

# The Beauty and Poverty of Humanity in Shen Congwen's Writing on the World of Xiangxi

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**Abstract:** *Shen Congwen's articles have always been described as the beauty of human feelings in the western Hunan world, away from the humble human nature of the city, and return to the beauty of human nature itself. But is Shen Congwen's writing, especially on the human nature in the world of western Hunan, so one-sided and simple that he loses the true nature of human nature and becomes a lack of human nature?*

**Keywords:** Human beauty; anti-modernity; simplicity.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Shen Congwen once said to readers in his Anthologies of Exercises: "If my peasant temperament were recognized by you, you would understand the reason why my works have failed when facing most readers at present, and even if one or two works have left a good impression on you, it still cannot be said to be a failure. The popularity of my work in the market is actually almost Bought the casket for the pearls and returned pearl. you can appreciate the freshness of my story, but you have ignored the passion behind the work, you can appreciate the simplicity of my writing, and you have ignored the sadness behind the work." So what is the passion and hidden sorrow behind Shen Congwen's works?

## 2. TRAGIC EXPRESSIONS

The Xiangxi world is beautiful in Shen Congwen's works. The real world of Xiangxi is really like what Shen Congwen depicted in his writing? Shen Congwen once wrote in "The Long River: Inscription" that in the winter of the twentieth and thirtieth years of the Republic of China, I returned to western Hunan from Beijing for business, and took a boat upstream from Yuanshui to my hometown of Phoenix County. It had been eighteen years since I went to my hometown, but once I entered the Chen River Valley, everything was different. On the surface, everything seems to have progressed greatly, but if you pay close attention, you can see the trend of degradation in the midst of change. The most obvious thing, that is, the rural society retains a bit of integrity and simplicity of human beauty, almost to disappear, instead of the actual society in the past twenty years to cultivate a successful view of life is only practical but profitable. In other words, Shen Congwen is conscious of the decline of his hometown and misses the hometown that is full of human beauty in his memory. Therefore, with the help of literary imagination and fiction, he used words to construct the beauty of the world of western Hunan in his memory. In "Ways of Imagining China: History, Fiction, Narrative" Wang Dewei points out, "There is actually a dilemma in creating about the hometown, that is recreating the original face of the hometown and reorganizing the scenes of the past life, but always helplessly bringing out the gap between imagination and original desire, words and the world, memories and the past." Reality is intertwined with the beauty of past memories, and he presents an allegorical tragic writing with his passion for his remembered hometown and his grief for the real world.

Xia Zhiqing believes that the sorrow contained in Shen Congwen's article is the affirmation and regret of human's pure emotion and complete personality, as well as an extremely valuable criticism of the complacent, arrogant and reckless Chinese society. Xia Zhiqing's commentary is perhaps biased with political overtones, judging the author's unique lyrical style and artistic outlook and political stance by placing him in the historical context of his time. But such a view is similar to that of most scholars in the academic world, who believe that what Shen wants to draw readers' attention to, and what lies behind it, is his lamentation of the erosion of the rustic civilization, which is rich in human, customary and natural beauty, and his satire of the humble humanity and culture in the city. Xie Zhixi, on the other hand, believes that Shen Congwen did not always have such sadness and hidden worries, but specifically, that may not be the hidden intention and true meaning of Shen Congwen in "Border City". By combining the text with the author's creative background, he argues that the true meaning behind it is the hidden personal sorrow of life and the suppression of love and desire. From this, we can see that the hidden sorrow behind Shen's writings is not only the suppression of love and desire and the bitterness of life, but also the tragic writing of lost nostalgia.

Under Shen's writing, many characters in his works end tragically with regrets and beautiful misunderstandings. Zong Baihua once mentioned in "Tragic and Humorous Human Ecology": "However, there have always been some restless poets, artists, prophets, philosophers, etc. in the history of mankind, who prefer to turn decay into magic, to wonder at the ordinary, to find tragedy in the comedy of life, to point out contradictions in the harmonious order, or to guard a kind of humor with a transcendent attitude. "This is how Shen Congwen's works are, creating wonder in the ordinary world of western Hunan and presenting conflicts under the surface harmony. In "Border Town", the author uses simple and quiet ink and brush to paint a poetic world like a splashed ink landscape. The story takes place in the western Hunan frontier, describing the innocent Cui Cui living with

