examples of the last device, one might mention the hints of death which run through the whole story; the succession of Dragonboat Festivals in the early chapters; the subsequent allusions to No-sung's jocular warning to Ts'uei-ts'uei that a big fish might come and bite her; the fact that Ts'uei-ts'uei dreams of running off to Taoyuan to cross Lake Tungting and that,

2. Ibid., pp.28, 33.
3. Ibid., p.24. The fish here plays the same symbolic role as the fisherman in "San-san".
4. Ibid., pp.79-80.
when No-sung leaves home, it is to Taoyuan that he goes;¹ and finally the geomantically important white pagoda near the ferry,² which appears on the first page of the story, collapses during a storm on the night of the old ferryman's death, and is rebuilt on the last page. The very fact that Shen deals only with a small number of characters in a restricted environment also helps to bind the story together.

In keeping with his didactic intention, Shen deliberately idealizes his characters and the peaceful countryside in which they live, and he sometimes points the moral explicitly:

Since they consider principle more important than profit, and can be faithful and true, even though they are prostitutes, they are generally more trustworthy than less shameless city-folk.³

"...famous men? I don't think it matters much if this little place of ours doesn't produce any men of that sort. We've intelligent, honest, brave, hard-working youngsters, and that's enough. Like your father and you two brothers...."  

"You're quite right, uncle.....Seeing you so industrious, we young people won't dare let the days go to waste."⁴

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1. Ibid., p.112.
2. Ibid., p.124.
3. Ibid., p.12. In SF p.234, these last are specified as "gentry", who are "punctilious about morality".
4. Border Town, pp.52-3.
But the moralism does not get out of hand, and the idealization is never carried to the point of distortion, as in the Miao stories, for Shen is writing here of people and places that he knows intimately and can therefore depict in a thoroughly realistic manner.

*Border Town* has been called "for the most part an idyllic exercise"¹ and, more flattering, "an idyllic masterpiece"². The idyll, however, is only half the story, and Liu correctly goes on to emphasize the element of sorrow in the story, not as the result of outward circumstances, but as something inherent in the very nature and life of the characters. "The song had a melody of great tenderness, and in its happiness there was a touch of melancholy."³ - these words might be applied to the story itself, and in the end it is the melancholy which lingers, just as Ts'uei-ts'uei, "when she had finished the song...felt a trace of loneliness in her heart".⁴ Ts'uei-ts'uei's loneliness, the result of her love for No-sung, is in fact the heart of the story, the theme of which seems to be that love is inseparable from loneliness, loss of innocence, hostility, and ultimately death.

¹. Hsia, op. cit., p.365.
². Liu Hsi-wei, op. cit., p.74: idyllic is in English.
⁴. Ibid.
So Ts'uei-ts'uei, like San-san, loses her childhood innocence through love: brooding over the beauty and loneliness of the evening, she "felt that she had lost something...Life seemed unbearably commonplace."¹

Again, love and hatred are inseparable. As in San-san, love is associated with an image of aggression (here, being bitten by a big fish), and the two brothers become full of anger as a result of their love for Ts'uei-ts'uei. Even Ts'uei-ts'uei's love for her grandfather is not unmixed with hostility. When he fails to meet her after the boat races, a "strange" and "fearful" thought keeps crossing her mind: "Supposing Grandpa is dead?"² And later, in a daydream, she sees herself running off to Taoyuan while her grandfather, unable to find her, lies down on the ferry. Someone asks him what the matter is. He says:

"What's the matter? Ts'uei-ts'uei's run off and gone down to Taoyuan!"
"What'll you do about it?"
"What'll I do? I'll take a knife, put it in my bundle, and catch the river boat to go and kill her!"³

Finally, death is associated with love throughout the story. Thus it was love which killed Ts'uei-ts'uei's

¹. Ibid., p.79. SF p.280, makes the point clearer by commencing the sentence: "As her life matured, she felt..."
². Border Town, pp.21, 22.
³. Ibid., p.80.
parents, for they were unable to marry, and her father, a soldier, had died from swallowing poison, while her mother committed suicide soon after Ts'uei-ts'uei was born. Similarly, the wharfmaster's son T'ien-pao's death is the indirect result of his love for Ts'uei-ts'uei; and Ts'uei-ts'uei and her grandfather are bound together by death no less than love, for he always fears that she will die in the same way as her mother, through an unhappy love affair, while his own death is constantly anticipated by both of them. This mingling of love and death in the story partly reflects Shen's own mixed feelings concerning the world depicted therein: his love for it, and his painful awareness of the inevitability of its destruction.

As a companion volume to Border Town, Shen later published a collection of eleven travel essays, recording the same trip that had inspired the story. These vivid and gracefully-written sketches speak for themselves and require little comment. The first records a meeting with his old friend Tseng Ch'in-hsüan, now the landlord of an inn in Wuling (Changteh). The second, "Taoyuan and Yuanchow", describes the things that he saw in Taoyuan. He is, as always, mainly concerned with people, and has

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1. In SF he dies less dramatically but perhaps more convincingly from an illness.
much to say about the prostitutes and the boatmen here. The third records an overnight stop on the river. The sailors go ashore to visit the women in the stilt-houses by the water, and here Shen recalls his own "Pai-tzu", as he was to do again shortly afterwards at Shenchow. Once again, as throughout the book, Shen displays a keen interest in all that he saw and heard, observing the comings and goings of the men, depressed by the piteous bleatings of a lamb, or reflecting on the conflict between man and nature after being wakened by the lights of fishermen at midnight.

The fourth essay, "The 18th. of January 1934", describes his arrival at his "second native district" Shenchow. He is particularly impressed by the 77-year old man who helps haul the boat up some rapids, seeing in him a "Tolstoy", as "hardy as an ancient Roman", but he pities his strenuous life. Coming to Shenchow again after sixteen years absence, he is overwhelmed by nostalgia, and deeply moved by the unchanging life of the common people, beside which history has nothing more important to tell.
to tell than "tales of mutual slaughter". Here too Shen meets his long-lost Tiger Cub serving as a sergeant under Shen's elder brother, who is now an army officer stationed in Shenchow.

The fifth essay contains anecdotes about "A Warm-hearted Sailor and a Warmhearted Woman", the former being a young sailor from another boat with whom Shen had spoken, and the latter an unhappy young woman whom he met onshore at a later stopping-place. "Sailors on a Little Boat on the Ch'en River" deals with the crew of his own boat, and the next piece describes his arrival at Box Cliffs, where he had witnessed the dragon-boat races fourteen years before. The beauty of such things, he laments, is beyond the power of words to convey, especially to a city-dweller who has never seen them. Once again he is moved to reflect on the nature of history, and on the people here in this obscure spot, whose closeness to and harmony with nature seems to him to give them greater knowledge than is possessed by "any wise man in the world".

1. Ibid., p.36. Shen's sentiments here are those of Thomas Hardy's "In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations'" (1915): "Only thin smoke without flame/ From the heaps of couch-grass;/ Yet this will go onward the same/ Though Dynasties pass." (The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy, Macmillan, London 1928, p.511.

2. Ibid., p.73.
The abundance of coal in the area leads Shen to devote most of the next chapter to a seven-year old story concerning a miner who became a bandit leader and eventually died in the old tunnel into which he had thrown the body of the first man he had murdered. The ninth essay is of special interest, for it describes how he first encountered a young woman called Ts'uei-ts'uei in Luki many years ago, the model for his heroine of the same name in *Border Town*. During his first journey to Shenchow his boat, with thirteen young soldiers in it, had had to remain behind at Luki for a time, while the rest of the boats, except for two others which carried uniforms, went on ahead. The youngest of the group of thirteen, No-yu was one of Shen's two closest friends at the time. He fell in love with Ts'uei-ts'uei, the girl in the wool-and-cotton shop in Luki, and vowed that he would marry her when he became an adjutant. Shen and No-yu next saw the girl again three years later, when returning home on leave. Soon after, they returned to Shenchow together, and it was No-yu with whom Shen was obliged to

2. The same *no* as in the name of Ts'uei-ts'uei's lover No-sung in *Border Town*.
3. Above, p.93.
catch frogs for the chief adjutant. When they were discharged, they lost touch with one another.

Now he was back in Luki, Shen went to the wool-and-cotton shop, where he thought at first that he saw Ts'uei-ts'uei quite unchanged. The white mourning band in her hair, however, showed Shen, when her father appeared, that her mother, the original Ts'uei-ts'eui was dead. Her father was No-yu, but he seemed like an old man already, owing to the ravages of time and opium. He did not recognize Shen, who left without disclosing his identity. Shen felt deeply troubled, but the sound of song from a boat on the river distracted him from his grief for the past: "...I smiled. I was willing to live for another seventeen years, and see once again everything that I could." It would seem that this incident and the memories which it recalled provided something of both the material and the melancholy of Border Town.

The tenth chapter is concerned with the Tiger Cub's history and Shen's present meeting with him. The last chapter, "A Friend who was Proud of his Nose", deals with

1. Above, pp.93-4.
2. Above, p.97.
a friend surnamed Yin, whom Shen had known in Paotsing.¹ Yin's abilities and his physiognomy (particularly the shape of his nose) seemed to promise an illustrious future, and he did in fact have the ambition to become a great man. He joined the Communist Party and wanted Shen to turn his writing ability to political ends, but Shen was not interested. Now Yin had become an important official, and Shen records their meeting here and their final parting.

These last four pieces are in a sense separate from the rest of the book, for one is a straightforward story and the other three are in the same autobiographical vein that Shen had often worked in before. The travel essays proper, however, showing Shen as the observer of life, the one who "never wearies of looking at everything",² strike a new note in his work. Both these aspects of Shen - the descriptive writer and the autobiographical essayist - meet in the last major work to be produced as a result of his trip to Hunan: his Autobiography. Just as Border Town sums up many trends in his earlier fiction, so the Autobiography sums up much of his nonfictional

1. See above, p.120.
writing. It begins with an account of Fenghwang itself and covers his life up to the age of twenty. It is the most important of all Shen's works for an understanding of his life and art, but requires little comment here, for enough of it has been quoted above\(^1\) to give an idea of its style and contents.

After his return from Hunan, Shen seems to have settled down again to the comparatively peaceful life which he had been living since the previous year. In 1933 Japanese troops had invaded the Peking area, and in May a truce had been signed at Tangku declaring a broad demilitarized zone just north of Peking. This zone, however, and to some extent Peking itself, remained largely under Japanese control. Consequently, apparently as a patriotic gesture, Shen had resigned his post as teacher at the National University in order to work with some friends, who were also teachers, at compiling basic reading material for students in North China. His official title now was only Assistant Primary School Teacher of Chinese, but this did not bother him, especially since prominent academics were among his co-workers.\(^2\) He worked at this task for four years, which he describes as

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"simple" and "happy" ones\(^1\) (although a preface written at the end of 1935 suggests that they were far from wholly happy\(^2\)), until war finally broke out in 1937.

In Peking, which one of his friends had described as "dead"\(^3\), Shen seems to have found the literary scene less dominated by cliques and less disturbed by social life than in Shanghai. Here, he felt, writers pursued their aims more as separate individuals and worked harder at perfecting their art. Consequently, he says, the North produced a number of "forceful and vivid authors" who became known, not only by reputation, but also by their "excellent writings". Among them, he mentions the playwright Ts'ao Yü 曹禺, the poets Pien Chih-lin 丁文林 and Ho Ch'i-fang 何其芳, the poet and essayist Li Kuang-t'ien 李廣田, and the writers Lin Huei-yin 林徽因, Lu Fen 蘆焚 (or Shih T'o 師陀), Hsiao Ch'ien 蕭乾 and Li Chien-wu 李健吾. He also pays tribute to the good work done in supporting the literary ideals expressed by the Literary Supplement to the Ta Kung Pao, of which he himself became editor in 1934, by the critic Chu Kuang-ch'ien 朱光潛, the poet Wen I-to 閻一多, the literary historian Cheng Chen-to 鄭振鐸, the poet and essayist Chu Tzu-ch'ing 朱自清.

1. Ibid., p.95.
the novelist Pa Chin 巴金, and the writers Yeh Kung-chao 葉公超 and Chang Chin-i 章靳以. 1

Most of Shen's own creative work during 1934 is represented by the three volumes inspired by his trip to Hunan. A fourth book, comparable to these in length and importance, had been completed at the end of the previous year, and also appeared, in part, in 1934. Shen had already written a brief biography of Hu Yeh-p'in called About Hu Yeh-p'in 記胡也頻 at the request of a young American who had been working on an English-language Peking newspaper, the Chien Pao 簡報, which carried Chinese literature and literary news. Shen's essay was to appear in the Chien Pao after it had been translated into English, but because the paper closed down before this could be done, it was published in Chinese in the Shanghai Shih Pao 時報 instead. 2 It appeared as a separate work in 1932. 3

After Ting Ling's disappearance in May 1933, Shen followed his earlier work with a more ambitious biography in memory of Ting Ling. In it he describes her parents, her upbringing and schooling, her life with Hu Yeh-p'in in Peking and Shanghai, Hu Yeh-p'in's imprisonment and

3. According to Schyns and others, op. cit., p.345.
execution, and Ting Ling's subsequent life in Shanghai until the time of her arrest. About her actual disappearance he says nothing, but the conclusion of the book shows that he assumes that she is dead. About Ting Ling is more than a simple biography of its subject and a testimony to Shen's affection for her. Its pages also contain vividly related stories and anecdotes, of which the visit by Shen and Ting Ling to the jail is the longest and most striking example,¹ a fair amount of autobiography, some social and literary criticism, and much thoughtful examination of character and human relationships. Perhaps the most important thing about the work is that it portrays Shen's urban environment with something of the comprehensiveness and clarity apparent in the description of the Hunan countryside in his Autobiography, his travel books, and his long stories like Border Town and The Long River. Considered purely as biography, About Ting Ling might be regarded as too sketchy and subjective, but as a picture of three young writers and their life in China during the '20s and '30s, or simply as another examination of "human life", it is among Shen's most outstanding works.

¹ Ting Ling II, pp.63-79.
Apart from the four book-length works, one short story is available from 1934. Called "The One Who Crossed the Mountain Pass" 1, it is a wartime piece comparable to "Dark Night". The atmosphere - this time of an oppressively hot and still afternoon, threatening rain - is evoked with a skill comparable to that of the earlier story, but the plot is slighter and the pace of the narrative slower. Once again there are only two characters, an older and a younger man, but this time it is the latter who is killed. The theme is the senselessness of war, and the sentiments are fatalistic: the dead can only be left to rot, while the survivors must go on living as best they can. The only other item from 1934 is a letter written at the beginning of the year to the Literary Supplement of the Ta Kung Pao. 2 Decrying "laziness" and "superstition" and calling for "honest" and "independent-minded" authors, it is similar in tone to the one he had had published three years before.

1. First appearing, like some of the pieces making up Hunan Journey, in the Literary Supplement to the Ta Kung Pao, it was omitted from the first edition of Eight Coursers, but appears in the third with a number of excisions, which remain in the latest printing in SF.

A few stories date from the following year (1935). "The Counsellor" 顧問官 is a satirical story set in an army-occupied town. The old "counsellor" of the title is serving here, after a long and chequered career, both as military adviser to the officers and business adviser to the local merchants. Although the merchants respect him as an intellectual, most of his advice is based on what he has read in the Shun Pao and is anything but reliable. At the beginning of the story he is poor, but when he secures the job of supervising the opium tax through the good offices of an influential friend, he is soon able to make a large, illegal profit, and he becomes comparatively wealthy. Now he is able to join in playing mahjong with the chief officers, where he takes the place of the military judge, who is suffering from a headache, for he had hoped to get the tax-supervising job for a relative. "Thus", Shen ironically concludes, "did a local 'intellectual' temporarily disappear."2 The satire here is trenchant but less bitter than in some earlier stories, and it is tempered by humour and compassion. The counsellor himself, despite his faults, is treated sympathetically, and is shown to

1. April 1935. It appears in Eight Coursers and SF.
2. SF, p.327.
be generous¹ and genuinely fond of his wife and of his friend.

"Big and Little Juan" 大小元² develops a character contrast that was adumbrated in "Dr. Jo-mo". "Big Juan" and "Little Juan" are uncle and nephew, but they are so similar in age and temperament that they are more like brothers or close friends. There remains a basic difference between them, however, which became apparent soon after their entry into an exclusive middle school in Hankow in 1923, for Big Juan joined the "Gentlemen's Society", a group of clever young dandies, while Little Juan joined the "Cudgel Society", which was favoured by sons of the military establishment. When the story begins, it is late at night. Little Juan has wounded a man, and has to flee the school. He wakes his young uncle up, borrows fifty dollars from him, bribes the old watchman, and runs away to Shanghai. His father regards him as a "bolshevist" and will send him no money, but the assistance of friends and other relatives finally enables him to go to Japan to study politics. The Nationalist march

1. Ibid., p.323.
2. April 1935. It appears in Housewife 主婦, Commercial Press 1939, and SF. The title alludes to the poet Juan Chi 元樵 (210-263) and his elder brother's son Juan Hsien 元咸.
north from Canton in 1926-7 recalls him to Hankow after half a year in Japan. He becomes a prominent party official, but narrowly escapes death in the purge which soon follows. He flees to Nanchang and then to Canton, where he takes part in the Communist-led revolt and is arrested. He manages to escape shortly before the three hundred odd others who were arrested with him are executed en masse, and he goes to Peking, where Big Juan is studying foreign literature at the university.

At first meeting the two are hostile, but their basic similarity of temperament soon reconciles them. The disagreement between them, however, has grown with the years: Little Juan is only interested in revolution and sees his friend's way of life as parasitic and frivolous, while to Big Juan, who cares only for art, Little Juan lacks common sense. Soon Little Juan departs again, this time for the mines at Tangshan 唐山 in Hopei. When there is news of a strike by the miners there a fortnight later, and of the execution of the ringleaders, a sorrowful but unsurprised Big Juan assumes that his nephew is dead. He returns eventually to teach at his old school, having married in the meantime, and finds everything changed except the old watchman, who was the first person to appear in the story, and whose calm acceptance of the flow of life gives him the air of a sage in Big Juan's
eyes. In 1935, Big Juan unexpectedly learns that Little Juan has actually been in prison since the Tangshan affair and has recently died as the result of a hunger strike. Uncertain at first how to mark the occasion of his friend's death, Big Juan finally decides to give the old watchman a year's free supply of the wine which he loves to drink, while he himself continues to pass his days in peace and contentment.

The story may be considered from several angles. First of all, it is a study in character, the contrast between the two Juans being examined in the light of their underlying similarity of temperament. Again, it is an exploration of conflicting ideas and values - those of the revolutionary versus those of the politically conservative artist - through the effect which they have on the character and behaviour of those who hold them. Most of all, however, it is an analysis of the tragic dilemma of modern China, as seen through Shen's eyes. Here, Little Juan represents one common reaction to the situation, that of the revolutionary, the person who hopes to perfect the world through violent political activity. Shen pays full tribute to his sincerity and courage, but at the same time his open contempt for Big Juan's way of life contrasts unpleasantly with the latter's humility and tolerance, and in the end, as with many of...
Shen's own revolutionary acquaintances, his ideals lead only to his own destruction.

