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Imaginings of Ethnicity in Shen Congwen’s Short Stories

by

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Introduction

This project examines portrayals of the Miao ethnic minority through the short stories of Shen Congwen. The main discussion, “Imaginings of Ethnicity in Shen Congwen’s Short Stories,” examines Shen’s treatment of ethnicity within three short stories I translated, as well as other stories read in translation. The analysis relies heavily on Louisa Schein’s theory of “internal orientalism,” which she developed to describe the commodification of Miao culture she witnessed while doing field study with the Miao in Guizhou. Shen at times eroticizes and feminizes his Miao characters, as well as associates them with youth and nature. This, as well as a sense of dangerous allure that surrounds these women, plays into Schein’s theory of internal orientalism, placing Shen Congwen in the position of the Han orientalist as described by Schein.

However, this is overly simplistic. Shen’s own ethnicity complicates this placement (he himself was partially descended of the Miao and Tujia minorities), as does his frequently omitting ethnicity altogether from his stories. The second half of the discussion examines more closely Shen’s own relationship to ethnicity. As Schein argues, it should not be assumed that the Miao, in being represented by Han Chinese, were unable to produce representations of their own minority culture as well. That Shen was perhaps acting in part as a Miao cultural producer is a useful idea for examining his portrayals of minorities. The ethnic conflict between Han and Miao was manifested in Shen Congwen himself, perhaps even driving his creative vision. By examining his ethnic positionality as an author, we gain greater insights into both the pieces translated below, as well as other works not included in this thesis.
One of the most prolific writers of the May Fourth Era, Shen Congwen produced the majority of his works in the 1920s and 1930s. Although he wrote some during the 1940s, he gave up fiction writing after the communist revolution. However, he later took up nonfiction writing, becoming an expert in the field of antique Chinese furniture and costume (Kinkley, 1978). Though his works of fiction had been banned from the founding of the People’s Republic of China through the Cultural Revolution, they were “rediscovered” in the 1980s, and he again enjoyed a degree of notoriety before his death in 1988. This partially was the result of an increased interest in nativist literature during this time, which Shen was credited with having influencing heavily through his depictions of West Hunan.

Shen Congwen was at the forefront of the vernacular literature movement, which called for literature to be written in a manner more similar to contemporary spoken Chinese rather than classical Chinese, as most literature had been for over two millennia. When Shen first began writing there was no true agreement amongst writers as to what form vernacular literature should take, thus all of his works can to some extent be viewed as experimental. However, Shen was even more experimental than many of his contemporaries. While other writers still leaned heavily on the use of classical idioms, Shen eschewed these clichés, creating his own literary flavor through fresh metaphors. He was influenced by Western works he read in translation, fiction and otherwise, and even cited James Joyce as an influence for his “Gazing at Rainbows” (Kinkley, 1978).

Though the subjects, settings, and content of Shen’s works are strikingly diverse, and to claim he focused only on regional pieces would give a very limited view of his literary accomplishments, he is best remembered for his depictions of West Hunan and its
inhabitants, including the Miao. He himself hailed from West Hunan, and drew heavily from his early experiences in the countryside as a child and later soldier for source material. These pieces are often described as pastoral or lyrical, and often depict members of the Miao ethnic minority living side by side with Han Chinese.

One of the fifty-six ethnic groups officially recognized by the current Chinese government, the Miao people live throughout southwest China, as well as Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand. The Miao are recorded as one of the largest ethnic minorities in China (a census counted 2.65 million Miao in 1965, and 7.4 million in 1990 [Schein, 2000, p. 69]). Their customs and traditions have long been the subject of fascination, as unmarried or widowed Miao women traditionally enjoyed more independence than Han women, sexual or otherwise (discussed below; see also Shen’s depiction of the widow Black Cat in “The Inn”, Appendix C). The Miao are also known for their antiphonal singing, which includes songs sung between two prospective lovers, as well as more general songs of welcome or merriment; playing the lusheng reed pipes; and the cherished embroidery made by the women. These traits are all portrayed in Shen Congwen’s fiction.

