

The Routledge Companion to Shen Congwen



Edited by Zhou Gang, Chen Sihe, Zhang Xinying, Jeffrey C. Kinkley



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ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO SHEN CONGWEN

This volume is about studies of Shen Congwen (1902–1988), one of the most important writers in modern China, but more importantly, it is about how Shen Congwen has been received in and beyond Mainland China. By presenting the best literary criticism on Shen Congwen in Mainland China over the past 80 years, and views of how Shen Congwen has been understood, interpreted, and appreciated in Japan, the US, and Europe, the editors propose a new way to approach the topics of canonic writers, modern Chinese literature, and world literature.

This is itself a translated project. Its Chinese edition appeared in May 2017. The bilingual rendering of the best criticism of Shen Congwen from a global perspective intends to initiate and advance dialogues between Chinese- and English- language scholarly communities. We strive to explore the complexities of “worldwide” images and interpretations of Shen Congwen. By calling attention to the *foreign spaces* into which overseas Shen Congwens and modern Chinese literature are reborn as world literature, we acknowledge and celebrate the study of Shen Congwen and modern Chinese literature as ongoing and endless cross-cultural dialogues and manifestations.

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and Jeffrey C. Kinkley*

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CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>x</i>
PART I	
Biography	1
1 A short biography of Shen Congwen <i>Ding Qianhan; Jeffrey C. Kinkley, tr.</i>	3
PART II	
Survey of research on Shen Congwen	27
2 The study of Shen Congwen in China <i>Yuan Yiyue; Philip F. Williams, tr.</i>	29
3 The study of Shen Congwen in Japan <i>Hisayo Kojima; Hisayo Kojima and Jeffrey C. Kinkley, tr.</i>	44
4 American Shen Congwens: a search for translators <i>Zhou Gang</i>	51
5 The translation and reception of Shen Congwen in France and elsewhere in Europe <i>Isabelle Rabut and Angel Pino</i>	62

PART III	
Research on Shen Congwen in China	69
6 <i>Border Town</i> and “Portrait of Eight Steeds” <i>Liu Xiwei (Li Jianwu); Zhou Gang, tr.</i>	71
7 The loneliness of Shen Congwen <i>Wang Zengqi; Eugene Eoyang, tr.</i>	75
8 Looking at Shen Congwen from the perspective of cultures in confrontation: Miao and Han; Chinese and Western <i>Ling Yu; Jeffrey C. Kinkley, tr.</i>	85
9 Shen Congwen and Chu culture <i>Liu Yiyou; Yuan Rongjie, tr.</i>	98
10 Temporal form in Shen Congwen’s fiction <i>Liu Hongtao; Jingyuan Liu, tr.</i>	118
11 Code words for communications media in <i>Long River</i> : Shen Congwen’s imaginaries of the nation and of the modern <i>Wu Xiaodong; Jeffrey C. Kinkley, tr.</i>	134
12 From enlightenment to the folk: <i>Border Town</i> <i>Chen Sihe; Jeffrey C. Kinkley, tr.</i>	151
13 Shen Congwen and 20th century China <i>Zhang Xinying; Jeffrey C. Kinkley, tr.</i>	170
PART IV	
Research on Shen Congwen outside of China	187
14 Comparative research on the work of Shen Congwen and Nakagami Kenji <i>Shiroya Takeo; Paul Bevan, tr.</i>	189
15 “Dreams” and “Reality” in Shen Congwen’s wartime works: with special focus on “Dreams and Reality” (1940), “Plucking Stars” (1943), and “Gazing at Rainbows” (1943) <i>Imaizumi Hideto; Pamela Hunt, tr.</i>	217

Contents

16	How Shen Congwen became a “believer in music”: wandering among sensory descriptions in <i>Nightmares of Seven Colors</i> <i>Tsumori Aki</i>	226
17	English translations of Shen Congwen’s masterwork, <i>Bian cheng</i> (<i>Border Town</i>) <i>Jeffrey C. Kinkley</i>	251
18	Freud in Hunan: translating Shen Congwen’s “Xiaoxiao” <i>Eugene Eoyang</i>	266
19	The transformations of work and life: on Shen Congwen’s texts of self-explication <i>Isabelle Rabut; Charles A. Laughlin, tr.</i>	273
20	Shen Congwen’s literary thought and the development of Chinese modern literature <i>Rosa Lombardi</i>	287
	<i>Works cited and major references</i>	298
	<i>Index</i>	302

FOREWORD

Zhou Gang

When Goethe first proposed the term “world literature,” the international reception of his own works was very much on his mind. It is in a way surprising that the current debate on world literature does not engage reception studies in any significant way. The recently published *Routledge Companion to World Literature* includes a list of articles that address the disciplinary dimension of world literature: world literature and philology; world literature and national literature(s); world literature and comparative literature; world literature and translation studies; world literature and postmodernism; and world literature and postcolonialism. While these are all valuable topics with which to map out the reemerging field of world literature, one wonders whether Goethe would add a new chapter, “World Literature and Reception Studies.”

This volume, the *Routledge Companion to Shen Congwen*, is about studies of Shen Congwen (1902–1988), one of the most important writers in modern China, but more importantly, it is about how Shen Congwen has been received in and beyond Mainland China. By presenting the best literary criticism on Shen Congwen in Mainland China over the past 80 years, and views of how Shen Congwen has been understood, interpreted, and appreciated in Japan, the U.S., France, and Europe, the editors propose a new way to approach the topics of canonic writers, modern Chinese literature, and world literature. The most relevant questions here are: How shall we perceive translated Shen Congwen and other rebirths of Shen Congwen in spaces beyond China? How shall we approach translated and to some degree reimagined modern Chinese literature in various receiving cultures? What is modern Chinese literature in a global perspective? How do these translated and overseas modern Chinese literatures contribute to our understanding of modern Chinese literature as world literature?

This *Routledge Companion to Shen Congwen* is itself a translated project. Its Chinese edition appeared in May 2017. Bringing to the Chinese-speaking world different versions of Shen Congwen as imagined from various *foreign spaces*, the Chinese edition not only made available some of the finest studies of Shen Congwen conducted in Japan, America, and Europe, but also argued that these overseas Shen Congwens should be treated as equal to the Chinese interpretations of Shen Congwen. Just as the perceptions and receptions of Shen Congwen in Mainland China have been deeply influenced by China’s political upheavals, these overseas Shen Congwens have been shaped

by distinctive host cultures, academic atmospheres, and transcultural readings exercised by individual translators and scholars. Flowing in the opposite direction, from Chinese to English, this English edition makes available to English-speaking scholarship a wealth of original and insightful research on Shen Congwen from Mainland China. But more importantly, it proposes a new form of reception studies that highlight those *foreign spaces* where modern Chinese literature became world literature and found endless reincarnations.

Since its entry into the American academy about ten years ago, Sinophone studies have decentered and unsettled modern Chinese literature in the conventional sense. Sinophone scholars have made great efforts to redefine and reimagine the study of modern Chinese literature from writings on the margins of China and Chineseness: writings produced by ethnic minorities inside the People's Republic of China and by Chinese-speaking communities outside China, especially in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, and other Southeast Asian countries. Crossing different borders and boundaries, this volume, the *Routledge Companion to Shen Congwen*, redefines and reimagines the study of modern Chinese literature, not from the margins but from the multiple *foreign spaces* in which it has been received. It argues that all these versions of modern Chinese literature as received in different host cultures should be understood and appreciated on their own terms. To understand modern Chinese literature fully in this age of globalization, we cannot and should not leave aside these other modern Chinese literatures born as world literature in *foreign spaces*.

Placing this English edition side by side with the 2017 Chinese edition, the bilingual rendering of the best criticism of Shen Congwen from Mainland China and beyond intends to initiate and advance dialogues between Chinese- and English-language scholarly communities. As defined by the nature of such an international project, many scholars, authors, and translators from China, Japan, America, England, France, and Italy were engaged in this rewriting of Shen Congwen from a global perspective. Without doubt, it is the connectedness of people (in academic professions in particular) in our globalized world that makes such an enterprise possible. But such an "international space" within which Shen Congwen has been received needs to be carefully thought about. Instead of stressing a universal platform on which participants talk as if they were all in a universal laboratory, this *Routledge Companion to Shen Congwen* strives to explore the complexities of "worldwide" images and interpretations of Shen Congwen. By calling attention to the *foreign spaces* into which overseas Shen Congwens are reborn as world literature, it acknowledges and celebrates the study of Shen Congwen and modern Chinese literature as ongoing and endless cross-cultural dialogues and manifestations.

Finally, we would like to thank Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press and Routledge for having had the vision to see this project through. I am extremely grateful to Professor Chen Sihe for his generous support of this project from the beginning. Professor Jeffrey C. Kinkley has played the most significant role in this English edition of *Routledge Companion to Shen Congwen*. Professor Michel Hockx and Professor Jon Kowallis helped locate translators for us. Last but not least, all the authors and translators in this volume deserve our gratitude for making this exciting project possible.