Big Juan, on the other hand, representing another common response to the troubles of the times, prefers to ignore his country's ills and to busy himself with study, entertainment, literary activities and purely personal concerns. He is therefore shown to be indolent and self-centred, despite the fact that he possesses a humility and generosity which his more narrow-minded nephew lacks. Thus Shen seems to find both the revolutionary and the conservative attitudes admirable in some respects but ultimately inadequate. His attempt to hint at a third alternative in the person of the old watchman who opens and closes the story is unconvincing, for his passive view of life is really only an extension of Big Juan's, and in the end, sympathizing with Big Juan and admiring Little Juan yet conscious of the faults of both, Shen can only marvel at "this strange period" in which "a great many people fall silently and perish in the pursuit of happiness,¹ while many others continue to live in the belief that they are doing so quite happily".²

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1. SF adds "for the majority".
2. Housewife, p.78. SF, p.345, slightly expands the passage.
"Out of Work" (失業) tells how a young graduate from an upper middle-school secures a job as operator of a long-distance telephone exchange in a country town. He is thus ideally placed to learn "what China is like (and)...how the great majority of her people live", but in the end he learns too much of the more sordid aspects of life in the country and he leaves his job, hoping to go to Peking and continue his studies there.

This is the last dated story in the collection *The New and the Old*, so some comment might be appropriately made here on the remaining three undated ones: "Knowledge" (知識), "Suicide" (自殺) and "Three Men and a Woman" (三個男子與一個女人).

"Knowledge" is another Buddhist fable, illustrating equanimity in the face of death, which Shen has retold in his own words and in a purely modern idiom. The place of Sakra, the chief of the gods, is here filled by a landlord's son who is returning to his native district after

1. Based on a work by some other writer which was published in 1935, it appears in *The New and the Old* and *SF*.
4. In the Pāli Canon it forms the *Uraga Jātaka*, No.354.
gaining a university degree overseas. The old peasant has been turned into a kind of Taoist sage, and instead of the Buddhist moral Shen has supplied his own more fatalistic attitude towards death: "As Old Liu said, the dead should be left to their death while the living must continue to live as best they can."¹ In addition Shen has inserted a characteristic moral of his own, contrasting the useless book-learning of the city-dweller with the intuitive wisdom of the countryman. So the young man writes to his formerly revered tutor at the university:

Old cheat, you ought to be dead. You taught me for the last ten years, and yet you are not as clever as a totally illiterate countryman in my district here.... All your knowledge is useless to living men, while of what man needs to know you are totally ignorant!

"Suicide" is of special interest, for Shen has himself provided a commentary on it. The story concerns one Liu Hsi-shun, who teaches psychology at the

¹ The New and the Old, p.138. In fact Old Liu does not say this in the story. Similar words have already been encountered elsewhere in Shen's works and seem to express his own personal view, just as Ts'uei-ts'uei's grandfather (Border Town, p.93) and several other characters appear to do when they utter another favourite phrase: "Everything is the will of Heaven."

² Chiao-shü, literally "taught books".

³ The New and the Old, p.138.
university and is happily married with a one-year old daughter. One afternoon, while talking to his wife about two middle-aged acquaintances who had threatened to commit suicide as a result of marital problems, Liu receives a letter from a Shanghai magazine requesting an article on "Why Men Want to Commit Suicide". A little later he meets a charming young girl of about eleven and learns that both her parents had committed suicide for reasons which will not be made public till she is twenty. All this casts a shadow over the happiness of Liu and his wife, and they both feel vaguely uneasy.

At midnight that night Liu is still pondering the article in his study, but he feels confused and unable to sort out his ideas. He presses his pen to his heart, seems to hear a shot, and tries to imagine that he himself is dead. Now his happiness is over, but, he wonders, "what is happiness? Everybody says I have a lovely wife..." ¹ He goes on to think about the girl he had met in the park. When his wife comes and urges him to go to bed, he says that he is busy. He opens a Russian novel at random and reads of a man tossing on his bed, unable to sleep for thinking of his sweetheart. A storm breaks and, after getting up to close the baby's window,

¹ The New and the Old, p.168.
his wife again gently presses him to retire, but again he refuses. This time she is offended and goes out slamming the door. Following her, he finds her weeping on the bed. She accuses him of not loving her any more, but just then the baby cries and she hurries out of the room. Left alone, Liu absently presses a finger to his breast, and "again he seemed to hear a 'bang' from somewhere". He lies down and kisses his wife's pillow, as if in answer to her reproach, and he recalls the story he had been reading:

> It seemed that a faint melancholy continued to invade his life from some unknown source. He wanted to make an effort to get rid of it, but he was unable to do so.

The tenderness with which Shen writes of Liu's wife and child here suggests that the story postdates his own marriage and perhaps the birth of his first child. The idea that some subtle but essential quality has been lost from the outwardly happy relationship between husband and wife may also reflect something of Shen's own problems at this time, for the same theme is dealt with more fully and explicitly in the largely autobiographical "Housewife" (1936). Finally, the situation in which Liu is depicted here - sitting up late at night trying to

1. Ibid., p.172.
2. Ibid.
write but unable to order his thoughts - must have been common with Shen, for the 1945-6 "Housewife" shows him doing this very thing, and, like Liu, ignoring his wife's advice to give up his project and go to bed.¹

All this suggests an autobiographical basis for the story, but "a certain professor" seems to have felt that he had been satirized in the person of Liu, and Shen wrote him a letter² denying this and explaining what he was trying to do in the story. It was not his intention, Shen insists, to satirize anybody, and certainly not a specific individual. His concern was rather to "explore a theme" which he wanted to "analyze and illustrate". This theme was that of the relationship between "love and wonder", as he had announced in the very first sentence of the story. (It was the title of a lecture which Liu had just given.) His aim was to show that "love has nothing to do with beauty, that habit can dissipate love, and that love will come into being if a sense of wonder can be aroused".³ He therefore wanted to contrast the apparent happiness of Liu and his wife with the underlying sense of emptiness which the loss of "wonder" and the consequent fading of love had brought into

1. SP, pp. 42, 44.
3. Ibid., p. 15.
their lives. So he had Liu's wife arranging forget-me-nots at the beginning of the story, as a clear sign that "the man had already forgotten the woman".

Shen's account of how he developed this theme shows the careful thought which he put into the construction of his stories:

First I described the atmosphere of the family and the wife's beauty, and then I had them chat casually for a while in order to establish the theme. Next I turned to the life of the couple themselves and said how happy this professor was; both he himself and outsiders acknowledged this happiness as being something which divorce and suicide could not touch. A little later, however, he chanced to go to the park, see a girl and hear a story, and when he returned home, because he was writing an article too, his fruitless reflections made him very weary. Then he actually thought of committing suicide. Although his wife was very beautiful, she was unable to move his heart. In his happy life there was a deficiency which he could not perceive; subconsciously he loved what was already past and what was not yet fully grown, while he felt that the present had become very commonplace.¹

The only fault one might find with this explanation is that it tends to gloss over the idea of suicide itself, although it is suicide which provides the title for the story, and one might argue that the hidden sense of meaninglessness in the relationship between husband and wife is only a symptom of the deeper fear that life itself is meaningless.

¹. Ibid., pp.15-16.
The last story from The New and the Old, “Three Men and a Woman”, is Shen's second and much more impressive attempt to make fictional capital out of an incident from his youth.¹ He has retained the essential facts as given in the Autobiography, but has provided them with a lengthy fictional prelude. The events are seen through the eyes of an army corporal, the narrator, and of his friend, a young bugler who had been crippled by an accident. The story is a fine one, but is straightforward in style and contains no special features requiring comment, especially since the original incident has already been described above. One minor point of interest is that Shen has provided the heroine with two white dogs - animals which seem to function in some of his stories as a symbol of virginal purity. Thus San-san also dreamt of "a big dog, white all over" which rushed barking from her house and pushed the "two bad men" into the water,² while Yao-yao in The Long River has a white dog³ whose moral character is confirmed by the fact that, according to his owner, he will not bite good people but only bad ones.⁴

¹ Above, pp.68-9, 288-90.
² SF, pp.173-4.
³ The Long River, p.62.
⁴ Ibid., p.135.
Another undated story, this time from *Spring Lamp*, might also be mentioned here. Called "Number Four", it is presented as a true love-story concerning, apparently, the "talkative friend" to whom it is dedicated. In it Shen's friend (assuming that the narrator is in fact Shen himself) tells him how he had fallen genuinely in love for the first time, with a beautiful young woman married to a clergyman fifteen years her senior. The two lovers had eventually planned to elope together, but the woman's injury in a car accident and the skilful tenderness with which her husband subsequently cared for her had brought the whole affair out into the open, and Shen's friend had found himself utterly defeated by the clergyman's wisdom and patient understanding. The day after this tale, Shen read in the newspaper that a clergyman had just been killed in that same district, but his friend had already departed and Shen was unable to contact him. In the end a letter came from Peking announcing his friend's engagement to a medical student, and Shen cast the letter together with the newspaper-clipping into the fire, where he watched them turn to ashes with the feeling that "I myself had become intimately involved in a tragedy, and I remained abstracted for a long time".  

"A Portrait of Eight Coursers" is another story concerned with love. The title refers to the eight occupants of a boarding-house by the sea at Tsingtao, all of them guest lecturers at a summer school, the principal of which has called them, and the other lecturers, "thousand-li horses" because of their eminence in their respective disciplines and the distance which they have come. The central figure is Chou Ta-shih, a writer renowned for his love-stories. He is soon to be married and, like Shen, writes to his fiancée constantly. To her he undertakes to describe his fellow-boarders, and these portraits form the basis of the story, although most of the descriptions are in fact narrated directly and not put into epistolary form.

Six of the men are suffering from what Ta-shih sees as some form of love-sickness. One eyes the young women students, another is in love with a woman but refuses to tell her so, a third, divorced after a year of marriage, is cynical about wives, and so on. Only Ta-shih and an economist who is constantly in the company of a beautiful

1. First published in Literature Magazine in August 1935, it appears in the December 1935 collection of which it is the title-story and, with revisions, in Spring Lamp.
2. Spring Lamp, p.57.
young woman appear to be truly in love and "healthy". Ta-shih is curious about this couple, but, partly because he finds the young woman attractive, he is careful to stay out of their way. Just before he is to leave Tsingtao, however, an anonymous note and some writing in the sand reveal that the woman is also drawn to him. Consequently he sends a telegram to his fiancee informing her that he has "contracted a slight illness" and will stay for another three days in the hope of curing it. The story is of course another illustration of the generally unhealthy state of the emotions of city-dwellers, particularly when they are also intellectuals. Shen sees it\(^1\) as a companion piece to "Pai-tzu", for the "good and bad qualities of the town and the country, and the loves and hates of the intelligentsia and the working-class" are "clearly and concretely reflected" in the two stories.

At the end of 1935 appeared the volume for which "A Portrait of Eight Coursers" provided the title. It was introduced by a short preface, written on the 10th of December, which is remarkable for its bitterness. Shen complains here that he is "ridiculed by the world", and that most of his time is taken up with "tiring and profitless duties" which prevent him writing. "To live in China

\(^1\) "Exercise", A-chin pp.4-5.
and be a man", he says, "is by no means easy", for "most people are thoroughly lazy, inhibited, and petty, and they all lack sufficient nourishment, sleep and virility". They believe that "though one is not considered clever oneself, one may ridicule what others do" - a "eunuch's view" which "reflects the decline of society and the nation". Apparently Shen's work had been under critical attack, but despite his difficulties, he concludes with the hope that he will find fresh strength to continue his creative work in the coming year, this collection serving in the meantime as a reminder that he has not forgotten his past work or completely lost his capacity for writing.

Despite Shen's hopes, 1936 does not seem to have been a very prolific year, for of the four volumes said\(^1\) to have been published then, one is The New and the Old,\(^2\) which contains nothing new, while the others appear to be merely collections of past work. Another different sort of collection is also said\(^3\) to have appeared in this year, namely Old Letters Preserved. The second half of this book is actually by Hsiao Ch'ien 謝, but the first

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1. Schyns and others, op. cit., p.78.
2. But this is also said, ibid. p.281, to have been published in 1940.
3. Ibid., p.345.
half by Shen contains two essays - the preface to *Border Town* and "The Importance of Water to my Works" - and a number of letters or extracts from letters. Three of these letters have already been mentioned; the rest are undated and addressed to people identified only as "a poet", "a writer of fiction", "a university student", "a certain professor", "a certain author", "a reader" and so on.

To these anonymous correspondents Shen offers advice on literature and life. He urges an aspiring writer, for example, to experience as many different things and read as widely as possible. Another letter suggests three possible solutions to an unhappy professor's personal problems, while to a fellow author with a passion for the French Revolution Shen recommends more calmness and objectivity and a greater knowledge of recent Chinese history. In his remarks on literature, he repeatedly stresses the need for constant self-discipline and practice, and for wide and critical reading - evidence of his own serious and thoroughly professional attitude towards his craft. "Writing fiction", he says, "is like any other job and demands proper study", while to someone else he points out that it takes two years to train to be a barber and asks him if he would become an author in less.

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Of the three available stories dated 1936, something has already been said about "Existence".\(^1\) The rest of the story tells how the young painter's wife, who is dying of consumption in the country, urges him in a letter to forget her and continue with his work. He gives away half the money she sends him, so that a sick friend might go to hospital, and on his return home he resolves to continue struggling to make his way in the world, in accordance with his wife's advice and with the sick man's familiar recommendation that the dead will die and the living must make the best of life while they can. At the same time, however, he cannot help weeping unrestrainedly into his pillow.

"Son of the Wang and Hsieh" 王謝子弟\(^2\) is a satirical portrait of a wastrel member of a wealthy gentry family, and it therefore has something in common with "Gentry Wife". Shen constructs the story in accordance with a pattern that is found in a number of his later stories, such as "Mud" 濁塗, "The Counsellor" or "Big and

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1. Above, pp.150-1.

2. Peking 1936. It appears in SF and Housewife. The Wang and Hsieh are used as the type of wealthy and eminent families in general, while the word tzǔ-tì, translated "son", means the younger generation of "sons and younger brothers" and may be used with the implication of dissoluteness.
Little Juan": that is, he begins with the present situation, then recapitulates the events that have led up to it, and finally takes the situation he began with on to its conclusion. Thus he adds a degree of variety and interest to the line of the narrative.

So Shen begins the present story by showing his hero, Ch'ı-yeh (七 日："Seventh Master", referring to his place in the family line), transacting some family business in Tsingtao and waiting impatiently for more funds from his reluctant brothers at home. He then describes his past history: his scapegrace childhood, his marriage, his disastrous business investment in a foreign-goods shop, his equally comical and catastrophic experiment in farming, and his brief career as an army officer. Returning to the present, Shen makes it clear that Ch'ı-yeh's current business is no less hopeless, and that he is surrounded by parasites - his servant, the old bawd who keeps the nearby brothel, and his crooked lawyer - of whose duplicity he is blissfully unaware. When the long-awaited money arrives, Ch'ı-yeh invests some in the business, but uses the rest to set up house with a young prostitute whom he hopes to turn into a "poetess". He soon loses interest in this latter project, however, and before long his mistress is also deceiving him. At this point Shen leaves his hero to continue his
absurd career, deceived by all but quite content with himself and sure of his own perspicacity.

Although this fine story may be classed as satirical, there is little trace of anger or indignation in it, and the warning which prefaced "Gentry Wife" is even more appropriate here. Not only does the hero himself arouse pity and amusement rather than anger, but even the unscrupulous parasites who surround him are treated in a disinterested and almost sympathetic manner. That "Son of the Wang and Hsieh" is superior to most of Shen's other satirical stories ("Gentry Wife" being the exception) is no doubt largely owing to this detached and sympathetic tone, which is more in accord with Shen's genius than castigation, as he suggests himself:

In writing fiction... my aim has never altered from the beginning. It is to depict a corner of man's life in words, to explain a phenomenon. I have not felt it necessary to attack anybody, and I have no interest in attacking anybody.... I am by nature capable of respect and sympathy for all living men, and I have never felt that anyone was my enemy.¹

"Housewife" ² follows the same structural pattern as the preceding story and further enlarges on the theme which Shen had treated in "Suicide": the

¹ Old Letters Preserved, p.16.
² Written at Peking in 1936 and revised the following year, it appears in Housewife and, with further revisions, in Black Phoenix.
weakening of love by the routine of married life. Written\(^1\) as a present for his wife on their third wedding anniversary, it shows the housewife Pi-pi 碧碧 lying in bed on the morning of her own third wedding anniversary and recalling her husband's long courtship of her, and then the years of their marriage, outwardly happy but marked by the gradual loss of "wonder" 敬雅 in his love for her, and by her own growing resentment of this. Her meditations are interrupted at last when her husband, who has also been thinking of their relationship outside in the courtyard, comes in to greet her. It is clear at the end that they love one another, but they still feel slightly unhappy, for he is unable to "belong completely to her" as she wants him to.\(^2\)

Shen composed the original story, he says,\(^3\) in ten hours, but it is written in a fluid and expressive style that has been praised by C.T. Hsia.\(^4\) It is also carefully constructed, and character and theme are developed, through Pi-pi's memories and reflections, with considerable subtlety. It is difficult to say how much of the story is fact and how much fiction, but Shen says in the second

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1. See the later "Housewife", SP p.37.
2. Black Phoenix, p.66.
3. SP, p.37.
"Housewife" that Pi-pi was intended as a portrait of his own wife, and the husband clearly resembles Shen in many respects: in his slight build, in the long letters which he wrote to his wife before they were married, in some of the details of his courtship, and in his "character, in love with human life, rich in dreams, and careless of reality".

The essay "Exercise", written at about this time, is an apology for his life and work, addressed to his readers. Here, with a mixture of humility and pride, he accepts the description of "vacuous author" applied to him by Han Shih-heng, asserts the need for individualism on the part of the artist, and claims, in an incongruous metaphor, that his only desire is "to build a little Greek temple" which he will dedicate to "human nature".

He speaks again of the gulf between a countryman (himself)

2. Ibid., pp.56-7; cp. above, pp.315-6.
3. Ibid., p.60; cp. above, pp.312-3.
4. It mentions the story "A Portrait of Eight Coursers", composed in 1935, and is a preface to a collection of "twenty short pieces" marking the completion of his "first ten years' work" (A-chin, p.8.), presumably one of the collections published in 1936. It appears in A-chin.
5. Literary Criticism, pp.94-5.
and city-dwellers (his readers), and complains that the latter often miss the point of his works, only "buying the case and returning the pearl".\(^1\) He vigorously attacks the literary critics and theorists, and pleads that his *Border Town* be read without prejudice. Finally, he expresses his gratitude to those who have helped him in his work over the last ten years: to Hsü Chih-mo 徐志摩, Hu Shih 胡适, Lin Tsai-p'ing 林宰平, Yu Ta-fu 郁達夫, Ch'en T'ung-po 陳通伯, and Yang Chin-fu 楊金甫. His greatest debt, he says, is to Hsü Chih-mo, and he claims that any warming "fire" which sympathetic readers may find in his work was originally got from the now dead poet.

The following year (1937) was interrupted by the outbreak of open though undeclared warfare between China and Japan, and only two stories from the earlier part of the year are available: "Kuei-sheng"丂貴生 \(^2\) and "The Reappearance of the Gods" 神之再現.\(^3\) The first of these is a product of Shen's maturest art, and has a truly

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1. Ibid., p.5. The figure is from the Han-fei-tzu 韓非子.
2. Written in March 1937 and revised four times during the next twenty years, it appears in *Black Phoenix*, *Hsiao- hsiao, Housewife* and *SF*.
tragic quality. Kuei-sheng is a young countryman who makes his living by odd jobs and by cutting and selling grass. Living close to nature, he is young, strong, kindly-spoken and by no means stupid, but these virtues, which appear so unreal in most of Shen's other heroes, are offset here by a certain slowness in thought, speech and action, which is to play a crucial part in bringing about the final catastrophe.