All four of the pieces translated for this project (three works of fiction as well as one short essay, all included as appendices) centrally include Miao characters. Of these four works, “Mei Jin, Baozi and the Goat” is the best example of Shen’s ability to submerge the reader in bucolic fantasy. The tale centers around two young Miao as they prepare for their tryst in the nearby Cave of Precious Stones. Mei Jin and Baozi are presented with a sense of magical realism, belonging to the fictional “White Face” and “Phoenix” tribes, seemingly altogether removed from Han society. Ah Jin, the
protagonist of “Ah Jin,” is a simple Miao man, living in a mixed Han and Miao town, Brown Ox Fort, who hopes to make a beautiful and young Miao widow his wife. The protagonist of “The Inn,” Black Cat, is another Miao widow. She continues to run the business after her husband’s death, and is described as sharing a mix of the best characteristics of several Miao tribes. Running a lonely inn at the foot of a mountain, she is both separated from society, yet plays host to a wide variety of travelers, Miao and otherwise. The fourth piece is a short essay titled “The Plight of the Miao People,” in which Shen Congwen outlines some of the basic issues of governance in West Hunan that lead to problems of banditry and misrepresentation of the region. These four pieces all show varying degrees of explicit interactions between Han and Miao characters, as well as varying degrees of possible intellectual interactions between a Han reader with his Miao subject matter.

**Notes on the translation process**

For translating the four pieces included in this thesis, I use hard copy works picked up in Beijing during the summer of 2010. While one of these originals is slightly different from editions cited elsewhere, it is in the form that is being republished today. The only known discrepancy occurs in “Mei Jin, Baozi and The Goat,” and is noted.

For most Chinese personal and place names occurring within the text I use their Romanized pinyin versions, with notes on meaning when appropriate. The exception is the protagonist of “The Inn,” named Black Cat, or *heimao* 黑猫. This name is a nickname given to her by her deceased husband. Since the nickname is given with the
full intent of carrying meaning, I have thus translated it to its English counterpart.

Furthermore, there are several puns made on cats that would otherwise be lost.

I try to preserve in the English translations a faithful rendering of the emphasis placed on certain phrases or words in the original. There are often more verbs within Shen Congwen’s sentences than are usual in English sentence. In these cases, I try to preserve meaning by incorporating all of the verbs, though this might mean that I break a longer Chinese sentence into two or three shorter English sentences. The translations are for the most part faithful to punctuation, using the question marks and exclamation points that occur in the original, even when it may seem slightly strange to do so in English. This was done in an attempt to preserve Shen’s flavor, as it were, which is often frank, and can convey a sense of almost child-like wonder.

I made extensive use of two dictionaries for my translations. The *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* published by the *Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press* (外语教学与研究出版社), as well as the online resource MDBG Chinese English Dictionary (http://www.mdbg.net/chindict/chindict.php). Of course, my thesis advisor Christopher Nugent has also been an indispensable resource for translation, able to provide answers to all the riddles caused by Shen Congwen’s unique use of Chinese.
**Imaginings of Ethnicity in Shen Congwen’s Short Stories**

**Portrayals of Minority Ethnicity in China**

Perceptions of ethnic minority groups in twentieth century and contemporary China by Han Chinese, as well as by minority groups themselves, have been both complex and malleable, accompanying the myriad social, political, and economic changes occurring during this timeframe. These changing relationships are diverse, influenced by early ethnographic studies, the political stances taken by the Communist and Nationalist parties before the Communist takeover, official Communist Party doctrine after, and media sources such as books, film, and television. An increased importance placed on ethnic minorities can be seen in many aspects of modern Chinese society, whether commercially, from depictions of ethnicity plastered on Beijing billboards to ethnic tourism in the outer provinces, or politically, such as the establishment in 1941 of the minority-focused Minzu University of China. The last century has witnessed increased ethnographic study in China by Chinese, Europeans, professionals and amateurs alike.

Ethnographic study within China itself is no recent phenomenon. Late Ming and early Qing dynasty “Miao Albums” depicted the habits, dress and presumed character of the Miao and other minority groups, in hopes of easing direct rule of borderlands from the capital (Deal and Hostetler, 2007, p. xxiv). However, these depictions were hardly pure scientific inquiry, and often reflected a degree of minority fetishism on the part of

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1 The term “Miao” here refers to its older meaning of “barbarian” groups in general, not to current conceptions of the Miao people (Deal and Hostetler, 2007).
the authors. In *The Art of Ethnography: A Chinese Miao Album*, Deal and Hostetler note that as:

…with any ethnographic text, we learn not only about the peoples described, but also about the authors’ interests and preoccupations . . . Courtship rituals and marriage customs, as well as norms that governed the relationship between the bride and groom and their extended families, attracted the most attention. In a culture where arranged marriages and patrilineal descent were the norm, variant practices understandably held a fascination for those to whom they were forbidden. (Deal and Hostetler, 2007, p. xli-xlii)