ABBREVIATIONS

- QJ: *Shen Congwen quanji* (The complete works of Shen Congwen). Taiyuan: Beiyue wenyi chubanshe, 2002, index 2003.
- WJ: *Shen Congwen wenji* (The works of Shen Congwen). Shao Huaqiang and Ling Yu, eds. Hong Kong: Sanlian; Guangzhou: Huacheng, 1982–85.

PART I

Biography



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1

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF SHEN CONGWEN

Ding Qianhan

Jeffrey C. Kinkley, tr.

1. The Shen family home in Fenghuang

On December 28, 1902, or the 29th day of the 11th month of the 28th year in the reign of the Guangxu Emperor of the Qing dynasty, Shen Yuehuan was born in a remote town inside the Hunan border girded by a river and nestled among mountains. Today the town is called Fenghuang. Formerly it was called Zhen'gan. The Tuo River runs through it. It was here that Shen Yuehuan grew up. Later he changed his name to Shen Congwen.

Zhen'gan is in West Hunan, near Guizhou province. Once a major Qing garrison town that grew up gradually through the accretion of imperial power, it retained institutions of the Army of the Green Standard into Republican times. Several hundred years of despotic rule and resistance to it had stained the land with blood; this mostly quieted down after Shen Congwen grew up. Although Han, Miao, and other ethnic groups lived alongside each other, the Han enjoyed a position of social superiority. Han or Miao, the local people favored the military arts; enlisting was the main career choice for young men, who hoped to become generals and bring glory to their families.

Shen Congwen's grandfather Shen Hongfu was a Han. Having been in the Hunan Army led by Zeng Guofan, he was promoted to brigade commander of Zhaotong, Yunnan, and acting commander-in-chief of Guizhou. He therefore left his family some property and social status. His wife was also a Han. Shen Hongfu died without an heir, so his wife had to take charge and adopt a son from Hongfu's younger brother, Shen Hongfang. That son was Shen Zongsi, Congwen's father. Shen Zongsi's mother was a Miao, of low status; after giving birth to two children as a concubine, she was married off to distant parts. Shen Zongsi's Miao blood was kept secret. Shen Congwen learned that Miao blood flowed through his veins only at the age of 20.

As Shen Hongfu's stepson, Shen Zongsi faced two expectations: carrying on the family line and bringing glory to the Shen family. The latter was of course to be achieved by becoming a general. During the Eight-Nation Alliance's punitive expedition, when the Dagou Forts of Tianjin were lost, Shen Zongsi was a subordinate general under the Dagou commander, Gen. Luo Rongguang. He had most of the Shen family property with him, and lost it in the chaos of the 1900 Boxer Rising. This forced

him to return home, where he had one male child, a 2-year-old. Two years later, when Shen Hongfu's wife passed away, Shen Zongsi's second son was a 100 days old – and that was Shen Congwen. Shen Zongsi continued to participate in local politics back home and became a person of importance, but lost an election to become a provincial assemblyman. He traveled to Beijing and there participated in a failed plot to assassinate President Yuan Shikai. When the plot was exposed, Shen Zongsi fled to Rehe province and other places. After many years living in the border regions, he finally returned to West Hunan, ultimately to die at home when Shen Congwen was 28. Two years later, Shen Congwen in his autobiography thanked his father for giving him life, and for giving him pride and courage.

Shen Congwen's maternal grandfather Huang Heqing was the first local holder of the *gongsheng* degree from the imperial examinations. He worked in a local academy and in temples. His was a household of openminded thinking that kept up with the times; they opened the first photography studio and the first post office in town. Shen Congwen's mother's brother Huang Jingming later went to Beijing to manage the real estate of Xiong Xiling, the first premier of the Republic of China. With that family background, Shen Congwen's mother Huang Ying became a woman of learning not inferior to the local males who went into the military. Shen Congwen felt that his mother bore the burden of educating her children, and that his own male powers of thinking and decision-making were likewise learned from his mother.

Shen Congwen was the second male child in line in his family, so he was called "Second Elder Brother." His siblings were Big Brother Shen Yunlu (also called Shen Yuelin), Elder Sister Shen Yuekun, Sixth Younger Brother Shen Quan (also called Shen Yuequan), and Ninth Younger Sister Shen Yuemeng. The elder brother Yunlu, four years older than Congwen, went to an art school. After the age of 18 he left home and spent several years searching for his father in the borderlands and earning his living by painting portraits. Though his health was not good and his vision was particularly poor, he was a man of uncommon knowledge. He left behind no children or property, but he was a man of note in his community, who made great contributions to the preservation and development of local culture and to the support of talented local young people. He maintained correspondence with Shen Congwen through the years, becoming a major pillar of support for him psychologically, and also for his home region behind the lines [during the war with Japan]. Shen Congwen's elder sister Shen Yuekun married Tian Zhenyi, son of a sister of Xiong Xiling. She was a primary school teacher and a mother. Her taking care of Shen Congwen in his youth left him with warm feelings, such that several decades later, in 1957, he mailed a book of his newly republished old works to her as thanks. The younger brother Shen Quan was an army officer for the Kuomintang in the war against Japan, for which he sustained several serious wounds. He was brave and aggressive in the world war, but steered clear of the civil war; instead he furthered the peaceful liberation of Fenghuang by the Communists. At the end of 1951, he was executed in the early campaign to suppress counterrevolutionaries (and posthumously exonerated in 1983). His orphan daughter Shen Chaohui, under the guardianship of her two uncles, grew up amid turmoil. Ninth Younger Sister Shen Yuemeng, born two years before Shen Zongsi left home, was ten years younger than Shen Congwen. She took shelter with Shen Congwen in his circle of literary friends; the image of her as a lovable young woman appears frequently in Shen Congwen's works. However, due to internal constitutional troubles and external problems, in the 1940s her mental health suffered. She was escorted from Kunming back to her home region, where she died during the famines of the New China. Sixth Younger Brother and Ninth Younger Sister were heartaches for Shen Congwen that he could not bear to talk about.

2. From naughty little boy to young soldier

Shen Congwen was an intelligent child, the darling of his family's heart and one for whom his father had great hopes. The family prepared a little coffin for him when at the age of 6 he came down with a rash and a high fever, but he recovered. His education began in a family-run private school, then shifted to primary schools inside the city and beyond. The curriculum could not hold Shen Congwen's attention; he was particularly drawn to the wonders of the outside world. He amused himself up in the mountains and down by the streams. He looked into the waters at reflections of the lovely stilt houses, and listened to the "guiguihong, guiguihong" call of the cuckoos as they flew off from the grain mills. He took interest in everything that went on in the shops and at the markets: the weaving of bamboo mats, the grinding of needles, the forging of ironware, and the slaughter of cattle. At an age before he had any consciousness of the meaning of death, he was curious to see the heads of men who had been executed at the riverside and the bloody ears of convicts displayed in front of the yamen. He played hooky, lied about it, and gambled, remaining incorrigible even after harsh corporal punishment, so that his family gradually lost hope in him. But nature and new kinds of people and events kept on nourishing him.

In 1916, when Shen Congwen's big brother, the one in charge of his discipline, left to search for their father, Congwen's mother agreed to enroll the younger boy in a new training class in the military arts. The family felt satisfied with the results of the eight-month training. The next year, the death of the second daughter and the daily decline of the family's fortunes made Congwen's mother finally decide to let him follow along with relatives in the ranks as a replacement soldier, to be garrisoned in Chenzhou [present-day Yuanling]. As Shen Congwen remembered it, it was after playing in the river on the 15th day of the seventh month, the day of the ghost festival, that he returned home to see his mother crying. In a fine drizzle the next day, bearing a heavy backpack thoroughly prepared by his mother, the little 15-year-old was propelled, unaware, into an unfamiliar and cruel new world.

West Hunan opens to the outside world through its rivers; navigation up and down them was the usual means of transportation. From 1917, when he became a soldier, until 1923, when he left West Hunan, Shen Congwen's world unfolded for the most part along the Yuan River and its tributaries, the You and Chen rivers.

Going by boat from Gaocun to Chenzhou, Shen Congwen entered a guerrilla detachment of the Second Army, under Zhang Xueji, of the United Army for Pacifying the Nation. Soon after, the troops went to Zhijiang for four months of pacifying the countryside, and then moved on to Huaihua. Because of his literacy, Shen Congwen was appointed a copyist clerk. He also took it upon himself to stew dogmeat for his comrades. After about a year, Shen's army returned to Chenzhou, due to internal problems and pressure from the First Army. When they moved on into Sichuan to seek resources for themselves, a surprise attack by local "spirit soldiers" nearly wiped out the whole army. Because Shen Congwen had been ordered to stay behind in Chenzhou due to his youth, he was fortunate enough to escape that catastrophe; the army was disbanded and he returned home. During those two years, Shen Congwen came to feel revulsion toward the horrors of slaughter, corruption in the system, and human ignorance; what comforted him were the streams and foliage of nature, daily life on the streets, and incidental acts of human kindness he encountered. And thanks to the influence of a staff secretary named Wen, Shen Congwen began to take an interest in culture.