The first half of the story establishes the characters and their interrelationships: Kuei-sheng himself, the local landlord (similar in many respects to the hero of "Son of the Wang and Hsieh"), his lecherous elder brother who is visiting him, the landlord's old workman, the owner of the shop by the bridge, his young assistant, and his beautiful young daughter Chin-feng ("Golden Phoenix"), who loves Kuei-sheng. Kuei-sheng, it becomes clear, also loves Chin-feng, and indeed everyone expects them to marry, but, as in many of Shen's stories, "everything is ordained by fate", and fate has already ordained otherwise. Chin-feng's father expresses his willingness to have Kuei-sheng for a son-in-law, but Kuei-sheng still

1. It is interesting to note that Shen regards fatalism as being characteristic of the people of his native province. See West Hunan, Preface, p.2.
2. SF, p.404.
hesitates, partly because of his natural slowness to commit himself to anything, and partly because Chin-feng's physiognomy is inauspicious. (It is revealed towards the end of the story that the combination of their birth-signs, the rat and the tiger, is also inauspicious.)

With its second part the story begins to move step by step towards its conclusion. The landlord's brother attempts to arouse the landlord's interest in Chin-feng, and although the latter shows no immediate enthusiasm, an ominous note is struck when the two men visit Kuei-sheng's house and eat some "eighth-month melons" which Kuei-sheng had been saving for Chin-feng and the apparently phallic shape of which had amused the elder brother. At last Kuei-sheng decides that he will marry Chin-feng, and he goes into town to consult with his uncle. Because the latter is busy, however, there is a fatal delay of two or three days before Kuei-sheng returns with his betrothal gifts.

On the way back he learns that the landlord is also getting married, and he notices that Chin-feng seems unhappy, but it is only on the following day that he understands what has happened. Stunned, he goes to help in the preparations for the wedding, which is to take place that night. The general bustle, the sedan-chair bearers' crude jokes, and the old workman's chatter about the
strange ways of fate all increase Kuei-sheng's confusion and his bitter sense of loss, and at last he slips away from the festivities. At midnight, when all are asleep, the sky glows red and dogs begin to bark. Both the shop by the bridge and Kuei-sheng's house are on fire, but there is no sign of Chin-feng's father, his assistant, or Kuei-sheng. Returning from the fire, the old workman meets the newly-wed couple going in the direction from which he has come:

Uncle Ya-mao stammered: "It's fate, Fifth Master, it's fate." He turned and saw that Chin-feng was weeping, but he thought to himself: "Woman, aren't you happy to be a young wife? Go back and hang yourself with a rope - what are you crying for!"

They all hurried off again towards the place where the fire had started.

"The Reappearance of the Gods" is a less impressive work, for it is only the tenth episode of a longer story called "Feng-tzu", and consequently little can be profitably said of it here. The hero is a city-dweller visiting Miao territory in Western Hunan, and the story examines "country" values against the familiar Miao background of shamanistic ceremonies, beautiful women and singing contests. There is an elaborate ceremony like that described in The Shaman's Love, and at the end a long

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conversation between the hero and his host concerning the survival of the gods in the countryside,¹ which provides a further illustration of the already-noted tendency for some of Shen's later stories to be dominated by prolonged discussion of theoretical issues on the part of the characters. In one or two places the prose style is complex and fanciful in a way that suggests the elaborate sentences and more "classical" vocabulary that Shen was to use in "Learning from Actuality", the second "Housewife" and "Rainbow".

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¹ An extract from this may be found in Hsia, op. cit., pp.189-90, although shen 神 is here misleadingly translated as "God" rather than "god(s)" throughout.
A. Hunan 1937-1938

On July the seventh 1937 fighting broke out between Chinese and Japanese forces not far from Peking. This marked the beginning of the Sino-Japanese war, and two months later¹ Shen Ts'ung-wen fled to the south:

But unfortunately their (literary) work was unable to develop further, for the war came. All the ideals of bookworms, the wealth and influence of others, and the younger generation's beautiful and cherished dreams about the business of life - all alike lost their meaning at once. And then everyone wordlessly destroyed the materials and achievements of several years in the big stove in a large courtyard, hastily left Peiping, and passed through the central and south-western parts of China into Yunnan.²

After leaving Peking, Shen went first to Wuhan, and the winter of 1937 saw him back in West Hunan, where he was able to spend about four months in Fenghwang.³

Once again, as in 1934, he was made painfully aware of the changes being wrought in the countryside, now accelerated by the war and the consequent influx of "outsiders" into Western Hunan. As in 1934 again, his experiences led him to write a long work of fiction and a complementary

¹ Winter Scene in Kunming, p.27.
² "Actuality", p.96.
³ The Long River, p.iv.
book of essays - this time a full-length (though incomplete) novel, *The Long River* 長河, and a descriptive survey of part of his native province, *West Hunan* 湘西.¹

*The Long River* is, as Shen says, "only a commonplace tale",² for his aim here is not so much to tell a story as to portray the life of the countryside in "a corner of Western Hunan", to preserve by his art a world that was already disappearing, and that "was engulfed with the coming of the war".³ In his first chapter, departing from his common practice of filling in the background after the story has begun, Shen gives a panoramic view of the whole countryside by describing the lives of the many kinds of people who inhabit it. There are boatmen, some of whom prosper and are able to buy land, moving up in the social scale, while others die in poverty, perhaps far from their native district. There are also the sons

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1. *The Long River* was re-checked in July 1945, as the note at the end shows, but the date of its original composition is not given. The preface was written eight years after the publication of *Border Town*. (The Long River, p.vii.) The novel was heavily censored on its first publication in Hong Kong (ibid., p.vi), and even the 1960 edition has (p.119) "a large section expunged by the Central Ministry for Propaganda*. West Hunan appears to have been originally composed in 1938, and the final proofs were read in January 1941 at Kunming. (See West Hunan, pp. 31, 95.)


3. Ibid., p.vi.
of the well-to-do who return from their education full of modern ideas, distress their indulgent parents by rejecting the country girls chosen for them and insisting on marrying short-haired schoolteachers, become involved in revolutionary activities and eventually flee or are executed. Then there are the women: girls who are engaged to babies, like Hsiao-hsiao; only daughters seduced by the songs of a bargeman; spinsters and widows, some of whom cause gossip by their love-affairs, while others marry soldiers who are unable to support them and finally sell them into prostitution; women illegitimately pregnant who deliberately induce abortion or, if weaker, commit suicide, the more romantic among them dressing in their best clothes before drowning themselves; other pregnant girls who are whipped by sadistic elders and then married off to someone far away, or else stripped naked, rowed out into the middle of the river in the dead of night with a millstone round their necks, and then silently tossed into the water; capable widows who manage successful businesses; educated young women with advanced ideas about marriage; and simple, sturdy peasant girls educated only in practical skills and fairy-stories.

After this sketch of the countryside and its inhabitants, Shen turns to his story, which unfolds itself with a deliberate slowness befitting the unchanging rhythm
of country life. In fact, the plot consists of little more than the gradual clarification of the relationships between the principal characters. The year is 1931, and the season is autumn: a fruitful autumn, for it has been a good year, but there is clearly significance in the fact that winter is imminent. T'eng Ch'ang-shun is the owner of the area's best mandarine orchard, and his land is considered locally to be of vital geomantic importance, like the white pagoda in Border Town. He is now 56, a former boatman who prospered and was able to settle down, and is highly respected by the local community. He has two sons and three daughters, but only one of the sons and two of the daughters appear in the story. The youngest and prettiest daughter, Yao-yao, is 15 and just engaged to a young man who is away studying. Another of Shen's young country maidens, she is the heroine of the story and its central figure.

The most important male character is T'eng Man-man (a distant relation of the other T'engs), who is referred to as "the old sailor". He is about the same age as Ch'ang-shun, but his experiences have left him white-haired, for when he was still comparatively young and prosperous, he had first lost two of his boats, then his wife and two sons from food poisoning, and finally his last boat, after which he left the district and
was not seen again for fifteen years. When he returned, he found, through Ch'ang-shan's good offices, a job as caretaker of an ancestral hall on Maple Slope, which overlooks the river Ch'en and Ch'ang-shun's mandarine orchard on the other side. Here he also sells refreshments to the travellers on the road which runs past the hall. He is virtually a member of Ch'ang-shun's family now, and is a close friend of Yao-yao's.

The villain of the story is the commander of the local security troops, a non-Hunanese with a city education. On his first appearance, he has just managed to bully the money for some missing guns out of the Chairman of the Traders' Association, Yao-yao's adoptive father, in the local market town of Lüchiap'ing. Three chapters later, he goes to Ch'ang-shun's orchard in hopes of getting a free boatload of mandarines, such as Ch'ang-shun had given to the Chairman of the Traders' Association, which he can sell in Changsha at a handsome profit. He does not realize, however, that the Chairman and Ch'ang-shun are formally "related", nor that the Chairman had insisted on paying half the price of the mandarines, and his scheme eventually comes to nothing. On the way back from the orchard he meets Yao-yao and finds her attractive, and from then on she can never be entirely free from the threat of his
unwelcome attentions. Three chapters later, he encounters her again on Maple Slope, but she is saved from his embarrassing conversation by the arrival of her brother, whom she has been expecting back from a trip down the river.

Yao-yao's brother is a hard-working and quick-tempered young man, loved by his sister and greatly respected by Man-man, but he appears too late to play any important part in the story. The eleventh and last chapter is concerned with a dramatic performance staged with specially imported actors from Pushih浦市 in order to give thanks to the god of the soil for a prosperous year. Ch'ang-shun is in charge of the event, and people come from miles around to watch. Yao-yao is there, but the Commander's persistent gaze drives her down to the river to find her brother. Before long Man-man turns up too, and after the three of them have spoken together for a while, the story ends on an inconclusive note. The Long River is only "the first volume" of what, according to Hsia, was to have been a trilogy. This would explain the incompleteness of the story: why, for example, the

1. Pushih was well-known for such actors: see West Hunan, p.49.
quail hunt which Man-man and Yao-yao agree on never takes place, why Yao-yao's long-awaited brother appears dramatically only at the end of the story, and why the Commander's pursuit of Yao-yao never reaches any kind of conclusion.

The mandarines which the region produces so abundantly are prominent throughout the story and serve as a kind of unifying motif, and as a symbol of all that is valuable in the life of the countryside. They represent, for example, the beauty of the countryside, with their "bright red and yellow, clustered thickly as stars in the sky" among the "dark green of the leaves". And so, when a local sailor is dying in poverty "eight hundred or a thousand li" from his home, a picture of the mandarine groves of his native district is the last thing that stands out clearly in his memory. Moreover, since country life has not changed here in its essentials from the immemorial past, the mandarines bear witness to this timelessness, for

two thousand years ago, when the exiled minister of Ch'ü, Ch'ü Yüan, travelled upstream along the Yüan River in a tiny whitewood boat, he must have seen mandarine groves like these before he wrote his poem "In Praise of the Mandarine-tree 橘頌".

1. The Long River, p.17.
2. Ibid., p.5.
3. Ibid., p.3. The poem referred to forms the eighth of the "Nine Declarations" 九章 of the Ch'ü Tzu 楚辭.
Needless to say, the mandarines also represent the natural life of the country as opposed to the artificial ways of the city, which are satirized by references to citydwellers' attitudes towards mandarines and oranges: the high prices they pay for inferior fruit, their fussy, "modern" concern for "hygiene", and their peculiar way of consuming the fruit, which prompts Yao-yao to tell Man-man that she wants to go to Hankow

"...to see how the cultured people in the city go about eating mandarines, cutting them in half with a knife, squeezing the juice out of them with a little machine, putting the juice in a cup and drinking it with sugar and water. How funny! What are they afraid of? They must be afraid that the seeds will stick in their throats, and that if they swallow them a mandarine tree will grow out of their backs! I don't believe it, I want to see it with my own eyes."¹

Most citydwellers are ignorant of the value of the countryside and its produce, and so most of those that they eat are still imported from America, far away on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. Chinese textbooks and other research studies have not usually made much mention of the fact that many places in several provinces in South China produce mandarines the quality and colour of which are both very good, far surpassing the standard produce of foreign orchards.²

As a result of this ignorance, the mandarines of Western Hunan sell at absurdly cheap prices, for the demand is

¹. The Long River, pp.97-8.
². Ibid., pp.2-3.
slight, and there is not much profit to be made by sending even Ch'ang-shun's superb mandarines down to the city for sale, especially after innumerable tolls have been paid on the way. In particularly fruitful years, in fact, piles of mandarines are often left to rot on the jetties, and Ch'ang-shun is bitter about the suggestion that mandarine trees are "money trees", requiring no outlay of capital in order to reap a regular profit.

Because of their cheapness and abundance, the mandarines are freely given away, and in fact the countryfolk will refuse to accept money for them from individuals. In this way, the mandarines also reflect country generosity, and those that are sold for money in the market-town are not so sweet:

If he should pick mandarines in the orchards, a thirsty traveller may eat them in the villages without having to pay any money. As soon as he reaches Lüchiap'ing, there are "Dog-dung" mandarines 赤甘, which are extremely sour, and although they are not worth much, there is still an old woman who sells them at the ferrying-place.¹

In short, the mandarines, and especially the splendid mandarines from T'eng Ch'ang-shun's orchard, may be taken as Shen's symbol for all that is good in the countryside. Yao-yao puts it simply and forcefully when Man-man suggests that it would be pleasant to be rich and live in

¹. Ibid., p.40.
Yao-yao said: "What would be the fun in that? I want to live in the country."
The old sailor said: "What would you hate to leave?"
"I'd hate to leave the mandarine trees."¹

The central theme of The Long River, as Shen explains himself², is that of permanence versus change, the permanence being represented by the ageless tranquillity of the countryside, and the change by the restless new world of revolutions, cities and mechanized factories. In his development of this theme, Shen makes deliberate use of "rustic humour" to "neutralize the deep pain and melancholy",³ and Hsia⁴ rightly emphasizes the comic element in the story. Yet in the last analysis the work is, as Shen points out,⁵ essentially a "grave and serious" one, and the humour is deliberately inserted for fear "that the work might only leave my readers with an impression of bitterness".⁶

1. Ibid., p.174.
2. "The work was intended to emphasize the intermingling of permanence and change." (Ibid., p.vi.)
3. Ibid.
5. The Long River, p.vi.
6. Ibid., p.v.
On the surface of the story, all seems well. The local countryside is at peace, the weather has been good and the soil fertile, while the mandarines have never been better. Man-man is content, Yao-yao happy and her brother safely returned. It seems only fitting to thank the god of the soil for the blessings he has given the people. Yet all this is threatened by dangers which are no less real for being hidden. From outside the province there come rumours of war and other disturbances, the ripeness of autumn will soon be followed by winter, and the Commander's threat to cut down Ch'ang-shun's mandarin trees, though only bluster, is nevertheless a reminder of what an invading army might do. Nor are the characters as secure as they appear. Man-man's unhappy past life stands as a constant warning of the fragility of Ch'ang-shun's prosperity, Yao-yao is vaguely menanced by the Commander, and her brother, even if he should return safely from his next trip downstream, is still tormented by his anger at the Commander's bullying of his father.

The countryside is still peaceful and prosperous, but it is already threatened by a new and hostile world of warfare and industrial change. Although Man-man's misunderstanding of the nature of the "New Life" movement is comical, and although the more knowledgeable agree that the movement itself can never amount to much more than a
joke in the countryside, the very name nevertheless suggests the coming change and the real "new life" of mechanized oil-factories and giant munition-works which will soon destroy the old ways forever. Man-man's fears are not groundless, but only slightly misdirected:

When Yao-yao said nothing, the old sailor thought again of the "New Life", and he felt a little apprehensive. He believed that as soon as the new life came, the whole original character of the place would have to be suddenly changed, and the life of Yao-yao and her sisters would also have to change. But as he watched the two girls now, trailing their hands in the water beside the boat and fishing floating melon, vine and vegetable leaves from the surface of the water, they were utterly content and at ease.

A more specific threat comes from the Commander. Although he is as much a ridiculous figure as a menacing one, there is no doubt that his lasciviousness is a real danger to Yao-yao and her family, while his threat to cut down the mandarine trees symbolizes his potential danger to the whole community, the prosperity of which is

1. Literally, "nursed a little anxiety of Ch'i 禹". The phrase refers to a story about a man of Ch'i who feared that the sky would fall. It suggests groundless anxiety, but Shen is being ironical in using it here, for Man-man's fears, while groundless in one sense, are not so in another.

2. Sic. Shen, perhaps significantly, omits quotation marks here.

3. The Long River, p.36.
linked up with the geomantic significance of the orchard. Again, as a "cultured" city-bred official with a contempt for the rustic Hunanese, he represents the threatening aspect of the outside world in general, from whence there come ominous rumours of troop movements and open warfare with the Japanese. Already, the people here have had experience of Communist and Nationalist armies, and of revolutions which "when they reach the countryfolk amount only to demands for money". 1

The Chairman, after a moment's silence, said: "Everyone says that the land has been blessed by the mandarine trees, but how are they to know that there are others who are always wanting to get the benefit of our blessings? Not long ago here.....they are unreasonable, what can one do?".... "Last time the Commissioner passed through to inspect the radishes, cabbages and fruits, this gentleman said at the welcoming party the Association held for him: 'Commissioner, apart from a lot of mandarines there's nothing worthwhile in this place, it'd bore you to death!' The Commissioner laughed his head off and said: 'Mandarines are very filling, and if you squeeze the juice out it's good to drink too!' All right let them all squeeze away. Fortunately there are a lot of mandarine trees and they'll never squeeze them dry. And yet if they keep on squeezing, they might still just about do it!" 2

The precariousness of the countryfolk's tranquil existence is suggested by a casual simile, the macabre significance of which could easily pass unnoticed.

1. Ibid., p.46.
2. Ibid., pp.69-70.
Yao-yao has been wanting Man-man to take her to catch quail on an island in the river, but Man-man explains that they will have to wait a week or so till the burning-off in the hills is finished. By then the quail will have come down to the island for refuge, and if anyone tries to catch them they will be unable to escape, for

"...they'll have nowhere else to fly to, and they won't be able to fly anywhere else."

"Why won't they fly?"

Then the old sailor, to tease Yao-yao, gave a strange reason: "Because they're like you, and when they see how good everything is here, they think it is a paradise, and they can't bear to leave it again."1

The implication is clear: Yao-yao is living on an island of peace and happiness surrounded by fires of change. She thinks it is a paradise, but in reality she is trapped.

Towards the end of the book, these fires are alluded to again. Yao-yao is gazing at the peaceful river scene at dusk after the dramatic performance:

Everything that Yao-yao could see from where she was standing on the river bank... formed another touching scene.

The reddish-purple brushfire on the distant hills was fanned by the wind and blazed ever more fiercely.

The old sailor followed Yao-yao, to the bank and also boarded the mandarine boat: "Yao-yao, you see that fire on the hills. It has been burning for over ten days without stopping. It seems as though it'll never go out."

1. Ibid., pp.173-4.
Yao-yao gazed in the direction indicated by the old sailor's pipe and said with a smile: "Man-man, hasn't the little fire in your pipe been burning for several decades without stopping? And the sun that's burning half the sky red has been burning for I don't know how many tens of millions of years. Beautiful things should always last for ever."