her grandfather under the white pagoda by the stream, and the love entanglement between the two sons of the ship's chief Shun Shun, Tianbao and Nuo Song, who were originally in love with Nuo Song, but Cui Cui eventually drifted apart under a misunderstanding, writing an idyllic pastoral love tragedy. In "Border City" whether it is Tianbao, Nuo Song or the old man on the ferry are good and beautiful, the old boatman for Cui Cui's love affairs, due to shyness to tell the secret, resulting in the beginning did not refuse Tianbao's request, Nuo Song and Cui Cui are in love with each other, because of the grandfather's misunderstanding and interference in the relationship has produced a misalignment. Eventually Nuo and Cui Cui love because of the unfortunate death of Tianbao and Nuo Song's departure and completely broken. Of course, the tragedy in the border city is not only the love story between Cui Cui and Nuo Song, and Cui Cui's parents before a poison ate cold water died of tragic tragedy, the story of the border city is beautiful and regrettable, beautiful encounter but because of various misunderstandings only left a deep regret. And what lies behind this beautiful regret? Liu Hongtao has pointed out that "Border Town" is the result of his being tempted by extra-marital feelings in reality and escaping, and proved that the woman who was deeply tempted was Gao Qingzi. At that time, after years of frustration, repression and struggle, he finally achieved success in his career and was about to marry Zhang Zhaohe, a beautiful woman he had been pursuing, but at that time he met another beautiful woman. He hates that he didn't know Gao Qingzi before he got married. After the marriage, the married life did not make him feel satisfied, so he wrote his own melancholy, depression and deep regret into the creation of "Border Town".

The regrets of Cui Cui and Nuo Xie are also the regrets of Shen Congwen and his affair partner not being able to be together. In "The Husband", the main character sends his wife out to run a prostitution business because of survival problems, and a series of stories occur on the boat where she works: finding her and spending time with her. The husband has been oppressed for so long that he has forgotten his dignity. And in the process of searching for his wife his dignity as a human being is awakened, and eventually he takes her home to stop letting her run the prostitution business. The tragedy of a wife forced to sell her body due to poverty and a husband without dignity under social oppression. The tragedy in "Guisheng" takes place because of the superstition that Jinfeng has a bad fate. The main character Guisheng likes Jinfeng and takes care of her in every way, and Jinfeng's father also approves of Guisheng. But Guisheng is hesitant to marry Jinfeng because he knows that Jinfeng has a bad fate. Because of his hesitation he lost the opportunity to marry Jinfeng, and eventually Guisheng burned his home and Jinfeng's house in Qiaotou. In "The Eight Steeds", Mr. Dash, a summer lecture professor at a university in Qingdao, thinks he is the only normal person who wants to heal the human soul, but he also becomes one of the eight steeds, and after receiving the strange letter "Do you want to leave the sea", he decides to tell his fiancée to postpone the date of his return home and starts his "After receiving the strange letter" Do you want to leave the sea? According to the American scholar Jin Jiefu, the woman who seduces Mr. Dashi in "The Eight Steeds" is the prototype of Yu Shan, the school girl of Qingdao University, whom Shen Congwen met and dated before he got married.

In "Long Zhu", because Long Zhu is beautiful and strong like a lion, gentle and humble like a lamb, a model, an authority, a force, a light in people's minds, a lion among beasts, he is always lonely as he goes on alone without company, and therefore he is lonely, longing for the coming of the woman of his destiny. The kind of repression and bitterness of love that Long Zhu faced was also consistent with Shen Congwen's early encounter, "Young Shen Congwen was in an unequal position in terms of love because he was living in exile in Beijing and could not afford to study, so it was difficult to gain the favor of young women." And eventually both Long Zhu and Shen Congwen met the woman of their choice and then married, Long Zhu met the girl from the Yellow Ox Walled City, while Shen Congwen met Zhang Zhaohe. He found his own comfort zone to escape from reality through his essays and gave vent to his emotions through his essays.

### 3. THE POVERTY AND SIMPLICITY BEHIND THE BEAUTY OF HUMANITY

Writing articles has become a way for Shen to express his emotions. Shen Congwen often considers himself a "countryman". The picturesque and beautiful Xiangxi world in his works makes us find a fertile soil of human spirit. Xia Zhiqing once said, His cool and wise view is suitable not only for the simple rural society, but also for the lazy, cowardly modern people who pursue false values and have severed their relationship with land and human relations.

When people refer to Shen Congwen's articles, they always think that his articles are hymns of the beauty of human nature, masterpieces of expressing human nature, praising the perfection and beauty of human nature, expressing the beauty of human nature, the beauty of human sentiment, the beauty of customs and so on. However, we will find that while describing the beauty of human nature, most of the characters created by Shen Congwen are one-sided and thin. What we feel from these characters in addition to the weak beauty of human nature, more is the sense of unreality. And where does this inauthenticity come from? The characters in Shen Congwen's works exclude and ignore their social and spiritual attributes. "Human being is the existence of nature, but also the existence of society, people should master social experience, assume social roles, participate in social activities, social communication, and form various social relations. A rich sociality is always a necessary condition for the true beauty and health of human nature." But in Shen Congwen's article, we can not see a sound person, the image of human beauty appeared in front of us.