Only three months later, Shen Congwen left home again to seek his fortune. Crossing snow and ice with his feet wrapped in palm leaves, Shen Congwen followed the sedan chair of a relative for

four days on a trip to Zhijiang. With an introduction from his maternal uncle, Police Commissioner Huang Juchuan, Shen Congwen took a lowly position as police clerk. From listening to his uncle and Xiong Jiesan, the husband of his mother's sister, take turns singing and chanting, Shen Congwen learned to write old-style poetry in classical Chinese. His mother had to come live with him after she sold off the family home in Fenghuang; she gave the leftover cash to Shen Congwen to manage. After the sudden death of his uncle, Shen Congwen became a tax collector. Meanwhile he dreamed all day of his using his poetic talents to win the heart of a maiden; instead, the woman and her elder brother used the courtship to cheat him out of the money entrusted to him by his mother. The shame of it and his emotional distress led Shen Congwen quietly to take his leave. When he reached Changde, he stopped to stay with his older cousin Huang Yushu. There he bore witness to and aided in the romance of Huang Yushu and Yang Guanghui, who later married and had a son. He would grow up to become the famous painter Huang Yongyu.

Living in a guest house with that cousin so immersed in love, while seeing no future for himself outside of thievery or suicide, Shen Congwen felt more and more distraught. Four months later, he and another cousin, Nie Qing, hitched a boat ride with their fellow townsman Zeng Qinxuan. After 40 days of braving dangers on the trip upstream, they passed through Chenzhou again and finally arrived in Baojing. Lodging with yet another cousin, Shen Congwen embarked on a "nomadic" life. Six months later, he landed a job as a secretary with the troops of Chen Quzhen, where he applied himself still more diligently to developing his meal ticket: his talent for calligraphy. Transferred to Longtan, Sichuan, with the troops of Zhang Yunlong, he passed through the town of Chadong, where later he would set his novella, *Border Town*. In the ranks he met colorful characters and encountered some dangers, which he set down in his later works.

After returning to Baojing, Shen Congwen saw a dream fulfilled when he was appointed personal secretary at the side of the commander he so admired, General Chen Quzhen. Helping Chen arrange and curate his collection of scholarly resources, Shen Congwen gradually developed a taste for the old manuscripts and scrolls of calligraphy and painting, and came to appreciate the magnificence of history, though he also felt increasingly lonely and vaguely sensed a need for a career of his own. Six months later Shen Congwen was transferred to Chen Quzhen's newspaper office to do proofreading work, and there he came into contact with the New Culture. After he was transferred back to the ranks, affected by a 40-day illness that nearly took his life and the death by drowning of a good friend who was an expert swimmer, Shen Congwen reflected on life on earnest. That year he decided to go to Beijing to study. He was supported by his commander, Chen Quzhen.

That was in 1923, when Shen Congwen was 21 and had been away from home for six years.¹

3. Professional writer

Shen Congwen's education in reality began as soon as he arrived in Beijing. Carrying his bedroll, the young country boy rode along in a cart to a pricey little inn in the Xiheyuan district. Going to visit his elder sister's home, he discovered that, discouraging to his own wishes to "seek ideals and study a little," his brother-in-law Tian Zhenyi had been unable to find work after graduating from college and was preparing to move his whole family back to West Hunan. (13:374)² His younger cousin studying at the Peking Agricultural College, Huang Cunsheng, took Shen Congwen to lodge at the Youxi Huiguan (Youxi fellow-townsman hostel), where Shen Zongsi had once stayed. It was economical and also well suited for study and taking walks. Shen Congwen got to know a group of

students at the Agricultural College, and the next year he moved to the Qinghua Lodging House near Peking University, where he quickly made friends with Chen Xianghe and other young people who were auditing classes at that university. Through his brother-in-law, he also met up with Zhang Caizhen and other students at Yenching (Yanjing) University.

However, realities of life continued to deal him some blows. Hope of entering a university by examination was beyond him, and the economic aid from Chen Quzhen also stopped; the coins in his pockets “were no longer sufficient to make a clinking sound.” (1:355) He was hungry and he ceaselessly sent off manuscripts in hopes of getting them published, repeatedly without success. Nor did he have any female admirers. He was like “a speck of dust.” (13:5) In his little room there was no escape from the cold winds blowing through it, or from his landlord’s hot sarcasm; on cold nights, feeling aggrieved and insulted, he curled up and wept in the dark. Such was the young man, telling a tale of woe, seen by Yu Dafu after he trod snowy streets to visit Shen Congwen in his “Cramped and Moldy Little Study.” Shen Congwen was able to publish his writings at the end of 1924. He wrote in many genres, and his works appeared one after another in the literary supplement of the *Chenbao* (Morning post).

In May of 1925, because of a literary misunderstanding, Shen Congwen went to visit Peking University professor Lin Zaiping, to explain himself and his feelings. The latter recommended him to be librarian at Xiong Xiling’s Xiangshan Orphanage.³ While there, Shen Congwen published satirical pieces about the orphanage under the titles “Events to Be Filed under ‘A’” and “Cotton Shoes.” He went to visit the poet Xu Zhimo, whose works he so admired, and he made the acquaintance of the lovers Hu Yepin and Ding Ling, who were writers, too. Xu Zhimo, who recognized talent, commissioned manuscripts from Shen Congwen and gave him praise that “ought to have gone without saying.” (11:49) The next year, Shen Congwen quit his job and became a full-time writer. He was also influenced by writer friends of the Crescent Moon group and the *Xiandai pinglun* (Modern critic).

Shen Congwen’s talent showed itself, and he became very prolific. According to statistics in the *Chronicle of Shen Congwen’s Life*, he published 60 works in 1925, 70 in 1926, nearly 40 in 1927, and more than 40 in 1928. In 1926, Beixin Publishers printed his first book collection, of works in different genres, called *Duck*. In 1927, the Crescent Moon Publishing House issued his first collection of short stories, *Sweet Mandarins*. The year 1928 saw the appearance not only of his successful story “Bozi,” but also his full-length serialized fictional works *Past Dreams* and *Alice’s Adventures in China*; the latter was published as a book the same year, along with more than ten other books and story collections.

Shen Congwen was so prolific not only because of the fertility of his imagination and his extraordinary experience, but also because of the pressure of having to earn his livelihood as a full-time writer. In the summer of 1927, his mother and Ninth Younger Sister came to Beijing to live with him. As the publishing houses moved south, Shen Congwen, too, went to live in Shanghai, with his two family members following soon after, and in the summer of the next year he accompanied his mother back to Beijing for treatment of her illness. Writing like mad despite a nosebleed, his poverty worsened because compensation from the publishers was frequently in arrears. Shen Congwen’s economic prospects remained bleak. He and his mother suffered from hunger during her illness.

Angry at himself, Shen Congwen described his struggles and resentments in *Diary of the Undead*, which was published in *Red or Black*, a new supplement of the *Central Daily News*. General editor of the supplement was Hu Yepin, with Ding Ling and Shen Congwen doing much of the real work (it ceased publication at the end of 1928). The next year, the three companions founded a Red or Black

Publishing House that put out a *Red or Black* monthly. They also published a *Ren jian* (The world of man) monthly, for the Renjian Publishing House. “Red or Black” was a West Hunanese vernacular expression: “it means ‘come what may,’ ‘whatever,’ ‘no matter what,’ . . . as in, ‘Red or black, we must eat!’”⁴ The immediate relevance of this phrase shows the three writers’ attitude toward literature, and also the enormous economic pressure they were under. Because they did not cater to the tastes of the day or stoop to compete commercially, even as they provided much of the content themselves, Shen Congwen felt that this was “the year that he worked the hardest.” (13:30) However, the publishing society in the end went bankrupt due to financial problems. *Red or Black* ended after its eighth issue.

4. College teacher

Recommended by Xu Zhimo, Shen Congwen in September 1929 went to teach at the China Institute in Wusong, Shanghai, where Hu Shi was president. Shen Congwen taught “Studies in the New Literature,” “Exercises in Fiction Writing,” and “The History of Chinese Fiction,” meanwhile compiling teaching materials and also continuing his own writing. Related to his teaching was Shen Congwen’s entry into literary criticism, in which he expressed his own strong opinions about creative writing by authors of the New Literature. The next year he published “On Feng Wenbing,” “On Guo Moruo,” and many similar essays. His mature stories with West Hunanese themes, such as “Xiaoxiao” and “The Husband,” also came out at this time. Besides new collections of his creative writing, he also published his teaching materials, in *Lectures on the History of Chinese Fiction*. He spilled out everything that he was thinking in letters to Wang Jizhen, a friend with whom he immediately hit it off, and who was bound for America.