The old sailor, as if pursuing the question, said: "What! Beautiful things should last for ever - who's responsible for arranging that?"

Yao-yao said: "I've arranged it."

Here Yao-yao tries to change the subject, but Man-man sighs and resumes:

"Yao-yao, it seems to me that beautiful things can never last for long. Fine bowls are easily broken, fine flowers are easily killed by frost - good people can't have long life. The good die young, and the wicked live for a thousand years...."

Shen's final conclusion concerning the beauty of the world that he has depicted in The Long River would seem, then, to be a gloomy one. He will not give up hope, however, for even should the war bring about a complete transformation in China, to take the character of this society, now almost a historical relic, and preserve it carefully in writing, so that it may be compared with the brand-new circumstances of the "present" - this may very well help us to gain some new social awareness.

West Hunan was conceived as a companion volume to The Long River, and like the latter, only much more

1. Ibid., pp.203-4.
2. Ibid., p.vi.
explicitly, its purpose was informative, for Shen was distressed by the fact that most of the refugees who were pouring into Western Hunan were ignorant of the nature of the country, regarding it only as "bandit territory". ¹ "They are all lacking in true knowledge of the place's bad points", he complains, "and are even less capable of deep love for its good qualities". ² Accordingly, he wrote his two books, a novel and a collection of essays, to educate these outsiders and to convey something of his own "deep love" for the land in which he grew up. In The Long River he examined West Hunan in depth, as it were, while in the volume of essays he is concerned to describe it in a more superficial but more detailed and extensive manner. West Hunan is in fact intended as a sort of guide book:

My aim was merely to save the traveller some unnecessary anxiety, to satisfy some of his inevitable curiosity, and to give him some of the general knowledge which a visitor to Western Hunan should require for his safety and happiness. I also hope that when the reader closes this small book, he will have been given just a little of the sympathy for this out-of-the-way spot that it deserves, for then I will consider that the aim of the work has been realized. ³

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1. Ibid.
2. West Hunan, Preface, p.4.
3. Ibid., Preface, p.3.
The original title of West Hunan was *A Brief Account of the Valley of the Yüan River* 垸水流域識小錄, and Shen prefers this as being more in keeping with the modest scope of the contents. He is not, he explains, setting out to give a comprehensive survey of the whole of West Hunan, together with its economy, politics, culture and so on. He is only concerned with what a traveller might see along the Hunan-Kweichow Highway, the things that could easily strike his eyes when he gets out of his car, the consequences that could easily arise when he stays somewhere, and the arguments that could easily come up in a conversation: trivial things like these...

The book is planned to accord with an imaginary traveller's route as he passes through Hunan to Kweichow, and Shen discusses each place in turn, interspersing his descriptions of landscapes, towns, and the customs and livelihood of the people with occasional anecdotes and brief stories.

In the "Prologue" 子, after some introductory remarks, and a brief description of Changsha, Shen takes his imaginary traveller from Changsha to Wuling (Changteh), where West Hunan proper may be said to begin. The next essay, "The Boats of Changteh", describes the various boats to be seen at Changteh, the goods they carry, the

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1. West Hunan, p.3.
routes they ply, and the men that sail them. Taoyuan, a popular tourist resort ninety li upstream, is also described, with its prostitutes and its busloads of tourists. "The People of Yuanling" 湯陵的人 takes the traveller to Yuanling (Shenchow). Almost all the workers here are women, for most of the men have become soldiers, or bandits. Here Shen also tells the story of Yao-yao, the young daughter of the owner of a local mandarin orchard. Unlike her namesake in The Long River, however, she had been carried off the previous year by the regimental commander 團長 of some rebel soldiers, and had proved quite content to marry him. A romantic story concerning a local bridge, and a boatmen's fairy-tale are also related.

With the next chapter, "Some Wharf-towns in the Valley of the White River" 白河流域幾個碼頭, Shen turns aside from the highway to consider the features of some of the towns, including Paotsing and Yungsui, on the banks of the White River, or, as it is more usually known, the Yu 湘水. The beginning and end of this chapter are taken from Border Town. The next essay, "Luki, Pushih and Box Cliffs" 灘溪·浦市·箱子巖, a small part of which is taken from Hunan Journey, describes the two towns and the limestone cliffs mentioned in the title, all of which are on the Yuan River. After Pushih, the next
town along the Yuan is Chenki, the subject of the follow­
ing chapter, "The Coal of Chenki" 反鎮的煤, which
again draws on Hunan Journey. Chenki depends for its
livelihood on the export of coal, and Shen describes the
poverty that had come to it since the war with Japan
had cut off its major market. He also tells a melancholy
story about a beautiful girl who became a prostitute and
eventually committed suicide. When her father was killed
shortly afterwards in the mines, the mother and younger
daughter were left to fend for themselves. "Such families
are very common", Shen remarks, "and stories about them
may be gathered everywhere".1

"Parts of some Districts on the Upper Yuan" 河水 上
游幾個縣分 follows the Yuan to the Kweichow border, and
describes such places as Hungkiang, "the heart of West
Hunan",2 Chihkiang, Huaihua, YUshuwan (these last three
familiar to Shen from his army days), and Hwanghsien,
which plays an important part in the opium traffic.
Scenery, trade and past history are mentioned, together
with a few anecdotes, including the one he had given in
his Autobiography and twice used in his fiction, about the
young woman who was taken from her grave.

1. Ibid., p.59.
2. Ibid., p.60.
The longest essay in the book, "Fenghwang", is devoted to Shen's native district. It begins with a passage "taken from 'Feng-tzu' 墨子 "¹ and previously used in the Autobiography, and goes on to deal with certain aspects of life in Fenghwang. Shamans are discussed, and the treatment of supposed witches, and Shen then illustrates the harsh treatment of women here by two stories, one concerning an officer who had his wife killed because he suspected her, on the most doubtful grounds, of infidelity, and the other describing a ceremony held to test a young man suspected of flirting with another man's young wife. He is obliged to jump into a pit full of concealed knives, and when he emerges unscathed, the woman is considered guilty of having bewitched him and is promptly beheaded. Macabre incidents of this type seem to hold a certain fascination for Shen, and he remarks: "There are very many incidents like this, and in all of them romance and solemnity, beauty and cruelty, love and hatred are inextricably woven together."² He concludes the chapter with a discussion of the spirit of knight-errantry, which he sees as an essential part of the character of the people here, illustrating it with incidents from the

¹. Ibid., p.74. "Feng-tzu" is the story of which "The Reappearance of the Gods" forms part.
². Ibid., p.87.
life of T'ien San-nu 因三怒, the "last of the local knight-errants".¹

The book concludes with a brief essay on "The Problem of the Miao People" 藩民問題, in which Shen defends the Miaoos against the charge that they are a savage and lawless people, and insists that intelligent and just government of the area would soon put an end to the whole problem. This essay brings together the past history of the Miaoos, concern for their present and hope for their future in a way that is characteristic of the whole book, for wherever Shen casts his eye in West Hunan he is reminded of the past, of such things as the poems of the Ch'ü Tz'u, or ancient landscape paintings, and he senses the immemorial age of local customs and ceremonies. At the same time he is haunted (though this is more apparent in The Long River) by fear for the future of his native countryside, and is anxious to see as much as possible of it preserved in some way. He is particularly concerned in West Hunan to examine the present in the light of the past, for he feels that a hopeful future can only be built on what is and has been:

¹. Ibid., p.90. The T'ien family of Feng-hwang produced a number of eminent soldiers, among them T'ien Hsing-shu 丁興受 (cp. Ting Ling I, p.4) and his son T'ien Ying-chao (ibid., and above, p.64.)
The importance of the "future" West Hunan is clear and easy to see, but this "future" is inseparable from the "past" and "present". Should we not still know a little more about this place's "past" and "present"? Is it not still worth while knowing a little more? 1

Apart from these two major works, Shen does not appear to have written much at this time. As he says: "Everything here was bound up with the war, so that although there was much that I could write about, what I was able to write naturally did not amount to very much at all." 2

In fact, he did not stay in Hunan for very long. He was certainly still there in 1938, for Wen I-to met him in Yuanling on the sixth of March in that year, 3 but by 1939 he had fled further to the south-west, to Kunming in Yunnan.

B. Kunming (1938-1946)

Since the story "Winter Scene in Kunming" was published in February 1939, 4 it seems reasonable to assume that Shen had arrived in Kunming sometime during the previous year. Here he was to stay till after the war,
when he returned to Peking in 1946. He is said\(^1\) to have taught at the Southwest Associated University, the students of which are recorded as having invited him, together with some other writers, to a literary evening in 1944.\(^2\) Shen seems to have found pleasure in the unfamiliar natural beauty of the Yunnan countryside, but needless to say the wartime social scene was not to his liking:

Everything one heard and saw was steeped in the money atmosphere created by the war. Although the original kindliness and simplicity of the place were still preserved in a great many well-bred families, the surface of society was embellished by the fashion for the active pursuit of material things. Since there was a fair amount of freedom in the sunlight, the spiny cactus was often entwined with the lovely and quickly-fading morning-glory, which lived and flourished together with the venomous silver-green spiders that wove their webs in its midst. A metaphor was thus contained in the actual scenery, for if an especially warm climate may foster the growth of lofty ideals, it may also cause the proliferation of corrupt realities.\(^3\)

Shen goes on to leave no doubt as to which of the two he found to be more common in wartime Kunming. The monied and the politically influential united to turn the place into a "hothouse of democracy", and even the banks

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1. Schyns and others, op. cit., p.77.
were hung with "repulsive calligraphy" by prominent people and held talks on "national reconstruction". In all this political pother, intellectuals (such as Shen, presumably) who wished to make "genuine contributions to learning" found it hard to make a living.1 As the war dragged on, people became more dispirited, and the former "hothouse" "became an ice-pit".2 Many, to Shen's evident disgust, sought an escape in religion, and turned to the Vajrayāna Buddhism that was prevalent in the area, until the authorities became concerned that "faith in democracy" was being weakened and took steps to spread a more political doctrine, which Shen parodies in a mock Buddhist gāthā 偈 3.

Many other things added to Shen's distress. There was of course the horror of the war itself:

...even in the limitless expanses of the sea and sky there is nowhere that is free from the death and bloodshed caused by exploding steel.4

His own sufferings were also aggravated by the sufferings of others, such as the close friends who died,5 or the relative who went mad after losing his job.6 Money was

1. Ibid., p.97.
2. Ibid., p.98.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.99.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p.100.
always a problem, in spite of his wife's working as a teacher, and, like many Chinese poets before him, he was depressed by signs of advancing age, as "the country-man's ... teeth fell out, and his hair turned gray". Had he been willing to compromise his ideals and adapt himself to the prevailing "actualities" (in what way, he does not specify), his "life would have perhaps been much easier,... but my work would then have lost all meaning". So he suffered "slanderous attacks", while "a portion of my work was ruined by a stupid and ignorant system of censorship". Thus this fourth stage of his career became a "fairly long, lonely and bitter" one, but he tried to accept his hardships "silently and with a smile", taking comfort in the fact that he at least had the understanding of his wife.

These trying conditions were not favourable to creative writing, and although Shen revised a number of earlier works in Kunming, he does not seem to have produced a great many new ones, despite the length of his stay there. Only two books are traceable to this period:

1. "Housewife", SP, p.35.
3. Ibid., p.100.
4. Ibid., p.99.
5. Ibid.
Watching Clouds in Yunnan and Winter Scene in Kunming.

Winter Scene in Kunming is a slender volume containing four essays and the title story. The first essay, "The Truly Uncultured and the Falsely Pious" was written in reply to an essay which had made fun of uncultured amateurs who "revere art and collect curios". Shen points out that the true uncultured person is humble and unpretentious, and for that reason he will be sincerer in his appreciation of beauty than those who affect a greater degree of refinement. He goes on to attack the false piety and lip-service to morality of the older generation, but when he turns to the younger adherents of the "new morality" and modern culture, he finds the same hypocrisy and superficiality among them too: "They appear to be strong, but at heart they are weak and timorous; they seem to be passionate, but in reality they are apathetic". It is no wonder, he concludes, that modern China has produced no great literary works, for such works cannot be created by "a lot of cultured people, a lot of false piety, a lot of people who

1. Unobtainable, but listed in Schyns and others, op. cit., p.78.
2. Published in May 1939.
4. Ibid., p.5.
live superficially, like dragonflies skimming the water....
Most people's lives are like a pile of cowdung: they
smoulder slowly giving neither heat nor light.\(^1\) What
China needs is thirty years of unbroken writing by "a few
more authors who seem extremely uncultured", for then "the
situation will be very different".\(^2\)

The second essay, "On Poetry for Recitation"\(^3\), is the longest piece in the book and is divided
into four sections. In the first, Shen points out that
much of the verse fashionably described as "for recitation"
is in fact too loose in form for this purpose, while truly
recitable verse, like that of Hsü Chih-mo, Wen I-to and
Chu Hsiang 朱湘, is now scorned as "fettered and
manacled".\(^4\) In the second section he elaborates the point
with reference to methods of recitation mentioned in
classical literature, while in the third he describes
recitals by well-known modern poets that he has attended,
and warns that free verse sounds ludicrous if it is de-
claimed loudly. The last section offers more remarks on
the current situation and the art of reciting well, and
concludes with the warning that the future of poetry in

\(^{1}\) Ibid., p.7.
\(^{2}\) Ibid., pp.7-8.
\(^{3}\) Published in Hong Kong, Oct. 1938.
\(^{4}\) Ibid., p.10.
China depends on the attitude of the poets: it will be bright if they are prepared to work hard, but dim if they are only going to follow fashions uncritically.

The third essay, "On Conservatism" is interesting, for it shows Shen at furthest remove from his common role of simple "countryman". After some initial praise for England's conservatism, he launches into a vigorous attack on Chinese "conservatism" and "superstition", which he equates with "stupidity" and "selfishness", quoting such sources as Nietzsche, the Stoics and James Harvey Robinson's The Mind in the Making. At the same time, however, he also warns the young that "progress" cannot grow from nothing, and he discounts modern education as lacking moral basis and so doing more harm than good. Doubt, properly applied, is what he finally recommends as the antidote to China's current ills, for doubt pursued will lead to the truth.

"Common or Special" is a brief discussion of the relationship between specialization and popularization in society, at first in general and then with special reference to modern literature. In the last part of it, Shen seems to be defending himself against possible or actual criticism that he is lacking in

1. Written at Kunming and published in Hong Kong.
patriotism because of his unwillingness to engage in propagandist activities. He points out that there is much to be said for those authors who "silently and quietly" keep aloof from propaganda and "the romanticism of war" in order to study "human life", for they are also necessary to their country, and although their task "may still be said to be a specialized one at the moment, one hopes that it will become a common one in future".

The last piece in the book is the title story, "Winter Scene in Kunming", an atmospheric sketch full of quiet despair. A stranger, referred to only as "the man from Shanghai" stands in a corner of the square before his new lodgings, by a eucalyptus tree in which a squirrel is darting about. Dogs are chased from the busy square by the stones of children, but return cautiously when a butcher sets up his stall. One dog finds some scraps and retires to the eucalyptus tree to eat them, while the man picks up a nut that a squirrel has dropped and smells its bitter-sweet fragrance. The next section sees the man standing in the deserted square at six o'clock in the morning. All is quiet, but he seems to hear voices. The butcher is arguing with a woman customer who has complained about the number of bones. After some heated

1. Winter Scene in Kunming, p.46.
2. Ibid., p.48.
speculation about their respective fates after death, the butcher declares his intention to go and fight the Japanese in Wuhan. He says similar things to other women, and then all is still again. Far off, a bugle is heard from a military camp, and the man thinks: "Wuhan fell three months ago".¹

Then he notices a wrongly worded slogan on a newly whitewashed wall: a small thing, but symptomatic of a larger incompetence. A lean horse passes by with a bucket of excrement. Someone comes looking for a child who, because his school has closed down, generally plays all day on a heap of coal in the square. The man from Shanghai is moved to painful reflections on the state of the country and the artificial prosperity which the influx of refugees has brought to Kunming. On the last page, Shen abruptly switches to the second person:

Because if you have loved a patch of blue sky, an expanse of earth, and a number of loyal and honest people, you will surely be unable to prevent yourself from shouting: "This won't do! This won't do!....."

Then someone is bound to ask: "Sir, what do you mean by that? Whom are you abusing? Whom are you admonishing? Whom do you want to arouse? What do you intend?"

You marvel at these questions: not only do you not understand his meaning, you may even become confused about your own original meaning. You are speaking at cross-purposes, and neither of you is in the right. You love "mankind",

¹. Ibid., p.55.
he fears "change"; you are "enthusiastic", he is "suspicious".

"Beauty" (mei) is a word that is very simply written, but it seems to be very difficult to recognise. "Love" is a word that everyone knows, but those who really understand its meaning are very few.1

This story is clearly an elaboration of the point expressed by the "metaphor" which Shen had seen in the cactus: against the charming squirrels (ignored by the local populace), the blue sky, the beauty of the sun on the eucalyptus leaves, and the peace of the early morning are set the persecuted dogs, the quarrelling people, the war, the excrement, the children with no school to go to, and the general disruption of the country. As in so many of Shen's stories, love and beauty gain in poignancy from the contrast with their inhospitable surroundings, but the final impression is a melancholy one.

A similar melancholy pervades the autobiographical "White Nightmare".2 It begins with an ironic

1. Ibid., p.57.
2. It appears, undated, in SP, but it must have been written about 1942, since Shen says in it (SP, p.15) that he has been living in the countryside for five years. The title alludes to a kind of grass known as "Green Nightmare" (SP, p.118). The "white", apart from suggesting death, in accordance with traditional Chinese symbolism, presumably has the sense of "daytime" - i.e. a "waking nightmare".
reference to the peace and quiet which Shen implies that he seeks in the countryside, but as he goes on to note, the simple life that he leads here is involved with things which are "by no means perfectly simple". On his desk are a number of as yet unanswered letters, telling of the deaths of some friends and relatives and the despairs of others. A twenty-six year old cousin has died in the war, and Shen writes an ostensibly consoling letter, the quoted extract from which reflects on the impermanence of life and the selfishness and stupidity of the older generation.

In another letter, he begins to commiserate with a friend on the unhealthy situation in Kunming, but he is interrupted by the arrival of a visitor, the fat and garrulous "Mrs. X". After exchanging a few remarks, Shen leaves her, with an apologetic smile, to his wife, and goes out of doors, to the spot where he had discovered the withered "Green Nightmare" a fortnight ago, where he also has a small tea-table and a notebook. Here he feels at peace with his environment again for a brief while, but the spreading heat of the day soon dissipates this mood, and he sees that amid the beauty of his surroundings there are many things suggestive of aimlessness and

1. "White Nightmare", SP, p.115.
decaying: fallen leaves, withered grasses, short-lived mayflies, the ant that wanders, bewildered, up his arm, and the clouds which drift across the sky only to their eventual dissolution.

His melancholy deepens as he recalls some of "Mrs X"'s past monologues, with their bafflingly abrupt changes of subject, and their mixture of daily trivia with laments over growing old and statements of her intention to divorce her husband. Must all our interests and ideals be founded on the trivial, commonplace things of life? Shen wonders, but his reverie is interrupted by the sound of a high-flying aeroplane, and his thoughts turn to the war and to the number of aeroplanes shot down in flames: "All over the world, in the beauty of the sky, one such fiery flower falls to earth almost every minute". Many young friends have sent others to their death or perished themselves in this way, and now "my heart seemed to trail down out of the void and plunge anew into the greater complexity of human affairs, where it completely lost its sense of direction".