"Border City" in the two love of Cui Cui and Nuo Song seems to lose its subjective ability to express, again and again in the speculation misunderstanding gradually drift away, and we know in real life, meet like people will be unconsciously close and talk about feelings. Secondly Nuo Song by the temptation of money and smooth ship total and the old boatman indirect bereavement of the pain, seems to have been good feelings covered up. But is this really true in real life? In the face of the loss

of a child, will you really continue to offer help and kindness? The protagonist in the novel *Xiao Xiao* is a rural girl named Xiao Xiao, who became a child bride at the age of twelve and married her husband when he was only three years old. Because of the coaxing of the GouDa in the same village, he had an affair with GouDa before marriage. According to local customs, Xiao Xiao should be placed in the water to drown alive, or sold to someone else, but under the kindness of her uncle, he decided to sell her and avoid death. In the process of waiting to be sold, her husband was very reluctant to give up on her and because no one bought her, she not only successfully settled down in her husband's home, but also married her husband, and finally the family was happy. The tragedies of the characters in *Xiao Xiao* seem to be ignored under the influence of the beauty of human feelings. "Bai Son" describes the sex story of a sailor and a prostitute, the sailor gets off the ship and gets together with the prostitute after earning money on the ship. The author ignores the secular view and inherent moral concepts, and places him in a different way of life and folk customs. In the author's writing, he does not feel that the love with the prostitute is dirty, nasty and despicable, but feels fresh and beautiful. No matter Xiao Xiao, sailor or prostitute in Shen Congwen's works, the ugliness of their human nature and the feudalism and oppression of society are mentioned in a single brush, which only presents a sense of beauty and harmony to the readers.

The tragedy in "The Husband" is not that the dignity of the husband is compromised, but that the poor wife is mercilessly sold on a boat by her husband to become a prostitute to support the family, and that the husband uses her body in exchange for money to earn a living. Later, the husband brings his wife home, using the loss of traditional patriarchal power to maintain his own position. And ignoring the wife's inner sorrow as the sold one. "The place was so poor that what little harvest there was was routinely taken away by the people above, and the country people who had their hands and feet close to the ground, no matter how hard you worked and saved and worked hard to do it, it was not easy to cope with it for a quarter of the year, or to feed on sweet potato leaves mixed with bran and ashes." In the initial release of the article on this socio-economic motivation is not, and the later additions are also a passing comment, we can see that the author of the social background, attributes can be ignored, or obscured, and focus on the portrayal of the human body. In Shen Congwen's work, "he faithfully and carefully guarded the poor humanity of the natural children of western Hunan, lest they should slip into modern civilization and distort their humanity. But he himself lost his footing on the road of human nature exploration because of this faithful guardianship. "I think human nature has a dark side and a beautiful side, but it is poor and rudimentary to ignore its dark side by advocating the beauty of human nature. The good and evil of human nature is clear and clear to all of us living in the real world, and only recounting its beauty and ignoring its evil will not play a role in causing the reader to turn to the good and the beautiful, but will only make people feel the thinness of its characters. In order to advocate the return of the beauty of the human spirit, we should first have a holistic understanding of the complexity of human nature, in-depth analysis, while affirming the importance of its beauty, and then guide people to beauty and goodness.

#### 4. THE "REGRESSION" OF ANTI-MODERNITY

Yang Lianfen once pointed out that "the concept of modernity in China not only represents the ideal, but also has a strong ideological color. Civilization became synonymous with modernity, and the pursuit of conformity in Chinese modernity was accompanied by a firm and persistent progressive rationalism." In Shen Congwen's creation, it seems that the spiritual beauty and spiritual civilization of human beings have reverted back to the natural and wild side. As Su Xuelin said, "the wild and vitality of primitive culture is injected into the Han culture, so that it can regain vitality." Therefore, Shen Congwen's creative thought deviated from modernity and was anti-modernity with the mainstream ideology of Chinese modern that spurned barbarism and called for civilization during the May Fourth Movement. As for Shen's pursuit of nature, Liu Yongtai once pointed out: "He does not understand that the distortion of human nature is better than the poverty of human nature, because the former has taken a painful and bloodstained step toward the perfection of human nature. He does not understand that if he does not pay the price of distortion, he must pay the price of greater ignorance, uncivilized and human poverty." Most of the characters in Shen Congwen's works are those in the natural state, respecting the primitive, natural and unregulated countryside. All life here follows the laws of nature, growth, reproduction and elimination. As for describing human nature, Mr. Lu Xun's works satirize and alert people to the hardships of the powerful class and the people at the bottom under the rule of feudal society in real life, and awaken people through the bloody revelation of human nature in real life. Zhang Ailing's works cut into human nature from the perspective of ordinary life, diet and men and women. But Zhang Ailing is obviously different from Shen Congwen's emphasis on showing the beauty of human nature, her description of the desolate nature of life is thorough and direct, through the exploration and expression of the fragile nature of human nature, with an attitude of a bystander, quietly shows the truth of human nature on the basis of secular life, revealing the weakness and mediality of human nature. This is also another degree of awakening and pursuit of beauty.

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