While he was teaching at the China Institute, Shen Congwen fell in love with a second-year student of foreign languages, Zhang Zhaohe. But winning praise for his works was easier than winning the heart of the young woman; she took his love letters to the president, Hu Shi, to complain. His mother had returned home and Ninth Little Sister had entered school; poor Shen Congwen was at a point at which he wanted “to find a new direction in life.” (18:74) Having taught for two semesters, his heart was so tormented by unrequited love that he felt he was going mad. Xu Zhimo helped him again; Shen took a teaching position in the humanities school of Wuhan University, where Chen Xiying was dean. The political, social, and physical environment at Wuhan University in those days was not promising.

The year 1931 started out with death notices. Shen Congwen learned that his father had died at the end of the year before, that his good friend Zhang Caizhen had been murdered by the Kuomintang, and that his old companion Man Zhenxian had died in warfare back home. Subsequently Hu Yepin was arrested. Shen Congwen traveled from Shanghai to the capital in Nanjing three times to seek his release, but without success. When Yepin was executed, he was wearing Shen Congwen’s long gown. Shen Congwen then accompanied Ding Ling and her son on a long journey to her home [in West Hunan], but did not return in time for the opening of the new semester at Wuhan University.

Shen Congwen decided that he might as well give up teaching and remain in Shanghai to write. He was commissioned to write a biography of Hu Yepin, *A Poet and Fiction Writer* (later titled *Remembering Hu Yepin*), which was published serially in the *Times* of Shanghai. In a long article titled “On the Creation of Chinese Fiction,” he reviewed the development of the New Literature up to that point, characterizing the literary groups and writers, while writing of the possibilities and fixed conditions

for literary creation. At that time, Shen Congwen also detailed the possibilities for his own creativity in “Chat from Jiachen, No. 1.” He set out a 20-year plan for his future writing, to be accomplished between the ages of 30 and 50.

Having lost his teaching position at Wuhan University, Shen Congwen went to Qingdao University, where Yang Zhensheng was president, to teach the history of fiction and creative writing, again with an introduction from Xu Zhimo. Ninth Little Sister followed him there and entered the university as a student. That seaside urban environment was congenial, and his mood was unusually vibrant. On November 13, Shen Congwen in a letter to Xu Zhimo wrote of plans, with the encouragement of Xu Zhimo and others, to “write love stories of Miao men and women, tales with crying, singing, and murder.” (18:150) During that year, Shen Congwen published “Tiger Cub,” “Little Scene in Guizhou,” and more than 40 other pieces, while also publishing collections of his stories including *Shen Congwen’s zi* (“AA”) *Collection*, *The Marble Carrying Boat*, *Long Zhu*, and others. As his letter had indicated, he planned to reexamine his experiences in West Hunan. However, Xu Zhimo died in an airplane crash on November 19. When a telegram bearing that news reached Qingdao four days later, Shen Congwen left for Ji’nan that very night. It was a year that ended in more deaths and funeral arrangements.

Gazing at the sea and sorting out his emotions as the dark clouds gradually dissipated and the tides rolled in and out, Shen Congwen realized all the more the brevity of life. In 1932, he published almost 40 new works, and more collections, including *Tiger Cub*. During the summer recess, it took him just three weeks to write *Congwen’s Autobiography*, commissioned by Shao Xunmei, in which he came to terms with his life in his own mind.⁵ Shen Congwen turned 30 that year.

Early in 1933, Shen Congwen became engaged to Zhang Zhaohe. He published the title story of *Under Moonlight* in February. The year before, having finished his autobiography, Shen Congwen had journeyed to Suzhou to visit Zhang Zhaohe and her family once she graduated from college. “Under Moonlight” was one of the stories he had promised to write for Zhang Zhaohe’s Fifth Younger Brother. Zhang Zhaohe came to the Qingdao University Library to work; the couple went sightseeing in the Beijiushui district of the Laoshan area, and Shen Congwen promised to put what he had seen into a story. That work was *Border Town*. The same year, another good friend met with an unexpected disaster. Ding Ling, who had worked for the League of Left-wing Writers, was secretly arrested by the Kuomintang. Shen Congwen asked for help from Hu Shi and meanwhile published “Ms. Ding Ling Arrested” and “Ms. Ding Ling Has Disappeared” to arouse public concern on her behalf. Heedless of possible danger to himself, after publicizing the harm done to Ding Ling, he went on to write the fictional story, “Three Women,” and began to write, for serial publication, a biography called *Remembering Ms. Ding Ling*.

5. Editing without end

In August of 1933, Shen Congwen resigned from Qingdao University (then renamed Shandong University) and, at the invitation of his former university president Yang Zhensheng, returned to Beijing [then called Beiping] to participate in editing primary and secondary school textbooks, while at the same time taking charge of the new “Literary Supplement” of the [Tianjin] *Dagongbao* (*L’Impartial*), working with Zhu Ziqing and others. His marriage was consummated in September, while he was composing *Border Town* and in the midst of writing installments for *Remembering Ms. Ding Ling*. In the fall, Ba Jin, a friend he had met the year before, came to live in the newlyweds’

home for two months. It was in this year that the collections *The Story of Ahei*, *Fengzi*, and *Under Moonlight* appeared. Because of Shen Congwen's editorial work, he was frequently involved in gatherings of scholars and men of letters. He began to pay more attention to encouraging and supporting younger writers, and as before he stressed the need for a healthy literary environment. He published "The Proper Attitude for a Littérateur," which stirred up a debate about "Peking Types" (Jing Pai) versus "Shanghai Types" (Hai Pai).

Nineteen thirty-four was a momentous year. At the start of the year, while *Border Town* was being written and serialized and Shen Congwen remained surrounded by happiness as a newlywed, his mother became severely ill. He journeyed alone to West Hunan to look in on her, a trip that took almost a month. As his little boat went up the Yuan River with which he was so familiar, he wrote bits and pieces of what he saw and heard along the river, together with his own reflections, in tender letters to his wife.⁶ Essays based on these several dozen private letters were collected in 1936 in the book *Discursive Notes on a Trip through Hunan*, a work of compelling scenic descriptions. The same year, his earlier essays of literary criticism were published as the book *Froth*, and his representative works *Congwen's Autobiography* and *Border Town* were printed as books and garnered positive reviews. His mother soon passed away, and Shen Congwen's son Longzhu was born, leading to major changes in his life.

In early 1935, the Liangyou Publishing House of Shanghai put out *Selected Exercises from Shen Congwen's Fiction Writing*. For the preface, Shen Congwen reassessed the previous ten years of his writing career, responding to criticisms and reiterating his attitude toward literature: he wanted to build a little Greek temple for the worship of "human nature," not to "build a lofty edifice on sand or water." (9:2) At the end of the preface, he thanked Xu Zhimo, Hu Shi, Lin Zaiping, Yu Dafu, Chen Tongbo, and Yang Zhensheng, and expressed a hope that his works would be judged from the standpoint of the history of the human race. That year Shen Congwen published articles of criticism titled "On Reading the Classics" and "Fulfilling One's Responsibility," and the short story "The New and the Old," works that expressed more bluntly than before his worries about national reconstruction and the political situation. His satirical story "Portrait of Eight Steeds," written in Qingdao, was published at this time, as was his short story collection of the same name. The story led to misunderstandings that created difficulties for Shen Congwen. In 1936, in "Authors Need a New Kind of Movement," he advocated a literary "Anti-About-the-same-itis movement." This took aim at the "Literature for National Defense" slogan in contemporary debates, and he also published "'Pulling Together' and 'Uniting' the Literary Scene." Nineteen thirty-seven saw the inaugural issue of *Wenxue zazhi* (Literature magazine), with Zhu Guangqian as chief editor; Shen Congwen, Yang Zhensheng, Yu Pingbo, Zhu Ziqing, Zhou Zuoren, and Lin Huiyin were on the editorial committee. However, after four issues, the War of Resistance to Japan broke out, and the journal ceased publication until it was revived ten years later. In 1936, previous correspondence gleaned from Shen Congwen's editorial work was collected and published as *Letters Never Mailed*.

After a secret request from the Ministry of Education in August 1937, Shen Congwen left Beiping, in the company of other professors from Peking University and Tsinghua (Qinghua) University. Passing through Wuhan, together with Yang Zhensheng, Xiao Qian, and others, he resumed editing textbooks, using materials in the Wuhan University Library until the university's closure in December. Shen Congwen engaged in his war work enthusiastically. When the textbook editorial group decided it was time to retreat to the interior behind the lines, Shen Congwen arranged for his group to take up residence for three months in "Yunlu," the new home in Yuanling, West Hunan,

of his elder brother Shen Yunlu. With help from his brother, Shen Congwen received and offered assistance to other scholars retreating into the interior; he received his guests at “Yunlu.” In Changsha, Shen Congwen had visited his former commander Chen Quzhen, who was reassigned to work as a water conservancy commissioner, and invited “civilian and military elders of West Hunan” to the house in Yuanling so as to encourage them to support the war of resistance. (16:392) When his Sixth Younger Brother Shen Quan returned from the front lines to nurse his wounds after desperate fighting in the Battle of Shanghai (Battle of Songhu), Shen Congwen invited him, before he left, to lecture to literary and scholarly friends on the course of the war.