Suddenly the noise of the aeroplane sounded deeper in my ears, and when I raised my head I could see, in the bright blue sky, a gleaming silver speck which slowly turned into a tiny silver cross. Before long, a shadow swept

1. Ibid., p.121.
2. Ibid.
across the place where I was sitting, the vermilion tea table before me, and the notebook on it that I used for writing in, as the sunlight vanished. The plot of land in front of me, planted with rape, also lost its former soft green for a moment, and while I was waiting for the sun to shine on the paper again, I wrote two words: "White Nightmare".1

This symbolical shadow represents the gloom which the war had cast over Shen's mind, and, as he saw it, over the whole country. Once again, then, his theme is the painful incongruity between the peaceful country life which he found here near Kunming and the "waking nightmare" into which everything had been plunged by the war, between "the original purity and simplicity of the countryside, and the poverty and complexity created by corrupt city ways".2

The last Kunming story, "Housewife",3 contains echoes of the earlier "Housewife" and of "Suicide", but is explicitly autobiographical. It is the 8th. of September 1945, and the following day is the Shens' thirteenth wedding anniversary, as well as being the official date marking the end of the war with Japan. Shen has arranged for some friends to come with wine and sweets on the early train in the morning, to surprise his wife.

1. Ibid., pp.121-122.
2. Ibid., p.116. The poverty was caused by inflation.
He himself hopes to write a story for her, as he had done with "Housewife" ten years before. He sends his wife and their two children to bed early while he sits up to write, but, like his hero in "Suicide", he finds himself at midnight still pondering but unable to write. At 3 a.m. his wife appears and urges him to come to bed, but he refuses - again as in "Suicide". Instead he adds more oil to the lamp, pours himself a cup of coffee, and continues to brood over the past and the present. At dawn he slips out of the house and walks the five li or so to the lake. Here he becomes aware that, intoxicated with the beauty of nature, he has walked too far, and he plucks a bunch of blue dew-moistened wild-flowers and hurries home, to find his wife anxiously looking for him at the door. He gives the flowers to her, and she puts them in a vase.

The bunch of little blue flowers on the table blazed like flames, while the little white flowers (put there on an earlier occasion) were as hazy as dreams. I really did seem to be a bit tired. From far away I seemed to hear someone calling me, but I was worried that I would lose my way among the feelings aroused by the two kinds of flowers, and not know how to get back. And then again, it was as though the call were actually coming from the midst of the flowers. Flames and dreams: they begin this story,1 but they do not end it.2

Such is the outline of the story, the most impressive feature of which is perhaps the complete fusion of

1. Cp. the flowers and flames of the first paragraph, SP, p.34.
2. SP, p.47.
autobiography and fiction in it. On the one hand it appears to be as intimately autobiographical as anything Shen has written, and on the other hand it echoes two earlier stories which purport to be fiction, is constructed and reads like fiction, and, like fiction, is concerned with the analysis of character and the delineation of human relationships. In this sense, it successfully overcomes the "slight contradiction" which Shen claims to feel between his life and his work. It is also remarkable for combining a "late" prose style - the often elaborate and sometimes obscure sentences, and the frequently "classical" vocabulary found also in the "Actuality" essay - with a simple lyricism reminiscent of Shen's country love-stories.

In part, the story is straightforward autobiography. Shen describes the setting of the house, the removal of noxious caterpillars from the peach trees in the courtyard, the family's difficulties with the leaking roof and flooded kitchen when it rains, and their various household activities and conversations during the day. The centre of the story, however, as of the home, is Shen's wife, and what he has written is in effect a kind of love-poem, a tribute to the strength he drew from her companionship.

1. Ibid., p.44.
during the long years of the war. In the story,\(^1\) he explains his dissatisfaction with the portrait of his wife in the earlier "Housewife", and he has clearly set out this time to write something which will do her more justice. In the story itself, however, her simplicity defeats him,\(^2\) and finally he can offer her nothing but the flowers he has picked:

"So it was for the sake of these pretty things that you forgot that someone else would be worried about you."

"No. Could I forget you? It was just that I was thinking back over the last ten years, and I wanted to write a little piece to commemorate this ninth of September. I sat in a trance all night, without setting pen to paper. I had grasped the fact that these ten years had seen no progressive changes. I already understood what simplicity of character was. But to praise it - this was a task that my complicated brain just couldn't cope with. My piece of writing is still only a title, "Housewife". And as for this piece (I handed her the flowers), see what a pretty blue it is!"

"You really are a symbolist, not bad at all!"\(^3\)

Shen had complained to his wife earlier of being called a symbolist,\(^4\) and the symbolism of flowers in particular runs right through the story, from the red and

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1. Ibid., pp.37-8.
2. Cp. the similarly baffling "simplicity" of the old soldier in "The Lamp".
3. SP, p.46.
4. Ibid., p.36.
white sunlit chrysanthemums in the garden, that stirred slightly in the breeze "as if to show men that the happiness of life, although transient, is really eternal",

to the "flames" and "dreams" of the last page. Above all, flowers are identified with the housewife herself:

At the end of the table in the thatched house, the wildflowers that were always being plucked and brought home from the fields - vermilion ones, sapphire-blue ones, ones whose every petal was a flame, and velvety goosedown-yellow ones - prolonged each spring for more than half a year, and also preserved the soft pliancy of the housewife's feelings and the everlasting spring of her body and soul.

1. Ibid., p.35.
2. Ibid., p.39.
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE FIFTH STAGE: RETURN TO PEKING

A. 1946-1949

In September 1945 Japan formally surrendered, and the following year Shen was back in the Peking that "I had been away from for nine years and familiar with for twenty-five". He was moved again by the sight of Peking's blue sky, and was glad to find that the "bright and sunny atmosphere" had not lost its freshness, but there was little comfort for him in the social and political scene. He felt that Peking was, as everyone said, "the brain of China", and that here if anywhere one should encounter the critical and independent thinking which China needed so urgently. Yet "after I had been back for only a month.... I came to feel a deep fear".

It was true that much had changed over the years. The military bureaucracy of twenty years ago now seemed only a relic of the past, and had acquired something of the unreality of a fairy-tale for those who were "about twenty years old". There was also a healthy concern

2. Ibid., p.102.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.104.
5. Ibid., p.101.
for academic freedom.¹ But more ominous signs were not wanting either. The old evils and the preoccupation with "actualities" were still there, only awaiting the chance to spread again and "hypnotize" the young into living a life "without aims or ideals", or turn them into minor officials "all virtually identical in body and soul".² No less discouraging was the insignificant place which the study of literature seemed to occupy in schools and universities, in comparison to other disciplines.³ Shen himself received an academic post,⁴ apparently at Peking University,⁵ for which he ironically protests his unfitness.⁶

By the time Shen began to travel this "fifth stage" of his life's journey, he seems to have felt weary and disillusioned after so many hardships and frustrations. A sense of isolation and a despair of the present seem to have impelled him to seek comfort in the thought of the comparable isolation of the great men of the past,⁷ and he reflects that "virtue is not alone: it must have

¹ I[bid.], p.102.
³ I[bid.], p.104.
⁴ I[bid.]
⁵ Schyns and others, op.cit., p.77.
neighbours"1 whether those "neighbours", travelling the same journey "in silent endurance....with never a destination", are contemporaries or belong to a different age.2 He felt, with what seems to be some sense of relief, that his day was almost done: "It may be that after I have travelled for another eight to ten years, I shall have to lay down my pen and rest forever". And again he looked to the past for comfort, to the sixth chapter of Chuang Tzu: "The Great Mass...wearies me with life...and gives me rest with death".3

The only works readily available from this period in Shen's life are the few stories and essays dated 1946 and 1947 included in SP. Apart from "Housewife", discussed above, the only story dated 1946 is "Rainbow", a tribute to the beauty of the scenery in Western Yunnan, and an examination of certain questions with which Shen is often concerned, chiefly the relationship between the artist and society, and the inability of art to capture the beauty of nature.

It is the 17th. of October 1941, and four young men are setting off along the trade route which runs from

1. Lun-yu 論語, 4.25.
Western Yunnan into Tibet. Three of them have been trained as artists, but the leader of the expedition, Hsia Meng, is now an adviser to the local military government, while another of the group, Li Ts'an, after abandoning landscape painting and then achieving some success with illustrated travel books, has given up art altogether in favour of anthropological studies, and is at present engaged in gathering material for a dictionary of hieroglyphic inscriptions. The third, Li Lan, is the only one who still has hopes of achieving success in landscape painting, while the youngest and tallest member of the group, "Little Chou," is a student in his early twenties who has studied sociology and graduated in agriculture.

As the caravan winds up a steep slope, Hsia Meng leaves the pack-horses and rides to the top of a nearby eminence, where he is spellbound by the view: a panorama of trees, jutting rocks and snow-capped mountains set off perfectly by a brilliant rainbow in the sky. He calls a halt, and when the other three ride up to join him, all except Little Chou decide to try and capture the scene in paint. While the others paint, Little Chou lies under a tree, gazes at the sky, and ponders, at considerable length, on the hopelessness of his friends' task, the restricted life of city-dwellers, the sorry state of China and the contribution of the artist to society. Meanwhile,
Hsia Meng has given up the attempt and comes to join him. Only music, he tells Little Chou, could hope to capture such a scene, but perhaps its beauty would even have defeated Bach or Beethoven. After some further discussion of conditions in China, the two friends are joined by Li Ts'an, who had quickly turned from the richly coloured scenery to make some sketches of the camp for a future travel book. He is aware, however, that such travel books can convey little to city-dwellers, and he explains how the initial amusement he had felt on seeing Buddhist devotees prostrating themselves in a temple in Central Yunnan last year had given way to respect for their humility and simple faith. When confronted with such scenery as this, he concludes, silent worship is the only possible response.

Li Lan alone continues to paint, and when he has finished, the others eagerly examine his work. They find, however, that he too had soon abandoned the larger view for sketches of trees and horses. Nevertheless, when they compare their first attempts, they discover that Li Lan had in fact captured the scene best in a black and white sketch with just a touch of light red for the rainbow. After some discussion of the aesthetics of painting, they conclude that the effect of nature's lavish colours can best be caught, not by imitation, but by being very
sparing with one's own use of colour. At this point, Little Chou notices that the smoke rising from the campfires has set off the scene in the foreground with the same perfection that the rainbow had given to the larger scene beyond. You may capture the vivid rainbow, he points out, with a touch of red, but what hope have you of depicting this colourless smoke?

Here Shen himself concludes with an elaborate description of the scene, ill-advisedly one might think, in view of the preceding discussion and Little Chou's rhetorical question, but by doing so he provides the story with a necessary climax, and leads up naturally to the final moral:

The plain white rainbow that floated up from the cooking-fires of the horse-caravan was at first only a single strand, then it became three, five, and then innumerable large and small strands, vying with one another as they rose straight upwards. When they reached a certain height, they seemed to dissolve, and they slowly spread out over the tips of the pine trees to become an insubstantial milk-white carpet, the pale blue fringe of which sank down to flow among the pines and rocks. Thereupon the white, the green, and the black (of the rocks) gradually melted into one another and became one, a single long, narrow ornament which seemed to be moving gently below the young men's feet. Everything, far and near, was gilded as if by gold-dust fallen from the setting sun, and by degrees all turned to blue and purple. The sun sank down, and ten or more of the snowcapped peaks in the range over two hundred li away began to shine all the more brilliantly, like so many platinum awls projecting up into the silvery-blue, purple-tinged purity of the sky.
The four men remained silent before these new twilight changes, and the three youths especially who had been discussing painting felt that all their opinions and achievements had become meaningless.¹

This story is similar in a number of ways to "Three Women": in being concerned with a small group of people of the same sex but different personalities, in the lengthy conversations which take up the greater part of it, and in the prominence given to the description of natural beauty. A rainbow is even mentioned in the earlier story as a symbol of beauty.² "Three Women", however, despite its discursiveness, remained a work of fiction, in which character was still more important than argument, whereas "Rainbow" is more like a fictionalized essay, and ideas and values are its chief concern. The fictional element here, then, while still of substantial importance, is nevertheless subordinate to the argument - as is appropriate, for the story's main point is that art is inadequate to depict natural beauty and communicate it to others. So all the friends have the same thought when confronted with the beauty of the scene: "This is not meant for painters: it is too beautiful.... It can give rise only to religion, not art."³ And Li Ts'an, clearly

¹. SP, p.61.
². Black Phoenix, p.16.
³. SP, p.54.
expressing Shen's own opinion, disparages the artist who is merely a spectator of nature:

The man who accepts the world of nature, bringing his life into harmony with nature so that it becomes part of it, is really doing something far nobler and more admirable than we, who come to admire the scenery in search of materials for painting.¹

It is an indication of the consistency of Shen's personal vision that he had made the same point as in this story, using the same illustration of the rainbow, in an autobiographical essay written nearly twenty years earlier: "If a thousand poets were to gather together and write poetry about rainbows for a generation, more would still be contained in an actual rainbow than in all the poems combined!"²

The only story available from the following year (1947), "An Ordinary Romance", is part of a much longer work,³ as the familiar treatment of the characters, including the unidentified narrator, and occasional reference to preceding events show. Nevertheless it is a fairly self-contained episode of the longer story, and achieves a degree of formal unity by beginning and ending with the same character and in the same place. Between

1. Ibid., p.58.
3. At least four chapters of this work received periodical publication: see C.T.Hsia, op.cit., p.639.
the two peaceful scenes which open and close the story lies a narrative outstanding in Shen's work for its vividness and swiftness.

When the story begins, it is a fortnight since Ch'iao-hsiu, who is seventeen, has run off with her lover, a twenty-one year old bugler, and three days since young Tung-sheng, who is fourteen, has also disappeared. It is learnt that Tung-sheng has been kidnapped by the T'ien brothers, who come from a nearby village, and that both he and the opium he was carrying are now in their possession. After some discussion with the village constables, the local military commander, one of the Man clan, which is hostile to the T'iens, decides to proceed against the kidnappers. The district magistrate arrives and an expedition is mounted. The T'ien brothers have meanwhile retreated, together with their men, their prisoners, their booty, and ample provisions, to the safety of Tiger Caves, two large and almost inaccessible caverns high up in the side of a cliff. Here they are besieged, but with food, ammunition and a freshwater spring their position seems impregnable, and after a few days' hunting in the locality, the district

1. Tung-sheng's relationship to Ch'iao-hsiu is not made clear here: it is presumably the subject of the preceding episode, which is named after them.
A week passes before the besiegers discover that it is possible to escape from the caves by climbing to the top of the cliff. Most of the T'iens' men have preferred to remain in the caves, however, and now a guard is set so that they cannot escape. Two masons are then hired from a nearby village, and a path is cut down towards the caves from the cliff-top. Negotiations are attempted, but the T'ien brothers will not surrender their arms and the Commander will settle for nothing less, so battle is resumed. Eventually, after sixteen days have passed, the upper-cave entrance is taken in a surprise attack, and the fourteen defenders retreat further inside. A fire is lit at the entrance and smoke blown into the cave, where, shortly afterwards, the fourteen men are found suffocated, together with over twenty huge white rats. Five days later the second cave is entered, but its construction does not favour the use of noxious smoke, for this would also poison the water supply from the spring, so the attackers build a wall and settle down to wait.

There are only six men inside, together with Ch'iao-hsiu and Tung-sheng, and here they all live in the darkness for a month, with their food supply slowly deteriorating. Ch'iao-hsiu pleads for surrender, or at least the release of Tung-sheng, but the men refuse: they have sworn an
oath to fight to the death. Her lover is younger than the others, however, and is secretly moved to pity, both for Tung-sheng and for the pregnant Ch'iao-hsiu. That night, when the other two guards doze off, he wakes Tung-sheng and Ch'iao-hsiu and sets them free. They have just got through the wall to the Commander, when their absence is discovered inside. There are angry shouts and curses, a scream from Ch'iao-hsiu's lover, and finally, faint but clear groans and a curse directed at Commander Man by one of the T'iens. The next day it is discovered that the six men have killed one another in a frenzy. As with the previous fourteen, their hands are cut off for public display, and everybody returns home. After all this horror, the New Year passes peacefully, and the story ends on a note of calm, although it is clear that the events of the last month or two have left an ineradicable mark on those involved.

It is noteworthy that each of the fictional works which Shen produced during and after the war with Japan tends to sum up a different aspect of his work. Thus The Long River is his most exhaustive treatment of the "pastoral" theme and the figure of the young maiden, "Housewife" is his most intimate exercise in autobiography and his most deeply-felt love story, while "Rainbow" represents the fullest development of the discursive mode
in his fiction. Now "An Ordinary Romance" unexpectedly shows his capacity for romantic story-telling at its peak. Only when describing Man Lao T'ai-t'ai 滿老太太, who is presented as a paragon of virtue,¹ does the story move at a slow pace. For the rest, events flow with an impressive swiftness that is unusual with Shen. As the title suggests, Shen has at last succeeded here in blending the romanticism of such Miao stories as "A Little Scene in the Moonlight" with the realism characteristic of his other work, to produce a tale of exceptional quality.

A number of essays were also written in 1947. One is the descriptive piece called "The Hsiung Mansion in Chihkiang District", dated the 19th. of December. It has been utilized above² and needs no further discussion here. Another is a talk "On Modern Poetry" 談現代詩, delivered to an unspecified audience in the same month. Here Shen, although he calls himself a "layman" 外行,

1. "Straightforward and honest, unaffected, industrious and thrifty......helpful, compassionate and never stingy......a realist in her everyday household affairs, a symbolist in her inner life (referring to her pious observance of the traditional country ceremonies), but at the same time an idealist where her children were concerned." (SP, pp.64-5).

reveals the same concern for the state of modern Chinese poetry that was apparent in an earlier essay. He distinguishes two general trends in modern poetry, which he calls the political and the lyrical. Both trends, he feels, have been too commonly taken to extremes, the former ending up as superficial propaganda, in a jumble of slogans and sociological jargon, while the latter gets lost in obscurity, through an excessive use of private allusions, "abstract terms, and fancy 'modern' phrases". After pointing out that what matters most is the actual creation of poetry, rather than theories about it, he goes on to mention the qualities required by young artists in general, and by young poets in particular. One of them, ironically enough, is "thought", a popular term which Shen had considered meaningless when applied to his own work. Above all, "before he can become a poet", he "needs a love for mankind that is generous, honest and compassionate". Finally, Shen emphasizes that he fully agrees with those who advocate combining poetry with politics. However, poetry should not be used to "adorn politics", but to "transform politics". This at

2. SP, p.124.
4. SP, p.125.
least is the ideal, but he sees little hope of its realization, and he concludes on a pessimistic note:

Of course, this is little more than a dream. But just think: if even poets lack faith in the nation's future, can it still resemble a nation at all? I ask you. .........