This interest in the love-related and the sexual persisted through the end of the Qing dynasty and into modern times. As argued by Louisa Schein in her treatise on Miao minority images in late twentieth-century China, *Minority Rules: The Miao and the Feminine in China’s Cultural Politics*, by the 1980s and 1990s a sexualized and feminized image had became even central to minority identity. After post-Mao economic reform policies, ethnic culture itself became a resource, a marketable commodity, and images of young minority women dressed in festival wear became exotic delicacies to be consumed by Han urbanites (Schein, 2000, p. 10). Not only did these young women become an economic asset, their youthful sex-appeal drawing ethnic tourists to remote areas as well as turning a profit through traveling minority culture shows (Schein, 2000, p. 125), they were also embraced within the Chinese psyche as bastions of Chinese culture untainted by Westernization and modernization, as is discussed below. Minority men were also involved in the consumption of minority culture, by arranging business deals and photo shoots, sometimes even taking the photos themselves (Schein, 2000, p. 133). In cultural performances they embraced and sang to the women, “their intimate proximity to the desired object, focus[ing] and redirect[ing] the consumers’ gaze from the
indeterminate panorama of colorful culture to the minority woman-object” (Schein, 2000, p. 127).

However, this young, beautiful girl as the marketable face of minority culture was not entirely novel in the 1980s or 1990s. The notion of young minority women as sexual objects can be traced back to the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, where it resonates interestingly within the works of author Shen Congwen. In Shen’s short stories also occur exoticized and eroticized images of minority women similar to those seen in the 1980s and 1990s. That Shen Congwen was the original source of such exoticizing is unlikely; more conceivable is that he was simply participating in a tradition established far prior to post-Mao internal tourism.

A Brief Biography of Young Shen Congwen

Shen Congwen was born in 1902 into a West Hunanese family that had made its fortune two generations previous, when Congwen’s grandfather Shen Hongfu was appointed a Gan Army general at the age of twenty.² For a brief time before his death of a battle wound at the age of twenty-six, Shen Hongfu acted as commander-in-chief for all of Guizhou province, setting a precedence for military careers within the Shen family (Kinkley, 1978, p. 19). His widow adopted as heir Shen Zongsi, Shen Hongfu’s nephew and future father of Shen Congwen, and he began his own military study. However, the family struggled financially under Shen Zongsi’s leadership, and he eventually abandoned his wife and children after participating in a failed assassination attempt on

² The Gan Army was a small outpost of the Qing Army stationed in West Hunan, and run by local commanders who had proved themselves in battle, such as Shen Hongfu (Kinkley, 1978, p.13).
Yuan Shikai, reestablishing contact only to mortgage the family property to pay off debts (Kinkley, 1978, pp. 19-20).

Shen Congwen was privileged to an (albeit spotty) elementary education, and he chose to pursue an early career with the local militia at age 15. He spent the next five years traveling through Hunan, working first as a bodyguard and reservist, then later as a clerk. His clerking duties allowed him to mingle with officers, but also included less savory duties such as recording the confessions of tortured prisoners (Kinkley, 1978, p. 42). Despite these tasks, Shen Congwen kept a fairly romantic view of soldiering for several years. As Kinkley notes in *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen*,

> His earliest stories, of the mid-1920's . . . present raw and vivid scenes of frontier militarism, sometimes mixed with romantic evocations of, say, what it means to be a dashing officer enjoying the respect and perquisites of the uniform—one such perquisite being the amours of unattached local women. (Kinkley, 1978, p. 43)

These colorful travels took him through both Han and Miao territories, and taught him much about the region and its people, providing the materials and inspiration for the regionalism that featured in his later works. Kinkley notes that Shen probably “learned the art of oral storytelling while in Hunan [as a soldier], and felt moved to spin yarns ever after when the subject was soldiering” (Kinkley, 1978, p. 43).

Shen Congwen’s transition from soldiering to writing was not entirely smooth. After the destruction of his army (from which he was luckily spared by being deemed too young to travel to a dangerous encampment), he found his way to Changde, where he studied calligraphy and classical poetry with two older men of the gentry class, then continued on to Yuanzhou to work for the police, again as a clerk (Kinkley, 1978, pp. 57-58). In Yuanzhou it seemed he would marry into the gentry class, and his mother and
sister sold their remaining estate in Fenghuang and moved to Yuanzhou. But Shen Congwen shunned the marriage choices presented to him, and chose instead to pursue a romantic interest with a young and beautiful girl. After loaning her and her brother a third of the Shen family’s wealth, the young woman disappeared, and Shen fled to Changde (Kinkley, 1978, p. 59). There he lived with a cousin, immersing himself in studies of classical poetry and translations of Western fiction. However, he soon travelled upriver to Miao borderlands in West Hunan, and once again took up a military position (Kinkley, 1978, p. 61).