At the end of April 1938, Shen Congwen finally and with difficulty arrived in Kunming, via Guiyang. There he was able to carry on in peace with Yang Zhensheng, Xiao Qian, and other colleagues, continuing his work editing textbooks for Chinese classes. The year before, because their second son Huchu had just been born, Zhang Zhaohe had remained in Beijing with the two children. When the city fell to the Japanese, mother and sons had to fend for themselves; they could not leave. Shen Congwen sent his love and kisses in many letters, urging them to depart. He expressed his misgivings and complaints, and even felt suspicious about what was going on. In November 1938, his wife, accompanied by their two sons and Ninth Little Sister, finally arrived in Kunming, after passing through Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Vietnam.

After his retreat to the Southwest, Shen Congwen’s new understanding of West Hunan and his longtime thoughts about it spurred his composition of *West Hunan* and *Long River*. He also published articles such as “How to Train Oneself during the War,” in hopes of raising spirits on the home front and getting people to join the war in a spirit of stability and solidarity – this was one reason why he did not accept an invitation at this time to go to Yan’an. It was in that year that the Kaizōsha publishers in Tokyo issued Matsueda Shigeo’s Japanese translation of *Border Town*, the first publication of a major work of Shen Congwen’s as a book abroad. Subsequently, despite ceaseless civil war and political movements in China, Shen Congwen’s works were continuously translated, anthologized, and published in Japanese, English, American, and Swedish editions.

6. Inner and outer torments

When in 1939 the weekly *Jinri pinglun* (Criticism today) was founded, in China’s Southwest, Shen Congwen, as chief editor of the literary section, used it to promote a group of new literary talents. In “Ordinary or Special,” he argued against equating creative writing with “propaganda,” and wrote that quietly immersing oneself in historical or scientific study at this time should be as highly respected as going off to the front to fight – a viewpoint branded as advocating “having nothing to do with the war.” He recommended his student at the Southwest Associated University Cheng Yingliu to become editor of the “Pingming” supplement of the *Central Daily News*. Shen Congwen contributed essays himself, while revising and recommending manuscripts from young writers for publication there. He was busy with much tedious work. When his work preparing textbooks for Chinese classes was mostly finished, he was engaged by the Southwest Associated University to continue teaching classes on the New Literature and on writing. There he gained a new literary follower, Wang Zengqi.

In 1940s, after being named to the editorial board of the journal *Zhanguo ce* (Intrigues of the Warring States), edited by Chen Quan and others, Shen Congwen was called a member of the *Intrigues of the Warring States* clique. He also published “Reconstructing the Literary Movement” and other articles, pointing out the harm done to the literary movement by politics and commercialism in the

past 20 years, and expressing sadness that the onetime innocence and bravery of China's writers had been replaced by slickness and deceit. Shen Congwen also published opinions on the women's movement and berated the phenomenon of people getting rich from the war, "making a fortune from the nation's difficulties." His quick wit was visible in his essays. The natural environment of Kunming made Shen Congwen feel both at home and far away from the world. In nature he found beauty and eternity, a sense of life, and of selfhood – a miniscule self with which he could more deeply explore the vastness of the universe, and from that depth of understanding expand his sense of self. His collection *The Candle Extinguished*, published by the Shanghai Cultural Life Publishing House in 1941, collected both kinds of these essays he wrote during those years. In addition, during the war years Shen Congwen used figurations of the past to comment on the present, to acutely point out social problems.

On the one hand, he struggled with his practical difficulties, and on the other he overcame his doubts, so as to seek beauty in the abstract. Although he burned his diaries in 1944, these circumstances are clearly reflected in his works. *Long River* and "Yunlu Chronicles" encountered difficulties due to political censorship; "Gazing at Rainbows" and "Plucking Stars" were criticized as pornographic; and "Water and Clouds" has been called by Jeffrey C. Kinkley a "psychological autobiography." Nineteen-forty-three saw the beginning of serial publication of "Green, Black, and Gray" (later titled "Green Nightmare"). The "nightmare" refers to a shriek of fear during a bad dream; from that time through 1946, Shen Congwen composed six "nightmares," which by his own analysis are about trivial matters at hand that nevertheless bore premonitions of the future. In his "Preface to *Long River*," published in 1943 in the Chongqing *Dagongbao* "Battlefront" supplement, Shen Congwen wrote: "We see many painful things before us, but we need not be pessimistic. A sudden squall may come and ravage a good many people's high ideals, make them disappear without a trace. But an individual's ardor for the future of humanity, his pious attitude toward his work, will always survive, and moreover lend great encouragement to those who come after him!" (10:9) It was in that year that the Kaiming Press of Guilin began to publish a collection of all Shen Congwen's works in revised editions.

During these years, Zhang Zhaohe and Shen Huchu moved to Chenggong County, Yunnan, by Dianchi Lake, to escape the frequent bombardment of Kunming by Japanese airplanes. Subsequently the rest of Shen Congwen's family and some friends joined them there. The landscape was beautiful, but the living circumstances were difficult. With the children running wild like little monkeys, Shen Congwen would tell them stories of West Hunan. At one point while in Kunming, Shen Congwen was selling umbrellas and handicraft items from his hometown, to aid the development of rural industry and promote morale in the war effort. He contributed scrolls of his own calligraphy to a charity fund for poor students. Zhang Zhaohe taught English at the Kunming high school for Chinese from overseas and other institutions. Shen Congwen meanwhile developed a special interest in the lacquerware handicrafts of Southwest China. In 1941, Ninth Little Sister Shen Yuemeng, who worked at the Southwest Associated University Library, began to suffer severe psychological problems, such that she had to return home to Yuanling in 1945, to be cared for by Shen Congwen's elder brother.

The war ended in victory for China in 1945. When the Southwest Associated University was closed in July 1946, the Shen family as a whole flew from Kunming to Shanghai and proceeded to Suzhou. Reappointed to a professorship in the literature division of Peking University, Shen Congwen flew to Beijing; after the New Year in 1947, Zhang Zhaohe and the two sons joined him there.

7. “Reclusion” by one consumed in thought

By the time the eight-year War of Resistance against Japan finally concluded, the losses to the nation and to individuals were enormous. The bad wartime moral atmosphere continued to spread, and the civil war that was so harmful to the nation resumed, making Shen Congwen feel “pain in his heart.” (18:480)

In 1946, in his “The Candle Extinguished, Sequel” (later titled “My Impressions and Thoughts about Beiping”), Shen Congwen voiced his loathing of the civil war. He resumed using metaphors from history to describe the comedy of contemporary society. Furthermore, on October 10 [National Day], 1946, the Shanghai and Tianjin editions of the *Dagongbao* printed his “About Feeling Dejected – Preface to the Posthumously Published Writings of Nie Qing.” The essay expressed sorrow about the enormous costs in lives, ideals, property, and time incurred in the past several years, arguing that the survivors ought to convert their wounds and sorrows into strength to reconstruct the nation. In “Words from the Editor” of the Tianjin *Yishibao* (Social welfare) newspaper’s “Literature Weekly” supplement, Shen Congwen wrote of his hopes that both he as editor and his readers could devote themselves to quiet reflection instead of becoming active in the chaos. He hoped that the strength of literature might play a detoxifying and immunizing role, to prevent oversimplified mesmerism by politics, “and instead allow understanding that a nation achieves true progress when those who earn their living off politics grow fewer in number, and knowledge and reason are fully in command.” (16:450)

This attitude subjected Shen Congwen to still more pressure from the outside. In “Learning from Reality,” his November 1946 response to Democratic League and other external criticisms that said he had divorced himself from reality in his pursuit of the abstract, he reviewed his own relationship with reality during the past 20 years, pointing out the evils of the social environment during those years. He said, forthrightly, “the nation is in the hands of people in an innocently juvenile state of mind who are playing with fire, such that both small fires and holocausts are possible”; the value of writers was that “by adopting a unified quiet and humble attitude and applying themselves to their work, they might hope to expound the concept of seeking facts and remaining faithful to them.” (13:390, 396) This reaction no doubt brought down still more attacks on Shen Congwen from left-wing writers. Papers like the Shanghai *Qiaoshengbao* published articles vilifying him.