Another, longer article, published in the magazine The Analects 論語 at the beginning of 1947, gives evidence of Shen's continued interest in the early history of Chinese fiction. Called "Humour During the Sung Dynasty" 宋人諧趣, it begins by outlining the development of satire from the earliest days of Chinese written history up to the point where the elegant style began to give way to a more crudely comical spirit. The taste for humorous stories, Shen says, was most pronounced during the Sung dynasty, when a romantic note introduced into Chinese fiction by Indian Buddhist tales (ultimately to the detriment of the religious message which these tales were intended to help spread) combined well with a passion for jokes which was shared by everybody, from emperors to pedlars. The bulk of the essay is an anthology of jokes and anecdotes, selected from a great variety of sources to illustrate different types of humour, and linked by Shen's brief comments. This essay might serve perhaps as a useful reminder that the

1. SP, p.126.
humorous element in Shen's own work is not to be underestimated, despite the often prevailing melancholy.

Shen's last available major work was the long essay "Learning from Actuality", which is dated October 1947. It has already been quoted extensively above, and only a few general remarks need be made here. Summing up his experiences over the past twenty-five years, it is in the nature of an apology for his entire life and work. It offers his final portrait of himself as "countryman" and artist, doggedly pursuing the realization of his ideals through a world increasingly hostile or indifferent to them. Here, as his final literary testament, he provides a summary of his views on life and literature, his diagnosis of China's sicknesses - social, political and artistic - his grief over the past, and his hopes and fears for the future. He concludes on a wistful note:

I hope that this conclusion will prove instructive and encouraging to all those friends who have taken up their pens for the sake of their faith and their ideals. From this conclusion one may also see, for the way in which a countryman learnt from actuality, and in the end seemed to be out of joint with it, a profounder level of meaning and cause!¹

According to the playwright Hsia Yen夏衍 (penn-name of Shen Tuan-hsien沈端先), this essay, first published in the Ta Kung Pao in Shanghai, caused a stir

¹. SP, p.105.
in the literary world (for Shen had many readers and had been relatively silent during the long war years), and two Shanghai magazines devoted special issues to criticizing it.\(^1\) Hsia Yen also discusses it in an essay called "Can It Be Closed? No, It Cannot!"\(^2\) His intention, however, is not to evaluate, but only to disparage. He begins calmly enough, adopting a polite tone and summarizing some of the views expressed in the essay, but before long he is unmasking Shen as a reaction-ary "wolf" in "the sheep's clothing of 'liberalism'",\(^3\) and proceeding to a rhetorical climax: "This is Shen Ts'ung-wen's 'impartiality', this is Shen Ts'ung-wen's 'liberalism', this is Shen Ts'ung-wen's 'contribution' to the elements in favour of fascist dictatorship".\(^4\) For "what he wants to preserve is not the palace of art; what he pleads for day and night is nothing but the 'hothouse of fascism'!"\(^5\) This, of course, is scarcely literary criticism, or indeed

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1. Hsia Yen, *Post-war Essays* 胡英 批評, Hai Yang Shu Wu 海洋書屋, Hong Kong 1948, p.34.
2. Ibid., pp.34-41. The title refers to the door of what he sees as Shen's "ivory tower" (although the metaphor he actually uses is that of the hothouse).
3. Ibid., p.38.
4. Ibid., p.39.
5. Ibid., p.40. The allusion is to Shen's phrase quoted above, pp.427-8.
criticism of any kind, but it suggests the nature of some at least of the attacks that had embittered Shen in the past, and certainly sets the tone for those that were to follow after 1949.

B. After 1949.

In January 1949 Peking surrendered to the Communists, and Shen Ts'ung-wen laid down his pen for eight years.\(^1\) He lost his job in Peking University, and was made a copyist in the Palace Museum.\(^2\) He was attacked by the Communist press, and became so depressed that he attempted suicide. In 1950, however, he bowed to pressure and submitted himself for thought reform. In 1956 he is said to have produced a written confession.

His work in the Palace Museum must have afforded him some comfort, for here he was surrounded by beautiful artifacts from the past history of China. The interest

1. SF, Preface, p.4.

2. Vincent C.Y. Shih, "Enthusiast and Escapist: Shen Ts'ung-wen the Escapist", China Quarterly No.13, January-March 1963, p.107. Most of what follows is taken from this article. An eyewitness account of Shen's early years in Communist China is said (Shih, p.108; Hsia, op. cit., p.562) to be available in an article by Ma Feng-hua in Tzu-yu Chung-kuo, 16, No.3, February 1957, called "Recollections of Professor Shen Ts'ung-wen".
in the past which had begun during his army years\(^1\), and had led him to investigate early Chinese fiction now found an outlet in research into the history of material culture, and in 1957 he was the chief editor of a volume on Chinese textiles. 1957 also saw his fiction in print again for the first time in eight years, when the People's Literature Press published SF, a collection of twenty-two stories dating from 1928 to 1937. The only new thing in the book, however, apart from some slight alterations to existing stories, was the preface. Here he briefly reviews his past life and makes some general remarks about literature and the new China. Although he makes the required obeisances towards the Communist régime, he still speaks with his old voice. He refers to himself still as a "countryman", and writes with the same warm affection of his native Western Hunan, and with the same pride of his own dedication to his craft as a short-story writer. In view of his unaltered pride in his own work, and of the highly critical view he had taken of overtly political literature in the past, it is difficult not to suspect irony when he speaks of the "many fine outstanding works" celebrating the new order. Nevertheless, he concludes by expressing his shame at having only old works to offer,

\(^{1}\) Cp. above, pp.132-3.
and his hope that he may be able to take up his pen again in future, in order to "sing of the awakening and the victory of the people, to build up the fatherland and my native place, and contribute to the preservation of world peace".  

In 1959 some articles by Shen appeared in print, one in memory of Chin-i (People's Literature No.121, 1959), another (in the Kuang-ming Daily, June 18th., 1961, p.4) discussing the value for historical research of comparing written records with artifacts and other objects unearthed by archaeologists, and a third (Kuang-ming Daily, October 21st., 1961, p.4 and October 24th., 1961, p.4) dealing with problems involved in the history of the beard, in the light of the method recommended in the earlier article.  

In 1961, Shen was sent by the Chinese Writers' Union (which he is reported to have joined in 1957) on a tour to various parts of China, for some undisclosed purpose. Out of this journey came five poems (published in People's Literature, February 1962) in classical five-word form, two of them ostensibly political in purpose, and the other three concerned mainly with recollections of poets of the

1. SF, Preface, p.6.
Shen Ts'ung-wen has been called a "prolific writer", often, as he notes, with a touch of derision. But he himself is not ashamed of the epithet, for it bears witness to his constant dedication to his art, a dedication that is also reflected in the variety of his work, which includes not only all types of fiction but also poems, one-act plays, essays, biography, autobiography, and travel books. Among all these, however, it is short stories which predominate. As Shen says: "For roughly twenty years....it was short stories that I usually read, taught, wrote, and even discussed when I met with my friends". The foregoing survey of Shen's life and work suggests some general conclusions that might be drawn, particularly with regard to his stories. These conclusions can be conveniently arranged under a number of separate headings, as follows: types of story; characters; techniques and styles; the countryman; fact and fiction; the author; influences; and criticisms and estimates.

2. SF, Preface, p.4.
A. Types of Story.

Apart from a couple of special groups - the Miao stories and the Buddhist tales - Shen's stories do not, as a rule, fall into any easily defined categories. In length they range from the brief vignette of "Morning - A Pile of Earth, a Soldier" to the two hundred and six pages of The Long River, but the remaining stories form a continuum, and any division according to length would be arbitrary. One might also distinguish different types of story according to their narrative technique, depending on whether they are related in the first or third person, whether the narrative line is continuous or broken by flashback ("Ju-juei"), letters ("Eight Coursers") and the like, and so on. One might also classify stories according to the degree of emphasis given in them to narration, description, character analysis, or argument.

All these distinctions would have some validity, but the most obvious and useful basis for classification is subject matter: the setting, and the kind of characters dealt with. Here a general division between rural and urban stories immediately suggests itself, but it is also necessary to distinguish different types within these two broad classes. Within the rural class, for example, one finds a number of stories, such as "San-san" and Border Town, which are idyllic in setting and mood,
although their serenity is usually threatened with eventual
dissipation by some natural or human agency. By contrast,
there are others which show the countryside in a seedier
("The Counsellor"), a more desolate ("A Little Scene in
Kweichow"), or even a squalid light ("Holiday", "Dusk",
"The One who Came to Town"). The difference seems to
depend largely on how far the place in question has been
affected by the depredations of the armies, and no doubt
reflects Shen's often expressed disgust at the suffering
which so many years of pointless warfare had brought to
much of the countryside.

This disgust did not alter his affection for the
soldiers themselves, however, or for the more admirable
among their commanding officers, and some of his country
tales deal sympathetically with the life of the soldiers.
"Morning - A Pile of Earth, a Soldier", "The One who
crossed the Mountain Pass" and "Dark Night" are of this
type. "Huei-ming" and "Three Men and a Woman" might also
be included here, although in neither case is army life
at the centre of the story. The Miao tales form another
distinct group of country stories, and there are yet others
which do not fit well into any of these categories, such

Among the stories with an urban setting, similar
groups may be distinguished. Corresponding to the country
idylls, for example, one finds stories of a lyrical character, generally (like their rural equivalents) with young women as central characters and scenes of natural beauty as background. Into this category would fall such stories as "Three Women", "Spring", "Hsien-hsien" and "Daytime". And again, as with their country counterparts, these stories may be contrasted with more squalid ones, dealing with the hard life of students ("Existence") or the wretchedness of slum dwellers ("Rottenness", "Mud").

Two other types of urban story satirize the empty lives of two different classes of people: students and teachers ("A Certain Married Couple", "Springtime", "Eight Coursers", "A Slight Coolness"), and members of the gentry ("Gentry Wife", "Son of the Wang and Hsieh"). Naturally, other stories remain which are difficult to classify, such as "Living" or "Number Four".

Taken as a whole, the stories add up to a comprehensive portrait of rural and urban China, as seen through Shen's eyes, and the general division suggested at least has the merit of corresponding to Shen's constant concern with rural and urban values, although other classifications might be made with no reference to the setting - in which case love-stories, and satirical stories would be particularly important groups. In truth, however, all such categories are best taken as indicating trends within
Shen's stories rather than defining the individual stories themselves, for few stories will fit neatly into only one category, while others will resist classification altogether.

As far as his choice of subject matter is concerned, Shen seems to have more or less decided on its general range at the outset of his career. His earliest available story, for example, "Fu-sheng", published in 1925, is largely autobiographical, deals with childhood, and is set in a pleasant country town: all characteristics which appear throughout Shen's work. Similarly, "The Adjutant" (1925) is the first of many stories dealing with army life, and the satire of "A Certain Married Couple" (1927) or "Learned People" (1928) is echoed in "Eight Courser" (1935), while the "bandit" theme of "Under a Separate Administration" (1926) reappears, although to different effect, in "An Ordinary Romance" (1947), just as its heroine is the first of a long line of similar young women. Shen's rediscovery of his native Western Hunan in 1934 seems to have made a deep impression on him, but it only confirmed trends that had long been apparent in his work, and Border Town (1934) clearly stands in direct succession to "Hsiao-hsiao" (1929) and "San-san" (1931), as does The Long River (early 1940s).
B. Characters.

As with the stories themselves, what strikes one most about Shen's characters is their variety, the wide range of types and occupations that they cover: soldiers and "bandits", doctors, Christian missionaries, peasants, boatmen, prisoners and jailers, merchants, grasscutters, members of the gentry, construction workers, clerks, Miao princes and shamans, slumdwellers, students, professors - the list is an impressively long one, drawn from Shen's wide experience of "human life" in both the city and the countryside.

Right from the beginning, Shen's concern was with character rather than plot,¹ and with Turgenev he could have said "I have never started from ideas but always from characters".² This latter point is well illustrated by Hunan Journey, which shows Shen constantly observing the people he encountered on his trip, always on the alert for anything of interest in their appearance or behaviour. In some cases, such as "Dark Night" or "An Ordinary Romance", the story is dominated by a swiftly-moving plot, but in most cases the movement of the

¹. Cp. above, pp.162, 164.
characters' minds is of more importance, and in consequence the story may take on a rather static quality. Sean O'Faolain's words might be taken to sum up Shen's usual approach:

The modern story-teller, then, has not dispensed with incident or anecdote or plot and all their concomitants, but he has changed their nature. There is still adventure; but now it is an adventure of the mind....There is climax, but it is not the climax of the woman who discovers her lost jewels in the hat-box but the climax of the woman who discovers her lost happiness in a memory.....action reveals character, and...character demonstrates itself in action - and action is only another word for incident. But incident now is merely a trigger ...which...explodes some concentration of laughter, fancy, tragedy, or delight. 1

Many of Shen's characters are types, representing a whole class of people. Thus Pai-tzu the river-boatman, Big and Little Juan the dilettante and the revolutionary, Huei-ming the army cook, or the hero of "Son of the Wang and Hsieh": all these stand for a certain type of person and a certain way of life. Nevertheless, even here Shen never loses sight of the individuality of his characters, and in this sense, Ting Yi's complaint that "the characters of his works.....have no class character" is perhaps justified, although his conclusion, that they therefore "have no resemblance to real people", 2 is not.

2. Ting Yi, op. cit., p.187.
Shen's concern for the living individual, together with his stated disinclination to attack people, generally weakens the effectiveness of his characters as vehicles for satire, but since their vividness springs from the same cause, the loss is slight. As a rule, his approach to his characters, pace Ting Yi, is an objective one, recording rather than judging or generalizing. His aim is only "to depict a corner of man's life in words, to explain a phenomenon", to "record some phenomena" and not to "speak of principles". Only in the case of his Miao stories does Shen's romanticism tend to get the better of his objectivity, and here at least one would often be justified in saying of his characters that "they are like puppets, mere figments of the writer's imagination."

Finally, something should be said about two types of figure which frequently appear in Shen's work: the old man and the maiden. The latter is the more important of the two, and Liu Hsi-wei remarks of Shen's skill in depicting her that "it is as though he had been born with the

1. Ibid.: "He is too subjective to know what is really beautiful and what really ugly, what is really good and what really bad. The characters of his works... are what he...thought they should be."
2. Old Letters Preserved, p.16.
soul of a young woman".¹ She appears as early as 1926 with the heroine of "Under a Separate Administration", and she dominates such major stories as "San-san", Border Town and The Long River, as well as playing a dominant or a subsidiary role in a great number of others. Each of these young women is, of course, an individual no less than a type, and they are by no means all identical. San-san, Ts'uei-ts'uei and Yao-yao are very similar to one another, and may be taken to represent the norm, as it were. But others differ in one or more respects from these three. Hsiao-hsiao, for example, is more naive, A-hei less introspective, and the characters in "Three Women" more intellectual, while Ling-ling is still only a child. Nevertheless, all these characters are recognizably variations on a single pattern which may be defined by the qualities that they have in common: such things as youthfulness, beauty, liveliness, charm, and a kind of innocence which leaves them especially open and sensitive to the joys and sorrows of life.

Their precise significance is hard to determine, however. Hsia, sees them as "the embodiments of first love",² but although this applies well enough to San-san and Ts'uei-ts'uei, whom he specifically cites as examples,

¹. Liu Hsi-wei, op. cit., p.73.
². Hsia, op. cit., p.203.
it does not fit Yao-yao, Hsien-hsien, Yüeh-min, or Ling-ling. And if one were to add that this love was fated never to "meet adult fulfilment", \(^1\) A-hei at least would seem to be ruled out as well. Nevertheless, it seems clear that love is the essential part of their nature. Sometimes sexual love is involved, whether fulfilled, as with A-hei or Hsiao-hsiao, frustrated by death or misunderstanding, as with San-san and Ts'uei-ts'uei, or first fulfilled and then cut short, as with Ch'iao-hsiu in "An Ordinary Romance". At other times, however, it is a question of love for relatives, as with Ling-ling's feelings for her mother and sister, or Yao-yao's affection for her father and brother.

The importance of these women characters seems to reflect something of Shen's attitude towards women in general, \(^2\) and to explain it fully one would have to consider the effect on him of certain things in his own life, such as the formative influence of his mother, \(^3\) the premature death of his much admired elder sister, \(^4\) his affection for his young sister, who seems to have been the model for Hsien-hsien and Yüeh-min, and his close friendship

\(^1\) Ibid.
\(^2\) Cp. above, pp.335-6.
\(^3\) Cp. above, pp.16-17.
\(^4\) Above, pp.54-5.
with Ting Ling. The effect of his marriage is also reflected in some of his women characters, and the more mature figure of the housewife, as she appears in the two stories of that name or in "Suicide", stands in direct succession to the young maidens of the other stories.¹

The figure of the old man, who stands at the opposite "pole of Shen Ts'ung-wen's world",² is of less importance. In contrast to the maiden, representing love and youth, the old man seems to stand for death. Sometimes he is a pathetic figure, so obsessed by death that he already belongs more to it than to life, as with the puppeteer of "Living" or the innkeeper of "A Little Scene in Kweichow". At other times, however, though haunted by past deaths and aware of the imminent end of his own life, he appears as a man who has enjoyed life to the full, has acquired a measure of worldly wisdom therefrom, and is now able to contemplate death with a degree of equanimity - although not without sadness. Shen's most fully rounded portraits of old men - Ts'uei-ts'uei's grandfather in Border Town or Man-man in The Long River, for example - are of this latter type.

¹ Cp. for example the early portrait of his wife - then his fiancee - in "Three Women" with the later ones in the "Housewife" stories.
² Hsia, op. cit., p.203.
Hsia\textsuperscript{1} refers in this connection to "the Wordsworthian old man who has drunk life to its dregs and reached a stage of tranquillity beyond joy and despair", but this does not seem entirely accurate. Although they have drunk life to the dregs, they do not, and indeed cannot, entirely transcend the joys and sorrows which life brings, for there is no transcendent element in Shen's work at all. He sees himself merely as a recorder of the phenomena of life, and he has nothing of Wordsworth's "sense sublime/Of something far more deeply interfused"\textsuperscript{2} in nature. From the death which haunts his old men, and many of his young maidens as well (as it haunted him in his own life), he can offer no other refuge but the stoical advice that "the dead should be left to their death, while the living must continue to live as best they can", or that "everything is ordained by fate". Attempts to make sages of his old men, as in "Big and Little Juan" or "Knowledge" are rare and not very successful, while the wisdom of the others remains unequivocally worldly, and is shown to be helpless when the world itself appears in a tragic light, as in \textit{Border Town} or "Kuei-sheng".

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Ibid.}
\item "\textit{Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey... July 13, 1798}"\textsuperscript{, lines 95-6.} \end{enumerate}
C. Techniques and Styles.

One of Shen's most striking characteristics is his consciously stubborn dedication to his art - a dedication to which his constant revision of his stories bears witness.¹ Successive treatments of the same theme suggest the same concern for improvement of his work. One may compare, for example, the somewhat clumsy account of his acquaintance with Liu Yün-t'ing in "The Story of a Storyteller" with the more effective version in the Autobiography, or the unlikely tale of "The Doctor" (1931) with the far more impressive use of the same incident in "Three Men and a Woman". In his constant attempt to master and refine his art, Shen makes use of various styles and techniques in characteristic ways, and a few of these may be briefly commented on here.

In the construction of his stories, two basic elements may be distinguished: the general background, and the particular events with which the narrative is concerned. In some stories the plot predominates, as in "Dark Night" or "An Ordinary Romance", and then the nature of the background and the history of the characters will emerge more or less naturally from the course of the narrative. In other cases, and particularly in most of the longer

¹. He is, according to Hsia (op.cit., p.207), "the only modern Chinese writer with a passion for revision".
stories, the setting itself is of equal or greater importance, perhaps even dissipating the plot altogether, as in "Rottenness", and then it will be described directly. In most cases however, some sort of balance is struck between plot and background, and Shen does this in various ways. He may begin at once with the plot, pause to fill in the background, and then resume the story and take it to its conclusion. On the other hand, he may begin with the background and allow the story to develop from it: a method particularly appropriate where the setting is of primary importance, as in The Long River. These are the two basic methods, but there are also many variations. Thus "Rainbow", for example, begins with a straightforward and lengthy account of the appearance, character and past history of the four young men before taking up the narrative, while "The Counsellor" begins with the background, commences the story, pauses to explain the hero's character and past history, and finally proceeds to the development and conclusion of the narrative.

Shen opens his stories in a variety of ways. Sometimes he does so abruptly, as in "A Portrait of Eight Coursers", which begins as follows:

"Is this the first time you've come to Tsingtao to see the sea, sir?"
"If you want to go and amuse yourself at the beach, sir, walk across the lawn and go through that grove of trees, then you'll come to the sea."
"If you want to look right out over the sea, sir...."¹

Sometimes the opening involves a subtle modulation, as in "Three Women". But most commonly, Shen prefers to begin in a simple, straightforward manner: "At five o'clock in the afternoon, Comrade Wang came out of the No.X clothing and bedding factory in Wuhan on to the main street."²

Shen typically avoids concluding his stories on too decisive a note, and the surprise ending, as in the bitter and perhaps too abrupt last paragraph of "The Ox", is rare. Often the story is of the "slice of life" variety, when a clear-cut ending would be neither possible nor desirable, and in such cases Shen has to rely on other means to give the story a sense of completeness. Thus the early "The Adjutant" concludes with a scene similar to the one with which it began, "After the Rain" and "Pai-tzu" close naturally by following the rhythm of the awakening, gratification and subsidence of sexual desire, while "Son of the Wang and Hsieh" ends with some general remarks which give the story the air of a case-history.

A few of Shen's stories, like "Huei-ming", "Hsiao-hsiao" and "Under a Separate Administration", end happily,

1. **Spring Lamp**, p.47. The old caretaker is speaking to the hero.
but this is unusual. Much more often, the stories have an ironical or melancholy ending, which may range in intensity from the extreme bitterness of "The Ox" or "Holiday" to the tender poignancy of "Quiet" or "Daytime". These endings commonly involve one or more deaths, which cast a retrospective shadow over the whole story, as in "The Vegetable Garden", "Dark Night", "San-san" or Border Town, while in other cases, such as "A-chin" or "Ju-juei", the mere shattering of hoped-for happiness is sufficient to fulfil the same function. Although it would be an exaggeration to call Shen a melancholy or pessimistic writer (for humour also plays a large part in his work), the "influence of the rainy southern weather" is nevertheless clearly perceptible in most of his stories, and especially in their endings.

In his stories, one can see Shen experimenting with various literary techniques: flashback ("Ju-juei"), the use of letters to supplement the narrative ("Under a Separate Administration", "A Portrait of Eight Coursers"), the story within a story ("Number Four", the Buddhist tales), and varying combinations of narrative, description, dialogue and monologue. Yet on the whole Shen does not give the impression of being an experimental writer.

1. Above, p.4.
Despite his constant readiness to improve his work by the use of new techniques or the refinement of old ones, his stories impress more by the skill with which they are written than by any striking originality of style or method. This is perhaps in keeping with his essentially conservative temperament, for he claims to scorn literary theorists and the fashionable excesses of contemporary writing: the triviality of the escapists, the slogan-brandishing of the political activists, and the obscurity of those who value self-expression above communication.

There are, therefore, no striking new developments in Shen's work, no fundamental changes in its character or method. There is certainly increasing maturity and skill, and "Kuei-sheng" (1937) for example, represents a profound improvement over the brief "Fu-sheng" (1925) in style, construction, and depth of thought and feeling. But the difference between these two stories is not so great as to conceal their common authorship. Shen's characteristic attitudes, subjects and methods appear early in his stories, and thereafter they continually recur in different forms, giving his work an underlying continuity and unity.

An adequate evaluation of Shen's prose style is scarcely possible for one who is not Chinese, but a few points may be noted here. His mature style is a fluent one which
is nevertheless capable of some density. He adapts it readily to his subject matter, and Hsia\textsuperscript{1} distinguishes three basic styles, for description, narration and psychological analysis:

In his maturity he has at his command not one but several styles: the limpid pastoral prose with its concrete evocation of landscape, for which he is especially noted and whose most finished example is perhaps The Border Town; the terse narrative style...; the elaborate periods encompassing fluid mental impressions of the characters under description....

Even when Shen was establishing his reputation in Shanghai, he seems to have been regarded by some people as having a difficult style,\textsuperscript{2} and in some of his later works a more elaborate and 'literary' style becomes apparent. It can impress by its dignified or poetic character, but at times it can also be bafflingly vague, owing to complex but loosely constructed sentences and an abstract vocabulary. Examples of this elaborate style may be found in "Learning from Actuality", "The Hsiung Mansion", the second "Housewife", and "Rainbow".\textsuperscript{3} Signs of the same trend can be seen much later also, for Vincent Shih\textsuperscript{4} points out that the language of the articles Shen

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2. Preface by Wen Tzu-ch'uan to SP, p.1.
3. A lengthy sample from the first of these has been translated above, pp.278-9.
wrote in 1961 "is dominated by classical elements".

As already noted, the static, descriptive element in Shen's work is strong, for many of his stories are less concerned with action than with the depiction of character or environment. In this respect his art approaches that of the descriptive poet rather than that of the storyteller,¹ and it would not be far from the truth to say that what he calls "the poetry of human life"² is in fact his chief preoccupation. It is natural, then, that his greatest strength should lie in his powers of description, and his stories make their impression less by the incidents which they relate than by the atmosphere which they evoke and the characters and settings they describe. It is in particular Shen's keen eye for physical detail, apparent already in his earliest work, which gives his stories their memorable vividness, whether they are set in a country landscape or a city slum, a child's garden on a sunny day or a battle-field at night.

Shen's eye for sensuous detail, and his ability to recreate imaginatively what he has perceived, seem to have been with him from his early childhood,³ and they sometimes lead him to describe things with a vividness

1. Liu Hsi-wei, op.cit., p.71, also calls Shen a poet.
2. Tiger Cub, p.5.
which imparts a quasi-symbolical air to them. Shen has in fact been called a symbolist, as the second "Housewife" shows, and he is capable of consciously using symbolism as a literary device, as with the forget-me-nots in "Suicide" for example. At other times, he may see symbolical meaning in natural objects, such as stars\(^1\) or spiders and flowers\(^2\). More characteristic and more pervasive than either of these, however (although it is akin to the latter), is his practice of endowing an object with a heightened and apparently symbolical significance which is not precisely defined.

The most striking example of this practice is his use of the mandarine in *The Long River*. Although the mandarines may be taken as a general symbol of the virtues of the countryside which produces them, they are presented in too concrete a fashion for the abstract values which they represent to overshadow the tangible reality of the fruit itself. Moreover, their precise significance as a symbol is hard to determine and seems to vary with the context. The husband's sickle in "The Husband" and the lamp in "The Lamp" are also objects with a symbolic value which is uncertain or shifting. Moreover, in all these

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instances and very many others, one often feels that for Shen it is in the mere physical presence of the objects he so vividly describes that their true significance lies, that he sees in the sensuous impressions to which he was always so alive a kind of "reality" like that described by Virginia Woolf:

What is "reality"? It would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable - now to be found in dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now in a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and stamps some casual saying. It overpowers one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech.... Now the writer, as I think, has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of this reality. It is his business to find it and collect it and communicate it to the rest of us.2

Finally, something should perhaps be said about the humorous element in Shen's work. "Even if humour is not the most important part of human nature", he says, "it is at least an intrinsic part of it",3 and something similar might be said of his own work. Whether it expresses itself as gentle irony, good-natured ridicule,

1. Liu Hsi-wei (op. cit., pp.74-5) also remarks on this sensuous quality in Shen's writing: "All this the author allows the reader to perceive for himself ....The reader uses not only his eyes, but all his five senses as well."


or straightforward comedy of situation or character, it pervades almost all of Shen's stories to a greater or lesser degree, helping to mitigate the harshness of the satirical stories, and, above all, lightening the sombre melancholy of much of his work, which it thus prevents from degenerating into pessimism, despair or self-pity.

D. The Countryman

When Shen first arrived in Peking at the age of twenty, his reaction to the new currents in thought and literature, after his earlier initial bewilderment, seems to have been as enthusiastic as that of most of the other young students of the day. Even then, however, when he first began to write, he went back to the countryside for much of his material, and as time passed, he came increasingly to feel that his country background set him apart in some way from the city-dwellers among whom he lived. The conflict in his mind between the values of country and city first finds clear fictional expression in "Husband and Wife" and "Hsiao-hsiao" (both 1929), then in such stories as "The Husband" (1930) and "San-san" (1931). His return visit to Hunan in 1934 seems to have brought his feelings on the subject to a head, and in the preface to Border Town he openly proclaimed his personal allegiance
to the values which he had come to perceive in the countryside. Like the propagandists for more political creeds, he would use his writing to oppose all that he considered corrupt in the present age, despite the incomprehension or hostility which he anticipated from the critics and from most readers. He now saw himself as "the countryman", and this self-conception, which finds its clearest expression in "Exercise" and "Learning from Actuality", provided him with a standpoint from which he could evaluate his own work and define his ideas with regard to literature and society.

A great many of Shen's works are concerned with the celebration of his own native countryside of West Hunan - "the land and people of his heart". As James Joyce did with Dublin, Thomas Hardy with Wessex, or Jane Austen with the respectable society of the English countryside of her day, Shen has taken the place and people that he knew most intimately and created from them a distinctive literary world. Many of his most important works are devoted to this world, among them "Pai-tzu", "Hsiao-hsiao", "San-san", Border Town, the Autobiography, Hunan Journey, West Hunan and The Long River. He seems to have felt that

such works demanded for their full comprehension a knowledge of and a sympathy for the West Hunan countryside which he was doubtful of getting from his city readers. In his preface to West Hunan\(^1\) he even goes so far as to emphasize that "the ideal reader of this book should perhaps be a fellow-countryman, born and grown up here, and ever after inseparable from this place in prosperity and decline".

Mention should be made here of the Miao stories, in which Shen also attempts to create a special "world", embodying a particular aspect of Western Hunan. He sees the Miaos as sharing in the virtues of their fellow-countrymen but to a higher degree:

> Among the sailors on these boats we may discover Miao people....They are much the same in all respects as the other sailors, differing only in the honesty, generosity, simplicity and artlessness of their temperament.\(^2\)

Shen's knowledge of the Miao's indigenous way of life seems to have remained that of an outsider however, and the romantic and over-idealized conception of it which he adopts places his Miao stories, despite a certain exotic charm, among the weakest part of his output.

Sensitivity to the moods of nature is a natural part of Shen's love for the countryside, and his landscapes

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1. Pp.4-5.
2. West Hunan, p.13.
are among the most memorable features of his works, both as brief sketches of particular scenes and as the complete panoramas presented by entire stories. The interest which landscape-painting held for Shen is shown not only by his own imitations of the art in words, but also by his devoting a story specifically to the examination of its difficulties ("Rainbow").

In connection with his feeling for nature, mention should also be made of the significance which water had for him. Shen himself attaches considerable importance to this, pointing to the number of his stories that are set by the water, and to the strong influence exerted on the characters and prose style of his stories by the many boatmen and riverside dwellers that he had known and listened to.¹ A glance at his works will show that water, whether in the form of river, rain, sea, pond or canal, does indeed have a prominent place in most of them, just as, according to his Autobiography, it did in his own early life, and that the large claims he makes for the influence of water on his character and writings, while no doubt exaggerated, are by no means pure fancy.

With regard to the religious ceremonies and festivals of the countryside, like those which had presumably

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delighted his childhood, Shen's feelings seem to have been mixed. On the one hand, as a colourful part of country life they had a strong appeal for the artist and the countryman in him. But on the other hand, as a member of the modern intelligentsia he was obliged to reject religion and "superstition", to which a great deal of China's backwardness was attributed. As time passed, however, and Shen came to see himself more consciously as a "countryman", his sympathy for these customs seems to have increased, and he was moved on occasion to defend them openly. The shift in his point of view becomes apparent if one compares his treatment of the almost identical shamanistic ceremonies in The Shaman's Love (about 1929) and "The Reappearance of the Gods" (1937). In the former story, although Shen's interest in the ceremony is clear from the detailed account that he gives of it, there is no suggestion that it has any religious value or that the shaman really believes in the role he is playing as a "god". In the later story, however, as its title indicates, the ceremony is taken more seriously:

"Now you won't oppose our superstitions about the gods any more, for this is not superstition at all!... To offer prayers to the gods about unobtainable blessings and unavoidable disasters: this is something that you only find among stupid men and women who live in

the city. We see the gods in a completely different light...We never make requests of them; we simply regard what we have already got - that which was not obtained by human effort - as a gift of the gods, and to express our gratitude for this gift, we perform a ceremony of worship." 1

Shen defends the ceremonies chiefly on aesthetic grounds. Thus, when asked what he thought of the ceremony, the "visitor from the city replied: 'I felt that it was extremely beautiful'". 2 The same point is made in The Long River: 3 "But such ceremonies also benefit the wives and daughters of peasant families by embellishing their lives, and so preserving them from complete dryness."

Finally, Shen sees these country customs as a link with the past. Thus the shaman's songs recall those of the Ch'u Tz'u: "Although the songs did not equal those of the Ch'u Tz'u in elegance, they were closely akin to them in feeling." 4 This is in fact part of the importance which Shen attributes to the countryside in general, for here he can see the continuous presence of China's ancient past, and a secure future, he believes, can only be built on the basis of continuity with the past. In the cities this continuity is no longer to be found, but it is still

2. Ibid., p.143.
3. P.15.
preserved, though precariously, in the countryside. Shen therefore hopes, as he explains in his preface to *The Long River*, that by preserving a part of that countryside in his writings he will be able to make an important contribution to the future of his country.

E. Fact and Fiction

In *The Summing Up*, W. Somerset Maugham makes some remarks about his work that could well have been spoken by Shen:

> In one way and another I have used in my writings whatever has happened to me in the course of my life. Sometimes an experience I have had has served as a theme and I have invented a series of incidents to illustrate it; more often I have taken persons with whom I have been slightly or intimately acquainted and used them as the foundation for characters of my invention. Fact and fiction are so intermingled in my work that now, looking back on it, I can hardly distinguish one from the other. 1

The link between Shen's own experiences and the world of his fiction is a close one. His aim in writing, he says, is always to describe the phenomena of life, and even when, as in the second "Housewife", he senses a "slight contradiction" between his life and his work, he is aware that this is something which must be overcome, for "I must

live as a man and I must work: these two things are one and inseparable". Many of his stories, such as "The Visitor", "Tiger Cub", "Straggling", "Middle Age", "White Nightmare", or the second "Housewife" are frankly autobiographical, while others, such as "The Lamp", the first "Housewife", or "Dr. Jo-mo", appear to consist of varying proportions of autobiography and fiction blended in such a way that it is difficult to say where one ends and the other begins. Others again are based on people that he knew ("Three Women", "Number Four") or on incidents that he had witnessed (the first "The Doctor", "Three Men and a Woman"), and it seems reasonable to suppose that a good many of the remainder are also fairly directly derived from his experiences of life in the countryside and the city.

Indeed, Shen often claims to value life above art, pointing out that the best books are written with deeds and not words. Although he works with words, and, as his letters show, feels a true craftsman's concern for their proper use, he nevertheless often doubts their adequacy as a means of conveying experienced realities:

When I mention these things, it makes me feel anew the poverty of man's written and spoken

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language. The sounds and the atmosphere, were really something that writing and speech cannot describe.1

The same point is well illustrated in terms of painting in the story "Rainbow".

This belief in the ultimate inadequacy of art finds expression in the prominent part played by non-fictional elements in Shen's work. Of these, autobiography is the most important. Shen began writing autobiography at least as early as 1925, with the essay "Jottings of a Timorous Man". This was followed by "My Neighbours" (1927), "At Private School" (1928), and many others, up to "Housewife" (1945-6) and the essay "Learning from Actuality" (1947). His major work of this kind is of course the Autobiography itself. Describing vividly the first twenty years of his life, which formed his character and provided him with the material and themes that were to dominate most of his writing, the Autobiography occupies the central place, not only among the other autobiographical stories and essays, but also in Shen's work as a whole.

Shen's inclination towards autobiography may also be partly the result of self-consciousness induced by a feeling of alienation from his environment, for he seems to have been fated to remain something of an outsider at

all times: an artist born into a military family, a truant from school, the smallest child in his military training class, an introvert (as it eventually turned out) in the army, and a countryman in the city. But whatever the reason, this autobiographical tendency colours most of his work, making even his purely fictional stories into reflections of his own experiences, or at least of his own ideas and feelings, in accordance with his belief that "a writer's works must all have an individual character and be steeped in the author's personality and feelings".¹

Biography of others also plays a prominent part in Shen's writing, principally in his two works in memory of Ting Ling and Hu Yeh-p'in, but also, in a more general sense, in the character sketches in some of his other books: the account of Liu Yün-t'ing in the Autobiography, for example, or of Shen's friend Yin in the last chapter of Hunan Journey. Here again there is a close relationship between fact and fiction, for many of the accounts of people, places and events in the Autobiography, Ting Ling and the two travel books could clearly serve as raw material for typical Shen Ts'ung-wen stories.

Shen's belief that art can at best only provide an inadequate reflection of the beauty and complexity presented by life leads naturally to the view that art should serve the ends of life, and despite his professed amoralism there is in fact a strong didactic strain in Shen's work. Not only in his letters, essays and prefaces, but also in many of his stories, he is concerned to defend his ideals, and to satirize what he considers contrary to them. Sometimes the moral is brought out in the stories through satire, or it may even be openly stated, while at other times it is more indirectly expressed. But whether its presence is explicit or implicit, obvious or subtle, appropriate or intrusive, few of his stories escape from didacticism altogether.

The didactic attitude to literature and art has of course a long history in China, from the moralistic interpretations of the Book of Songs to the Communist literature of the twentieth century. Shen strongly disapproves of the use of literature merely as a vehicle for propaganda, but he does believe, in accordance with the traditional view that "poetry can regulate one's nature and emotion and improve human relationships,"¹ that

literature may have a beneficial (or harmful) effect on the individual and, through him, on the whole of society. Thus he hopes that his work "will prove instructive and encouraging "to his friends and readers and that the picture of the countryside that he has preserved in his works will be of assistance in the future development of society, and he clearly feels himself to be one of the "thoughtful, sincere, and creative writers" who - in contrast to the politically active who noisily proclaim their sympathy for the masses without doing anything constructive to help them - have "really enriched the feelings of the people and heightened the awareness of the masses"¹ by their art.

F. The Author

Since Shen himself figures in so many of his writings, and since all his best work clearly bears the stamp of his own personality - as indeed he believed it should² - a few remarks about his character, as it appears in his writings, may not be out of place here. His autobiographical pieces provide a variety of self-portraits corresponding to different stages and aspects of his

life, such as the truant child, the young soldier, the eager but impoverished student, the timid and lonely dreamer, the radical idealist, the harassed writer, "begging for food with a golden bowl",¹ the dedicated artist pursuing his chosen course with a countryman's stubbornness despite hostility and incomprehension, and finally, the venerable man of letters summing up his career and his hopes and fears for his country. Equally revealing are his essays, and, in a less direct way, his fictional writings. The character which emerges from all these portraits is of someone deeply troubled by inner conflicts, as timidity struggles with self-assurance, the conservatism of the countryman with the "progressive" attitudes of the city intellectual, realism with idealism, and reverence for art with reverence for life.