“My calling has become a profession that does not produce tangible benefit. . . . If the nation is in a bad way, one becomes isolated . . . is brought to a state of reclusion . . . in the end, one dies alone.” (18:451) Yet he maintained his prior attitude, opposing the vassalage of literature to raucous politicking. He continued to express his faith in literature as a means of restoring humanity through his commemoration of May Fourth and his essays written in the mode of “Correspondence from Beiping.” He opposed unhealthy tendencies in expectation of reconstruction of the nation, and on behalf of that he proposed audacious plans and proposals. “A New Hope,” published in October 1947, proposed three new “experiments of a third way of politics,” which Shao Quanlin and others understood to be a promotion of a “middle way” [between the Communists and the Nationalists], which was therefore criticized intensely. Shen Congwen’s January 1948 piece, “The Xiong Family Mansion in Zhijiang,” likewise was considered by Feng Naichao and his comrades to be reactionary literature advocating a “new movement for a third way.” The March issue of the *Dazhong wenyi congkan* (Literature of the masses) published by the Hong Kong Shenghuo Publishing House simultaneously printed three left-wing writers’ articles, including Guo Moruo’s “Castigate Reactionary

Literature and Art,” which ferociously criticized Shen Congwen and other independent writers. The Guo Moruo piece took Shen Congwen to be a classic example of the peach-pink (pornographic) writer. He was criticized for having “written erotic literature,” “sung at the top of his voice to advocate ‘having nothing to do with the war,’” and “promoted a new third force ‘dissociated’ from the revolution.” Zhu Ziqing, who was close to Shen Congwen, was classified as a representative of the blue writers favoring the Kuomintang. Guo Moruo urged all writers to “sever connections” with these people in “the enemy camp.”

In the summer of 1948, at the invitation of Yang Zhensheng, Shen Congwen and colleagues went to a summer retreat in the Pavilion of Clearing Skies (Jiqing xuan) at the Summer Palace (Yihe Yuan). This temporarily kept him out of the line of fire from public opinion. We know, from his “Random Thoughts at the Pavilion of Clearing Skies,” that the elegant surroundings relaxed his mood. Innocent children and refined friends simplified his life. The hills and waters of nature, and birdsong, afforded him silent reflection and enlightenment. But he could not “get back to the Wei and Jin dynasties and proceed from there”; his ruminations still concerned China’s future. (18:508) In “Where Is China Headed?” published in September, Shen Congwen wrote that because China was preparing for “centralized power” in the next generation, there was no hope for either today or tomorrow. Shen Congwen was of heavy heart amid the enormous changes of the era. Unable to shift from “thinking” to “believing,” he wrote that politics must not control literature with the thoroughness of a “stop-and-go light.” He also felt that he was not suited to his surroundings any more. In a letter to his elder brother, he said he wanted to return home to live. In December, while revising his 1928 work *Alice’s Adventures in China*, he repeatedly sensed that his writings had no meaning under current circumstances.

His studies of cultural artifacts grew more intense, even as his literary productivity dropped off. In early 1947, Shen Congwen threw his energy into art history, writing a piece of criticism called “My Reaction to the *Painting of a Spring Outing*” (later titled “My Reaction to Zhan Ziqian’s *Painting of a Spring Outing*”). His concern with cultural artifacts was not simply dictated by his personal interests. In 1948, he felt that peace was not in the immediate offing and that he could do cultural preservation work, so he proposed four areas in which he might make a contribution. In fact he had already begun. That year construction of the Peking University Museum was finished, and he donated artifacts and materials he had collected in Yunnan to it, offered a class on the “history of pottery and porcelain,” and began writing a *History of Chinese Pottery and Porcelain* and *Questions about the Art of Chinese Lacquerware*. He said he must do it for this reason: to leave a little something behind for the next generation. He believed it to be a kind of education of the feelings: “it directly influences art, which is by no means less important than literary revolution. It indirectly influences society, because when love permeates political philosophy and actual life, the fate of our people must likewise arrive at a new turning point . . .” (31:304)

8. “A new kind of life”

In January 1949, Guo Moruo’s “Castigate Reactionary Literature and Art” came to life again as a big-character poster on the campus of Peking University. Slogans appeared on teaching buildings that said “Down with the Crescent Moon Clique, *Modern Critic* Clique, and Shen Congwen with his third way.” Shen Congwen felt that the hour of his political liquidation was at hand. At this time his emotional state was full of self-questioning and weariness. His wife and friends wanted to help him

but could not understand his inner torment. He was fully disconnected from his surrounding, totally unable to change himself to suit the times, or to accept outside assistance from those who were in tune with the times.

In February, Shen Congwen was trying to remake himself, but “how long I can keep struggling before my nerves collapse, only heaven knows!” (19:16) Considering what he wrote in “One Man’s Confession” and “Some Notes – Written to Some Friends,” his struggle was very tenacious, very brave, very conscientious, and also very tiring. Again and again he engaged in soul-searching and analysis of his ego, hoping within a review of his life to find a resolution and the strength to continue working. However, compared to his friends, Shen Congwen was the one all alone and outside, like a lone star, “surrounded on all sides by unbounded emptiness,” or like a pagoda, “already collapsed” without anyone knowing.⁷ He seemed to have completed the work he could do; what was left of him was only a specimen. His essay of March 6, “On Southwestern Lacquerware and Other Matters: One Chapter of an Autobiography – The Development of a Small Fantasy,” was unruffled in tone. A note at the bottom of the last page said: “My last article before the Liberation,” which seemed to betoken an end of things. (27:37) On March 28, Shen Congwen slit his wrists with a razor and drank kerosene. Luckily this was discovered in time; he was saved and sent to a mental hospital.

From four pages of a diary Shen Congwen wrote on April 6, divided into entries for “seven o’clock,” “eight,” “ten,” and “a little after 11,” one can see that the struggle going on in his mind was not over. He felt dissociated from the normal world. When it came to his relationship to society, he felt that because of the thousands of people who had been sacrificed to make the new nation, he could not participate in its construction, and this was upsetting. On that account he wanted to end all entanglements due to his personal problems, his feelings of being special, and “finally come clear and find a new life.” (19:27) But how was he to do that? For a time there was no place to entrust hope, so he must first simply “wait.” After that, his “In the Beiping Dormitory, May 30, 10:00 p.m.” records another episode of inner turmoil and trying to come to terms with it. In a letter of July to Liu Ziheng, with whom he had enjoyed a heartfelt talk on a snowy night in Qingdao many years earlier, he felt that estrangement from the masses necessarily meant annihilation; he wondered if he could remake himself – that is what he asked his old friend, and even more he was asking it of himself, trying to uncover an answer. In August, with an introduction from another old friend, Zheng Zhenduo, Shen Congwen transferred from Peking University to the Historical Museum to begin work inventorying and cataloguing historical artifacts, while continuing to teach classes at Peking University and Furen University. During his illness, he completed his *History of Chinese Pottery and Porcelain* and *The Art of Chinese Lacquerware*.

In the end, his ship was able to change course. In a September letter to Ding Ling, he made a promise to that Communist Party representative that he would remold his attitude for the sake of the next generation. He wanted to contribute his efforts to the development of society and to art, his only request being that the revolution not break up his family – in May, Zhang Zhaohe had already been assigned to the North China University for study. During his strenuous efforts to turn his ship around, Shen Congwen took comfort from music. A poem he wrote in mid-September, “Recasting Life” (later titled “Garnered from the Music of Beethoven”), reveals his desire to start anew, because of his love for all things. He not only adopted this attitude for himself, Shen Congwen wrote his younger cousin Huang Yongyu in Hong Kong to persuade him to return to China. In November, engrossed in feelings that he must struggle to study “selflessness,” that winter Shen Congwen began research in the field of jade handicrafts.

In 1950, an organizational decision sent Shen Congwen to the North China University to engage in political study. Before he left, Shen Congwen wrote his politically compulsory autobiographical document. He graduated in December and wrote a final document of self-assessment. During his time at study, Shen Congwen only took notice of crows in trees and was moved by a lone star in the sky, both of which he saw as he awakened in the mornings to take his walks. He worried about the vacuous discussions and lecture style in these study sessions that were so useless to the nation, to the extent that he wrote about it in his ideological self-assessment. In the revolutionary university, Shen Congwen realized that his peculiarity of “repaying others with love” was connected to the ideologies of love in the Old Testament and *Historical Records* of Sima Qian. He wanted to become “selfless.” He wanted to resume writing fiction, and he was concerned about concretely contributing to national reconstruction.

In 1951, Shen Congwen returned to the Historical Museum as a docent. He was quite satisfied to explain the exhibits to ordinary people. He encouraged his elder brother in a letter to work for the next generation; “the individual is not worth thinking about.” (19:102) In “All Things Proceed from Understanding and Love,” he repeatedly said that he lived for the sake of the young people.

During these years, Shen Congwen wrote a good many political reflections.

9. “Just wishing for more work to do”

On October 25, 1951, Shen Congwen on his own initiative decided to leave Beijing for Sichuan to participate in the land reform process there, in hopes of learning from the masses. In November he completed his confession, “My Study,” which was published in the *Guangming Daily*. In Neijiang, Sichuan, that December, he felt the forward progress of history. Relative to the motion of human events, nature remained completely calm. He could not help contemplating the relationship between “feelings” and “actions.” He still wanted to return to writing. In January of the next year, his plan from his stint at the revolutionary university to write a story of an “Old Comrade” there went through seven drafts.