Shen's diffidence and self-doubt are clearly revealed by such autobiographical pieces as "Straggling", "Tiger Cub" and "Middle Age", and are also reflected in some semi-autobiographical stories, like "Dr. Jo-mo"² and the first "Housewife".³ The origin of these feelings should probably be sought in his childhood - as for example in the sense of guilt at having disappointed his father by his

¹. Old Letters Preserved, p.5.
². See Spring Lamp, p.102.
³. See Black Phoenix, p.57.
truancy and lying which emerges strongly from the *Autobiography* and "At Private School". In disappointing his father he was of course also letting down the whole family tradition, which his father embodied for him, by his obviously unsoldierly character and his generally disgraceful conduct. This gave him a feeling of alienation from his family, and a conviction that they did not understand him, which may have had something to do with his later inability to feel at home in the urban and literary world in which he came to live. It also gave him a sense of inferiority to his young brother, who eclipsed him in the family's affections, and this too was still very much with him twenty years or so later, as "Tiger Cub" shows.

Shen is sometimes haunted, then, by a feeling of alienation from his surroundings and a sense of personal inadequacy, and he is apt, at times of stress, to seek escape from a hostile environment in fantasy or even thoughts of suicide. Compensating for this, however, are his pride in his work and his faith in his ideals. He may doubt himself or even, in general terms, the value of art, but he adheres stubbornly to the values he believes in, and his faith in his ability as a writer, and in the worth of the contribution which he is making to society through his art, comforts him in the face of attacks on
and misunderstandings of his work. Even during and after the war with Japan, when Shen was apparently criticized by some for his failure to produce "patriotic" literature he continues to scorn the political activists and to affirm the greater value to society of the man who ignores politics in order to concentrate on developing his art. Shen may be lonely and misunderstood, but such has always been the fate of true artists, and time will vindicate him, he feels.

The basic conflict in Shen's mind, and the one he explores most thoroughly in his work, is between the values of the city and the countryside. He himself traces this to the disparity between his country origins and his later urban environment, and he sees the same conflict in his friend Ting Ling:

She was herself a kind of contradiction. This contradiction was the same as that which obtains when every person of peasant stock transfers his life to the city.

Aware of the virtues of country life yet oppressed by its narrowness and frequent brutality, attracted by the larger world of the city yet repelled by the ugliness, noisiness and "spiritual malnutrition" that he found

there, Shen seems to have been uncertain for a long time as to where his allegiance lay. Was he a progressive city intellectual or a conservative countryman? A writer of books or a despiser of them? Did he value the life of the body and senses above that of the intellect or vice versa?

This conflict Shen resolved in the end by becoming a propagandist for the virtues of the countryside, trying to preserve them in his work in order to convey something of them to sympathetic contemporary and future readers. Here again it was his faith in himself as an artist which sustained him, for in proclaiming himself a "countryman" he was only declaring his intention to abide by the world which had nourished his imagination and provided the material for much of his finest work. So he says: "I feel very lonely. There are too few countrymen."¹ But he adds almost at once: "Nevertheless I am still ready to continue my work, and never will I give up my eccentric imagination."²

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2. Ibid., p.8.
G. Influences

In the evaluation of a writer's work, the consideration of literary influences is generally of some importance. In Shen's case, however, the variety of literary influences to which he was exposed is so great that specific debts to other writers are difficult to trace. Nevertheless it may be useful to mention here the works which he is known to have read, for as well as suggesting possible influences, this will help to define the literary context in which he wrote.

Modern Chinese literature was formed under the influence of European literature, and the magazines which Shen first read, like the Creation Weekly, New Tide (or Renaissance), New Youth and La Rekonstruo, or those to which he later contributed himself, like Contemporary Review, The Crescent Monthly and The Short Story Magazine, offered a medley of works by foreign writers of all countries and times; and a similar variety was available to him in book form. Shen's first two contacts with foreign literature seem to have been through the novels of Dickens, in Lin Shu's translation, and some stories from the Arabian Nights which he found in a set of

2. Ibid., p.84; Autobiography, pp.139,141.
magazines. The latter, he says, made a deep impression on him, but it was Dickens' novels which particularly moved him, and their influence is apparent in a number of his own stories. Shen felt a special affinity with Dickens, but his genius is nevertheless of quite a different type, and the stories which show the strongest Dickensian influence are not among his best or his most characteristic.

Shortly after he arrived in Peking, Shen acquired an old copy of the Bible in Chinese. Its poetic qualities pleased him, and from its stories he claims to have learnt some "basic knowledge of the expression of feelings through narrative". This early contact with the Bible helps to account for Shen's use of terms like "the Kingdom of Heaven", and for the not infrequent appearance in his stories of Christians, both lay ("Dr. Jo-mo", "Gentry Wife", the first "The Doctor") and clerical ("Construction", "Number Four"). Despite Shen's respect for Dr. Jo-mo or the good clergyman in "Number Four", however, there is no sign of his ever having been attracted by Christianity as a religion, any more than he was drawn to Buddhism, despite his interest in early Buddhist tales.

1. Above, pp.103-4.
or ancient Buddhist temples.\(^1\) In religious matters, his own inclination would seem to be towards the attitude of the T'eng family, who "seemed to have no religious beliefs" but nevertheless scrupulously observed the traditional feast-days and fast-days of the countryside.\(^2\)

Apart from the Bible, Shen must have been familiar with a wide range of the foreign works that were available in translation, and among the authors that he read are Shakespeare,\(^3\) Flaubert,\(^4\) Gorky and Balzac.\(^5\) He was sufficiently impressed by Lewis Carroll's Alice books to write a satire inspired by them, but the major influences during his early period at least seem to have been Chekhov and Maupassant, for he claims that it was they who introduced him to the art of writing modern short stories.\(^6\)

It is interesting to learn that he had a copy of Daudet's *Le Petit Chose* in his room not long after he arrived in Peking,\(^7\) for this work, though ostensibly fiction, in fact describes Daudet's memories of his childhood and youth, and it may not have been without influence on

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2. *The Long River*, p.44.
5. "White Nightmare", SP, p.121.
6. SF, Preface, p.3.
7. *Ting Ling* I, p.34.
Shen's own autobiographical writing.

It is difficult to say whether Shen could approach any foreign literary works in their original language. He sometimes uses an English word or two in a story,\(^1\) in order to achieve a humorous effect and reveal some facet of character, but there is no evidence to show that his knowledge of the language went beyond the few words and phrases that he could have picked up from reading or from his friends, and in fact his claim to be "cut off" \(^2\) from English and Russian poetry clearly suggests a language barrier. At one stage he, Hu Yeh-p'in and Ting Ling undertook to learn Japanese,\(^3\) but their studies do not seem to have long survived their initial enthusiasm.

Among contemporary Chinese writers, Shen acknowledges only one specific literary debt as far as his fiction is concerned, and that is to Lu Hsüen\(^4\) (1881-1936), whose stories he had studied eagerly when first learning to write. He also feels deeply indebted to Hsü Chih-mo, without whom, he says, he may never have become a writer at all. But this last does not seem to be a question of literary influence so much as of advice, assistance or

\(^1\) E.g. "The Visitor", A Portrait of Eight Coursers, pp.80,86.

\(^2\) "On Modern Poetry", SP, p.123.

\(^3\) Ting Ling I, pp.126-8, 137ff.

\(^4\) SF, Preface, p.3.
encouragement which he received from the poet. He was similarly assisted by Hu Shih also at an early point in his career - a second "experiment" on Hu's part, Shen observes with a touch of boastfulness, that was even bolder and destined to be even more influential than his first.¹

Finally, Shen was of course also widely read in earlier Chinese literature, both poetry and prose. He seems to have always been fond of poetry. In his youth he had read such poets as Li Shang-yin² and Yü Hsuan-chi,³ among, no doubt, many others, and even when he began to write, Ts'ao Chih 曹植 (192-232) and the Ch'u Tz'u were still among his favourite reading.⁴ The Ch'u Tz'u in particular had a special place in his affections because he could relate much of it to the land and customs of his native province, and his reading of traditional Chinese poetry may have had some general influence on the often poetic character of his work.

His reading of earlier Chinese fiction must, however, have had a greater influence on his stories. He often

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² Above, p.124.

³ Above, p.138.

⁴ SF, Preface, p.3.
mentions the Chuang Tzu, the colourful and humorous anecdotes in which had no doubt made an early impression on him, and such collections of tales as Chin-ku Ch'i-kuan 今古奇觀, a Ming Dynasty anthology, and Liao-chai Chih-i 聊齋誌異 by P'u Sung-ling 蒲松齡 (1640-1715) were familiar to him from his childhood.¹ He read the ancient histories with interest, particularly the Shih Chi, with which he had become acquainted at the same time as he was discovering Dickens. When he arrived in Peking, the Shih Chi was at first the "only teacher" that he had,² and even afterwards it remained among his favourite reading.³

He was of course familiar with the classic novels. He had read the Shuei-hu Chuan in his youth,⁴ and the others, such as Chin P'ing Mei, Hung Lou Meng, Feng Shen Yen-i⁵ and Ju-lin Wai-shih⁶ some time later presumably. By about 1930 Shen's researches into the history of Chinese fiction had already given him a knowledge of the subject that was great enough for the course which he gave in Shanghai to impress at least one member of his audience

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1. SF, Preface, p.3.
3. Ibid., p.3.
6. Ting Ling I, p.64.
as being equal in merit to Lu Hsün's later-published *Brief History of Chinese Fiction*.¹ This knowledge, which was increased by further study, must have affected his own creative work, even apart from the stories based on early Buddhist tales, and Hsia² sees "the emergence of a distinguished supple prose in his writings of the early and middle thirties" as being "directly traceable to his continual exploration of varieties of Chinese prose as professor of Chinese".

H. Criticisms and Estimates

As has been said, Shen was proud of his achievements as an author. Looking back over his first decade of work, he observed that throughout these years he had been practising a craft more arduous than any other that he knew, and yet he had thought it worth while to persist. When one of his works turned out to be a failure, he had not lost heart but had tried again; and when he chanced to succeed, he had still been willing to try again, to see if he could improve on what he had done by using a different approach. So he had gone his way with a faith

1. See Wen Tzu-ch'uan's Preface to SP, p. 3.
in his own work that disregarded criticism, and if, he adds, "you call this 'conceit', you may go ahead and do so: I have no wish to dispute the point". ¹

One may ask, then, what Shen's estimate of his own work was, and by what criteria he distinguished success from failure. At the end of his creative period he set lofty standards, claiming that a literary work is worth valuing when

its achievement is such as to set higher standards for the New Literature Movement and create genuine progress; when it is capable of stimulating more people to take up their pens, to have courage, to feel the need to reveal things, and to be able to make all kinds of fresh efforts and investigations; and when it is also capable of having a far-reaching and beneficial influence on its readers, by means of the generous and profound feelings that pervade and sustain it.²

Here Shen is speaking more as a prophet than a critic, and judged by these standards, which are as much social as literary, even his own work would have to be counted a failure, for political events soon nullified any "far-reaching and beneficial influence" that it might have had.

Even when he is not so specifically concerned with righting current ills, however, Shen tends to appraise his work in moral terms. His stories, he says, reveal a

¹ "Exercise", A-chin, p.2.
² "Actuality", SP, p.92.
countryman's attitude to such things as "morality", "love" and "human life", and show his "eternal reverence for the wisdom and beauty of mankind, his admiration for robust sincerity, and his detestation of stupidity and selfishness".

Yet among the conflicts in Shen's character, there is one between the moralist and the amoralist. He seems to have difficulty in making up his mind whether he is a prophet preaching his "countryman"'s gospel to a corrupt society, or whether he is an essentially amoral artist, a distinterested recorder of life. He may therefore claim in his Autobiography to have no understanding of ethical principles, or, in the same essay in which he speaks of the moral quality of his stories, he may also describe his task succinctly as "capturing feelings and phenomena in writing" and himself as being otherwise uninvolved with the external world. From this point of view, his aim, as he puts it, is simply to build a little shrine to human nature, and his work may be judged by its beauty rather than its social effects. Even from the aesthetic point of view, however, he sees feeling as the

2. Ibid., p.8.
3. P.93.
5. Ibid., p.3.
most important thing, and to "enjoy the freshness of my stories" while overlooking the "warmth of feeling stored up behind them", or to "savour the simple honesty of my style" while neglecting the "grief that lies concealed behind" it is to "buy the case and return the pearl".¹ Feelings of happiness and sadness, then, are what Shen chiefly wants to communicate through his writing, and he is confident of success if only his readers will approach his works with an open mind.²

He particularly warns against trying to evaluate his work in terms of fashionable literary categories, for it is not susceptible of classification as this or that.³ Whether the "shrine" he has built is to the taste of his contemporaries, or whether it pleases posterity or not, is a matter of indifference to him, for he has built it according to his own design in order to please himself, and he is satisfied.⁴

Many critics, however, were not so satisfied. The hostile opinions of Hsia Yen and Ting Yi have already been quoted, and there were not wanting others to say that Shen was merely "developing the ideology of bourgeois

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1. Ibid., p.5.
2. Ibid., p.7.
3. Ibid., pp.6, 7.
4. Ibid., p.3.
individualism and the tendency towards idealism and nihilism that is so strong among the intelligentsia".1

The commonest charge against Shen was that his work "lacked thought", generally referring to its lack of political content. This complaint Shen himself indignantly repudiated, seeing in it yet another symptom of the corrupting influence of politics on literature and life in modern China. "All independent thinkers," he remarks bitterly, "who are able to exist without relying on certain political ideals naturally also become people who are said to 'lack thought'."2

But not everybody was hostile to Shen and his work. Han Shih-heng, for example, even in an essay originally entitled "A Vacuous Author" 一個空虛的作者, in which he attacks Shen's works as "an obstacle impeding social progress", admits that his stories are popular with the majority of readers,3 and in a supplementary note4 he

2. Ting Ling 丁麗 II, p.155.
4. Ibid., p.95.
mentions the many letters he had received defending Shen since the first publication of his article. Similarly, an even more unfriendly critic admits that Shen had had a great many readers before the war with Japan.¹

It seems therefore that it was chiefly with some at least of the literary critics, rather than with the book-buying public, that Shen was unpopular, as his frequently expressed contempt for critics and their opinions might suggest. Some of this criticism would have been on purely political grounds, as in the cases mentioned above, and therefore of no literary significance. Other critics, however, were more concerned with literary values, as with Han Shih-heng, who clearly makes an honest attempt to come to grips with Shen's work. Han's chief complaint against Shen, however, is the rather curious one that his work lacks substance, and that he is simply writing fluent but trivial stories in order to cater to the tastes of the unthinking majority. This is of course a superficial and hasty judgement, as Han himself seems to have suspected after many people had defended Shen to him. He points out in the supplementary note to his essay that he wrote without malice but perhaps over-harshly,² and his later essay, on the Buddhist

¹. Hsia Yen, op. cit., p.34.
². Han Shih-heng, "Shen Ts'ung-wen's Fiction", Literary Criticism, p.95.
tales, is more sympathetic in tone.

Han also makes an interesting but inadequate attempt to classify Shen's stories according to their content, as city love-stories, country love-stories, stories about the hardships of military life, and "commonplace tales".¹ In 1935, in an essay discussing Shen's collection of stories based on Buddhist tales, Han writes of Shen more sympathetically, and this time he tries to distinguish three characteristic features of his work as a whole: readability (mei-Ã£Á£É: the power of fascination which keeps the reader engrossed), satire directed at faults which Shen sees as currently widespread, and the celebration of young love as a means of asserting the freedom of the individual against pressures towards social conformity.

Even among critics, Shen's work sometimes found a warm response, as Liu Hsi-wei's enthusiastic essay on Border Town shows. Occasionally Liu's enthusiasm leads him to make some rash statements, such as that "Shen Ts'ung-wen never analyzes",² or that he "does not preach"³, but most of his observations bear out his initial assertion that a critic must feel sympathy for a work if he is to

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1. Ibid., pp.92-3.
2. Liu Hsi-wei, op. cit., p.70.
3. Ibid., p.71.
appraise it accurately. Liu proposes a distinction between the natural, spontaneous genius who is concerned with people rather than art, such as Balzac, and the self-conscious artist whose chief concern is beauty, such as Flaubert. It comes as something of a surprise, however, to find him then classifying Shen with the latter rather than with the former, for Shen's copious production and his wide human sympathies recall Balzac rather than the colder and narrower world and the painstaking composition of Flaubert. Nevertheless, Shen's constant revision and polishing of his stories, and his patient dedication to his art, do lend some validity to Liu's claim that he is a writer like Flaubert, "moving gradually towards a self-conscious art".¹

Unfortunately, however, this careful craftsmanship is not always apparent in Shen's work. His early stories in particular have been criticized for verboseness,² and a tendency to unnecessary repetitiveness and irrelevant digression is a frequent fault in his writing. In "Ox" and "A Slight Coolness", for example, the nature of the relationship between the farmer and his ox, and of the woman's attitude to her would-be suitors are

¹. Ibid., p.70.
explained so many times in different words that the reader is apt to lose patience. Or again, to take a slighter but more specific example from one of his best works, at one point in *The Long River* Shen is gently ridiculing the Chairman of the Traders' Association for his faith in the omniscience of the *Shun Pao*. Although he has made his point quite clearly, Shen seems unable to resist spoiling the joke by underlining it at last: "If it appeared in the newspaper then it was true, but any news not mentioned there was for the most part unreliable".¹

Related to this tendency to say too much is Shen's habit of drifting into irrelevant digressions. One has to be careful here, for it would be absurd to demand that an author always keep strictly to the point, or that a literary work should conform to a telegram's standards of economy,² and it is by no means easy to say just when a digression in a story is justified and when it can be considered a superfluous intrusion. Nevertheless, it remains true that many of Shen's stories are weakened by digressions which are too long or too irrelevant. A particularly transparent example of this may be found in

Little Chou's soliloquy in "Rainbow", much of which seems to have strayed into the story from one of Shen's essays, for it has little connection with the theme of the story and sheds no light on Little Chou's character.

As with the works of any other artist, Shen's stories are not all of equal value, and some types stand out as better or worse than others. The Miao stories, for example, are weak, and stories with squalid settings, whether in the city or the country, are generally less impressive than those set in more pleasant surroundings, for their characters tend to be more superficially drawn. In general, Shen writes best where his sympathies are most fully engaged and his familiarity with the setting and characters is greatest, as when he is dealing with the people and countryside of his native West Hunan, which occupies the central place in his work as in his imagination.

The range of his stories, and even of his best ones, is by no means confined to Hunan, however, and the crowded world embodied in his fictional and biographical writings is a work of art in itself, impressive in its variety and comprehensiveness. What Shen says of Border Town might also be applied to his work as a whole:

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1. SP, pp.54-5.
If the disposition of theme and subject-matter and the revelation of character are all done flawlessly, this kind of world might disappear, and it could of course still be preserved in my story. Even if this world did not really exist at all, the truth of the story would remain unimpaired.¹

Shen professes not to care whether his work survives him or not,² but it is clear that he feels confident of having created something of lasting value. Whether or not this confidence is justified, however, is something that only time can show:

My work consists in interpreting the past and explaining the present. As to whether or not it will be of assistance to the future, I leave that, like my own uncouthness and obstinacy, to the judgement of history.³

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2. Ibid., p.3.
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