In March of 1952, Shen Congwen returned to Beijing. While he was assigned to check on problems in antiques shops as part of the “Five Antis” movement, he realized that research on the history of cultural relics must begin with the material cultural system. He had missed out on the “Three Antis” movement because of his participation in the land reform, so when Shen Congwen went back to Furen University to teach, he had to engage in ideological self-examination. During a departmental reorganization, Shen Congwen decided to resign from full-time teaching and only work in the Historical Museum. Shen Congwen purchased artifacts for the museum according to historical and artistic standards as he saw them, not according to expert opinion, and often he used his own money to buy relics not in accord with the needs of the museum. He had to pay for his own housing; once when strapped for cash, Shen Congwen went so far as to write to Ding Ling to ask for money. That year he completed his annotations to the book *Tāo ya* (Elegance of pottery) edited by the Qing dynasty scholar Ji Yuansou, and was hired as an adviser to the “Committee for Porcelain Design in the New Nation.” In Hong Kong, his novella *Border Town* was made into a film called *Cuicui*.

In 1953 Shen Congwen joined a publishing team newly established at the Historical Museum. The work load was heavy and his new dormitory lodging, next to a latrine, was execrable. His family was not large, and Zhang Zhaohe needed bed rest because of illness; only in the next year was she appointed to the editorial board of *People’s Literature*. The Kaiming Publishing House, which

had planned to reissue Shen Congwen's works in 30 volumes, notified him that because his works were now out-of-date, they had destroyed the plates. After a period of contemplation in wake of the attacks on him, he declined an invitation from Hu Qiaomu, who was then vice minister for the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party, to become a professional writer again. Shen Congwen remained at the Historical Museum, doing research and lecturing. Subsequently the future famous archeologist Wang Xu, who was in charge of restoring the first jade suit sewn together with gold threads ever unearthed, having heard Shen Congwen speak in early July, subsequently began his research on cultural relics under the guidance of Shen Congwen. At the same time, Shen Congwen continued lecturing on the history of the art of Chinese dying and weaving at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. He drafted diagrams and explanations and was sent to Shanghai and Nanjing to learn from experts there. In October 1953, Shen Congwen wrote: "The nation needs personnel in every field . . . my small personal setbacks naturally don't bother me anymore." (19:365) The *Abridged Chronology of Shen Congwen's Life* reckons that it was at this time that Shen Congwen's purview expanded from a focus on the history of handicrafts to other, related fields, "expanding his horizons to include apparel and personal adornment, institutions, and the broad history of material culture; it was a big step forward."⁸ During this year, Shen Congwen published "The Historical Development of Gilt Brocade in China" and other articles. He edited books and proposed a good many questions that others had not yet considered. His theories about the jade suit that was sewn together with gold threads, for instance, were confirmed in 1968.

In 1954, Shen Congwen continued publishing articles about his research on material history and editing books on related topics, but by the end of the year he had some complaints: his work was tedious and oppressive, and its significance was being ignored, so that his energy and enthusiasm were being wasted. And yet, for the sake of the nation and later generations, he did not let up one bit. In 1955, he did annotations for the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, helped edit a catalog, *Ming Dynasty Brocades*, and continued publishing items that came out in the name of his organization. Shen Congwen wrote, in a letter, that "Here we just wish we could have more work to do." (19:402)

Even though his time and energy did not allow Shen Congwen to write a *Discursive Notes on a Trip through Sichuan* the likes of his *Discursive Notes on a Trip through Hunan*, not to speak of the obstacles to that in the realities of the time, he never gave up on his desire to resume writing. In 1955, Shen Congwen wrote a book in his spare time using his experience of the land reform as raw materials. It was called *The Rich Man Song Renrui and His Son*. At the end of the year, Shen Congwen indirectly expressed his hopes regarding creative writing and research on the history of the handicraft arts to Zhou Yang, Deputy Head of the Communist Party Propaganda Department and Secretary of the Communist Party leadership of the Chinese Writers' Association; he wanted to write, for the Writers' Association, or do research under the Palace Museum's department of weaving, embroidery, and apparel.⁹ At the start of the next year, Shen Congwen was appointed to be a committee member of the Second National Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. That year saw accomplishments in his research into material history, and he also published literary works. Yang Zhensheng died the same year, causing Shen Congwen to feel a heavy burden in carrying on the legacy of his deceased friend.

The pace of his work was very rapid. In October Shen Congwen visited museums in Ji'nan, Nanjing, Suzhou, and Shanghai, to view and study their collections. Along the way, he observed strange new kinds of commotion at the local level, involving new trends and old habits. He wrote about what he had seen, together with his regrets, memories, commentaries, and "foolish reactions"

in letters to Zhang Zhaohe, so that she could share his feelings. He also visited his old friend Ba Jin. (20:20) “No one knows what I am doing, but I know.” (20:19) The commotion was all on the outside, for at this time he felt a new “modesty” and “self-confidence” increasing together in his own life, and this was giving him inner resources to find a place for himself and to contribute to the nation and to other people. In November, he went to Changsha to join in activities of the People’s Political Consultative Conference, but fell ill and had to enter the hospital. There he wrote a commentary on Zhao Shuli’s novel *Sanliwan* (Three-mile bay). In West Hunan he visited Jishou and went home to Fenghuang, where as usual he worried about how he could benefit national and local reconstruction. He was also distressed by some of the changes and continuing needs there. Some of the artifacts Shen Congwen had purchased for the museum were exhibited as prime examples of waste at the Historical Museum when it staged an “Exhibition to Counteract Waste” that year.

10. “Dragging for those tiny shrimp”

In 1957, in accord with the policy of “Let a hundred flowers bloom; let a hundred schools of thought contend,” the People’s Publishing House prepared to put out an anthology of Shen Congwen’s works. In March, he submitted to the Chinese Writers’ Association a plan for what he wanted to write that year. In April, Shen Congwen traveled to Nanjing, Suzhou, Shanghai, and Hangzhou to prepare for establishing a silk museum. He wrote some articles and letters home. In Shanghai, he met Ba Jin again. Lodging on the tenth floor of the Broadway Mansions, Shen Congwen looked from his window at the noisy crowd activity on the Garden Bridge, and noticed the quietude of little boats nearby on the Huangpu River. He made sketches of the scene and wrote some comments of explanation alongside them. Zhang Xinying, in his *The Latter Half of Shen Congwen’s Life: 1948–1988*, argues that Shen Congwen created them as metaphors of his personal relationship with the times: “we might well take Shen Congwen to be that man in the tiny boat, ‘in other words, not awake,’ and even after awakening, he does not enter the ‘commotion’ of the ‘crowd,’ he only minds his own business, dragging for those tiny shrimp.”¹⁰

In August, while the Anti-Rightist movement raged, Shen Congwen for health reasons went to recuperate in Qingdao for a month. This revived his spirit, making him feel as if he had returned to the early 1930s. He began to write. He wrote a story criticizing intellectuals playing poker, which he gave Zhang Zhaohe to read. Purposely making “a mountain out of a molehill,” he displayed his feelings that intellectuals ought to make haste to contribute to national reconstruction. It was in this year that some of his pre-1949 stories were reprinted as *A Collection of Shen Congwen’s Selected Fiction*.¹¹ His work on material culture did not slow, either; *Patterns on Chinese Fabrics*, which he coedited with Wang Jiashu, also appeared in print. Shen Congwen remained on guard about the political situation. What was unexpected was that his older son Shen Longzhu, who had already drawn a line of separation against his father, fell from his position as a member of a leadership group for the Anti-Rightist movement and was classed as a Rightist element himself.¹²

When the “Great Leap Forward” began in 1958, Shen Congwen declined Zhou Yang’s request that he take over from Lao She as chairman of the Beijing branch of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles. Shen Congwen remained busy as usual with his cultural artifacts that year, still writing essays. He was not at leisure even when the Federation of Literary and Art Circles sent him out on retreats in the Beijing suburbs; he used the occasions to write essays like “Spring Outing in the Summer Palace” and “Some Young People Who Are in Charge of a Lumberyard,” but there were

many restrictions on his freedom of expression, so his writing could not return to its original vigor. He also wrote an article called “The Applications and Development of Dragon and Phoenix Patterns” (later titled “The Art of Dragons and Phoenixes”), which two years later entered the first book of his collected essays on material culture, called *The Art of Dragons and Phoenixes*. Shen Congwen participated in joint exhibitions displayed in Hangzhou and other cities, of silk embroidery from the collections of the Palace Museum and Historical Museum. He helped plan an exhibit of Ming and Qing cultural objects in Wuhan, edited the book *Bronze Mirrors of the Tang and Song Dynasties*, and commenced work on the editorial committee of *Zhuangshi* (Decorative Arts), a journal of the Central Academy of Craft Art. In 1959, Shen Congwen, still working passionately in a way that no one understood in a profession that no one understood, wrote: “Personal feelings are too small and insignificant! I must work harder and do my work well.” (20:286–287)

In 1960, Shen Congwen for the first time assumed status as a writer when he attended the Third Congress of Chinese Literature and Art Workers. The year before, Shen Chaohui, the orphan daughter of Congwen’s deceased younger brother Shen Quan, had traveled from her old home to Beijing, where Shen Congwen undertook to raise and educate her as his own child; at the start of 1960, he had already arranged for her to attend middle school. Shen Congwen began to write a novel about Zhang Dinghe, a martyr who was an older cousin of Zhang Zhaohe, and Dinghe’s daughter. Shen Congwen had been doing background work on the novel for several years, and he was still taking time to run about assembling resource materials. It was not only to show esteem for the martyr and a vision for the country, but also a project on behalf of Shen Congwen’s own new literary life. Meanwhile, Shen Congwen was still preparing to start research in a new field – the history of Chinese clothing and adornment. He also began to act as a historical consultant for historical dramas.

Shen Congwen felt distinctly low on energy; high blood pressure and heart disease began to tell against his rush to get things done at work. From the start of 1961 through mid-February, he was hospitalized on the advice of a physician. When he came out, he coedited teaching materials on handicraft arts, pottery and porcelain, lacquerware art, and weaving and dying patterns. At the end of June, the Chinese Writers’ Association arranged for him to recuperate in Qingdao for two months, in furtherance of his creative writing. In Qingdao, besides continuing his work on material history, Shen Congwen wrote “A Lyricism of the Abstract” and “Travel Notes from Qingdao,” to come to grips with his own development and that of the nation. Maintaining his aptitude and passion for learning, in late November he went with a Writer’s Association group to tour and conduct interviews in Jiangxi. He wrote some poetry in a reformed classical style.

At the start of 1962, Shen Congwen was 60 years old. He passed his birthday while on a business trip that had left him sleep-deprived. “All alone in my room on my sixtieth jubilee, I ate a pathetic little tangerine.” Thinking of the vicissitudes of his own life and society as a whole, he felt that if he could write his memoirs for the next generation, “that would be one great and voluminous book.” (21:143) On the May Fourth anniversary, Shen Congwen in a letter to his elder brother reminisced that in the past ten years he had “used the May Fourth spirit to keep working on, though stifled and stymied,” to leave something the next generation could build on even if he himself was forgotten. (21:198) In July, during a month of rest in Dalian, Shen Congwen came to feel distant from the lives of the people around him. But he was not depressed. He repeatedly exhorted Cheng Yingliu, whose Rightist cap had been removed and was now engaged in historical research: “It is best not to let little slights and injuries get you down”; “we need more folks, by the thousands, who can forge ahead,

steadfastly and silently.” (21: 245, 254) Thus did Shen Congwen encourage himself, and his friends, to work hard for the progress of the nation, even when misunderstood and treated unfairly.

11. “Above my qualifications to speak” and “incredibly stupid”

In 1963, the People’s Political Consultative Conference arranged for Shen Congwen to go to Guangzhou and other locations to inspect the production of handicrafts. That year, unwilling to have his life of writing come to a “premature death before it ever matured,” he wanted to return home and go into isolation in order to try to restore his creative powers. (21:348) He had tried this “isolation therapy” before at Kunming during the war, and in Beijing shortly after establishment of the new nation, but at present he had too many projects that he couldn’t and didn’t want to give up.

This was the fourth year that Shen Congwen had been working on his historical studies of Chinese clothing, and it was coincidentally just at that time Premier Zhou Enlai wished he had an illustrated book of Chinese costumes through the many dynasties that could serve as a gift for foreign heads of state. Because Vice Minister of Culture Qi Yanming had some understanding of Shen Congwen’s projects, he recommended him to the premier. Compilation and editing work for the book began in December. Shen Congwen was chief editor, and he had assistants. In April of the next year, the *Materials on Ancient Chinese Apparel* was ready; the Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party Secretariat Kang Sheng had written the title calligraphy for the book and President of the Chinese Academy of Sciences Guo Moruo had composed the preface. In June, Chief of the Cultural Relics Bureau Wang Yeqiu gave the book its inspection and directed that it be published prior to the National Day on October 1. In September, the mammoth task was completed, and 200 illustrations of costumes, with 200,000 characters of explanations, were already handed over to the publishing house. But the political situation suddenly changed, requiring that the whole book undergo reediting so as to conform with political dictates. As the “Four Cleanups” campaign commenced, editing work temporarily came to a halt. When publishing houses were dissolved during the Cultural Revolution, all that was left of the book’s artwork was glass plates from the original copy, which were protected by workers in the printing staff. The original manuscript copy was almost sent to a papermaking factory as scrap paper – the *Materials on Ancient Chinese Apparel* that embodied Shen Congwen’s heart and soul was nearly destroyed!

In 1965, in a letter to Zhang Zhaohe and her younger brother Zhang Zonghe, Shen Congwen realized that for the sake of his country he must take care of his health. At this point his systolic blood pressure was between 190 and 200. He worried that since his current work relied on memory, all would be lost if he died, which would be “uneconomical” for this urgent contribution to national reconstruction. (21:436) He wrote a letter to Beijing Vice Mayor Wang Kunlun to propose a rescue operation for preservation of Buddhist scriptures. He hoped that in the limited years of life still left to him, he could be of still more use – educating young people. His old friends all these years had remained famous writers; his work with cultural relics made him by contrast feel isolated, and he could not help feeling that he had led an odd life. When the Japanese Sinologist Matsueda Shigeo wrote to him, wanting to translate his complete works, Shen Congwen did not reply. Early the next year, Shen Congwen asked Cheng Yingliu to visit Shanghai’s used book shops and buy his old works.

When the Cultural Revolution exploded in 1966, Shen Congwen was criticized and struggled against, individually and in group meetings, and his house was raided three times. His adopted daughter Shen Chaohui was removed from his household registry, and Shen Congwen was assigned to clean

the men's and women's toilets in the Institute of History. What was most unexpected was that Fan Zeng, a student whom Shen Congwen had admired and protected, became Shen's most ferocious attacker in big-character posters exposing his crimes. Most of the attacks were fabrications. Furious, Shen Congwen wrote his own big-character posters to refute the charges. In another poster, he expressed his desire to continue working in the short span of life he had left. An unpublished manuscript he had written the year before was confiscated; Shen Congwen could only write a feeble but earnest plea on the attached label: "these questions are useful, I hope you won't destroy this." (28: 231) According to the investigations of the special case squad, Shen Congwen was a reactionary academic authority and "veteran anticommunist hack." His work on material culture the last ten years and more, and his writings and political attitude from before that all turned into historical crimes. The *Materials on Ancient Chinese Apparel* he had worked on so hard without ever seeing it published became a "big poisonous weed" that extolled emperors, kings, ministers, and literati with their beautiful women. This "reactionary literatus" that the authorities in Taiwan had accused of aiding the Communists became, in the Cultural Revolution, a "veteran anticommunist hack." Shen Congwen didn't know whether to laugh or to cry.

Two rooms of his three-room apartment were reassigned for workers to live in, and the books and manuscripts he had acquired over so many years were lost. That Shen Congwen's work on national cultural treasures was interrupted was pity enough; as he rehearsed his long life, he felt distressed that both his careers, in writing and the study of material history, were suddenly consigned to oblivion! Writing confessions became second-nature to him; his house was raided several times; and his selfless and tireless work got him criticized as ambitious. He was "officially emancipated" only in 1969. Although his health was poor, his spirits were roiled, and he was facing political problems. Shen Congwen still felt he had stored up in his life some energy yet to be expended. He felt he had the strength to change his profession again – he wanted to write short stories again – but his letters, writings, and so forth were all "taken for detoxification" by the Historical Museum; the laws of nature were affecting his strength and his heart problems and holding him back, so Shen Congwen felt that this hope was absolutely impossible. At this period, when he had no time even to catch his breath to look for new hope, in this very year, Zhang Zhaohe and Shen Congwen in succession were sent down to a May Fifth Cadre School in Xianning, Hubei. There was no room for argument. Prior to leaving Beijing, Shen Congwen made preparations in case he should die away from home.

Elder brother Shen Yunlu died at home of illness in 1970. Shen Congwen had by then passed through numerous further setbacks and been transferred to Shuangxi, Hubei, where the living conditions were even worse than before. Extreme heat exceeding 40 degrees Centigrade and year-round lakeside humidity were not good for the almost 70-year-old man. "My blood pressure lately is still 200," he wrote, and "my heart hurts as soon as I wake up." The doctor regarded him as "unfit for labor," but he would not rest. He felt he could still turn his energy toward new work, and he was in a race with time, to copy out the final proofs for his *Materials on Ancient Chinese Apparel*, to "have something to show for myself before the nation." (22:365) Lacking materials at hand, Shen Congwen relied on memory to continue his research into material history. He tried to find joy from his suffering by writing new poems that were in the old five-character-per-line classical style, but which captured the atmosphere of the age. In 1971, Shen Congwen and Zhang Zhaohe were sent off again, to Danjiang. In the winter, Shen Congwen jotted down on a small piece of paper, "A Little Inspiration from Acupuncture Anesthesia," in which he recalled how he often he "built houses on sand, which inevitably collapsed under the tides," and evaluated his work as a lowly writer of museum labels as