Shen Congwen was still stationed in the hinterlands of West Hunan when the first ripples of the May Fourth movement reached there, several years after the explosive protests that gave the movement its name. The reformist warlord under whom Shen Congwen worked took up the use of modern vernacular Chinese in media (Kinkley, 1978, p. 63). However, Kinkley states:

> The circumstances of Shen Congwen’s second stint in the army were not at all such as to lead him straight down the path of progressivism to Peking. They only deepened the contradiction between his continuing naïve devotion to half-traditional, half-modern military heroes and the disillusioning insights into the realities of militarism that were building up in the back of his mind. It was direct contact with the new May Fourth consciousness, through its magazines and partisans, that broke his intellectual deadlock. (Kinkley, 1978, p. 64)

After a near-death bout with Typhoid fever and the death of a friend, Shen Congwen decided to leave the army and the countryside (Kinkley, 1978, p. 66). He moved to Beijing in 1922, planning to start a new life as a revolutionary intellectual and writer.
Regionalism, briefly: Country versus City

Shen Congwen got off to a rocky start in the city, perhaps accounting for the romantic nostalgia for West Hunan seen in many of his early works of the 1920s and 1930s. He began to engage in a sort of myth making centered around West Hunan, the Miao, and country people, presenting West Hunan as “the modern descendant of an ancient kingdom and state of mind called Chu” (Kinkley, 1978, p. 5). Kinkley notes, “A region is as much an imaginative construct as a geographical place, and the [contemporary] idea of West Hunan owe[s] something to Shen Congwen himself…To Shen, West Hunan was a cultural frontier where sophisticated Han people…had since ancient times lived side by side with primitives like the Miao folk who still inhabited the hill country west of his hometown” (Kinkley, 1978, p. 9). Beyond simply coloring his stories, “the regional backdrop acquires the density of a fictional actor” (Kinkley, 2003, p. 428).

Han and Miao may have lived side by side in West Hunan for hundreds of years, but this ethnic mixing did not always go smoothly. Though Shen was fully aware of the struggles that arose through poor governing of the region by leaders ignorant of the locals (see “The Plight of the Miao”), he rarely depicts these struggles in his works of fiction, or mentions them in an offhand manner, not framed as a matter of ethnicity. In “My Education” (trans. Kinkley, 1995, pp. 121-155), the soldier-narrator references the execution of countryside “bandits” at market day, whose guilt of actual banditry is suspect. The narrator has mentioned that they have not seen any bandits in the area (trans. Kinkley, 1995, p. 124), suggesting that they are, in fact, simple peasants. The narrator seems to come from a larger municipality, and does not at first understand the
purity of motivation one finds in the countryside: When he hears a man playing a suona, he tries to pay him, only to be laughed at by the man and the children listening to him. “Turned out he was just amusing the kids, not playing for money” (trans. Kinkley, 1995, p. 123). This example also possibly identifies the village they are garrisoned in as partially Miao, as the suona, a brass-belled Chinese oboe, is associated with folk music and features in traditional Miao music. Ethnicity is only explicitly mentioned once, when identifying a camp cook as Miao, but then it is done in such an offhand manner as to imply ethnicity has little bearing within the ranks. Though Shen has ample room to expand upon the drama and tension caused by garrisoning non-local troops in this small border town and the mixing of cultures, he instead writes of the romanticism and boredom that fill the narrator’s day-to-day existence, focusing mainly on the wholly positive interactions taking place between the narrator and the workers at the local smithy.

While Shen rarely writes explicitly of ethnic clashes between the Han and Miao living in West Hunan, he shows no qualms over shifting this dynamism to clashes between the urban and the bucolic. Shen is fond of explicitly pointing out the deficiencies of city-dwelling modern intellectuals and women when compared to their rustic counterparts, two of his favorite points of comparison being their capacities for imagination and love. When discussing the existence of a remote countryside in “The Inn,” filled with nature wonders and Miao folk, Shen writes: “Those who live in the city, or even those with talent, cannot grasp that these people live in the same world” (Appendix C). And in “Mei Jin”: “Were there a literary man born into 20th century Shanghai . . . with intelligence to shock the world into submission—if you asked him to
imagine what a beautiful woman Mei Tin was, he’d still find it a tough task” (Appendix A). In an essay documenting and commenting on love songs sung between the Miao in Zhan’gan, he writes:

In the countryside, lovemaking doesn’t require any other technique than singing. It’s not like courting a modern woman of the city. Singing won’t work. Something a little more elegant, like poetry, won’t either. Better to get with it quick and put up your money, right? (trans. Kinkely 1995, p. 508)

Of course, from Shen’s perspective, simplicity and honesty are also so universal to the countryside that one can hardly help but be so: “Folkways in a border district are so straightforward and unsophisticated that even the prostitutes retain their everlasting honesty and simplicity” (“Border Town,” trans. Kinkley, 2009, p. 17). If the reader hopes to dismiss this hyperbolic romanticizing as part of a fictive narrative voice, he can think again—in his essay “The Plight of the Miao, Shen informs his reader: “[West Hunanese] are still some of the most hardworking, thrifty, simple, able to produce and carry out their duties in accordance to the law, extremely lovable, good and honest citizens among the Chinese people” (Appendix D). And yet city intellectuals, particularly revolutionary writers, are “extremely ignorant” (“The Inn,” Appendix C).

Why were city readers so willing to consume glorified images of the countryside and ethnic minorities at the expense of their own urban culture? One must assume that Shen’s romanticized portrayals of the countryside, as well as his deprecating depictions of the city, were somehow desirable to urban readers. Perhaps the answer lies in Schein’s characterization of fascination with the countryside and minorities in later decades. She states:

In post-Mao China’s nationalist construction . . . many found the [traditional Confucian cultural] ‘core’ bankrupt, and they began to situate
‘uncontaminated’ Chinese culture in the social/geographic periphery of the Chinese polity. The domains of the peasant, the folk, and the non-Han minorities came to be regarded by many as the sites where ‘traditional culture’ was preserved untainted. In this vision, the figure of the minority, usually feminine, came to be included in what was considered to constitute the authentically Chinese, appropriated to serve as contrastive with the figure of the West (Schein, 2000, p. 24).

This search for an embraceable and authentic Chinese identity mirrors the identity crisis that occurred during the May Fourth Era, tying nicely the post-Mao period Schein is describing to the period in which Shen was writing. Though perhaps not until the 1980s did situating the ‘uncontaminated core’ of Chinese culture in peripheral minorities become the norm, similar sentiments in Shen’s work show these ideas were palatable to his contemporaries.

Shen Congwen provides a backdrop of “untainted traditional culture” for modern, disenchanted intellectuals to explore, “satisfy[ing their] curiosity about his ‘barbarous’ region” (Kinkley, 2003, p. 426). His West Hunan is almost magically naturalistic, its Miao inhabitants full of purity, vitality, and ethnic flair. However, there is the threat of losing this vitality to encroaching modernity and Han culture. This nostalgia and romanticism exhibits what Renato Rosaldo has coined “imperialist nostalgia,” and which Schein repositions for China in terms of minority women: “Non-Han women constituted counterpoints to urban elite culture, signifying both a trajectory toward a modernity already claimed by the metropolitan class and evoking the “imperialist nostalgia” . . . in which one mourns the loss of precisely what has been destroyed through the “progress” one has wrought” (Schein, 2000, p. 120). Shen presents this in terms of ethnicity and sexuality: “The passion of Miao people is diminishing, and their women slowly resemble [Han] Chinese women. They’ve taken their love and now invest it in the falsity of
material wealth . . . Beautiful voices and beautiful bodies have similarly become meaningless objects in the face of prevailing materialism” (“Mei Jin,” Appendix A). The concept of moral authenticity as both physically and culturally distant from Confucianism is reproduced here from a supposed minority perspective, as though the local narrator is simultaneously making the same judgments as Han urban intellectuals. I discuss below whether Shen is acting as an ambassador for Miao fears or imposing a Han intellectual’s ideal onto his fictive subjects. First we must examine possible textual markers to his positionality.

Internal Orientalism in Shen Congwen’s Works

Lousia Schein is “concerned mainly with the 1980s, that moment of acute flux in which the decisive close of the culturally flattening and xenophobic Cultural Revolution collided with the dramatic flinging open of the door to the outside through the policies of economic and cultural liberalization” (Schein, 1997, pg. 74). Focusing on this timeframe, Schein proposes a theory of what she coins “internal orientalism,” borrowing from Edward Said’s revolutionary theory of the West defining itself through projecting what is “other” onto the East. She argues internal orientalism, then, is the production of minority images for internal/domestic consumption by Han male urbanites as a way of defining Han China in relation to what they viewed as their less civilized, less modern, and yet culturally purer counterparts. The “orientalist” in this case “is a figurative term to those who produce representations that define other in the East” (Schein, 2000, p. 104). Schein stresses that Said’s argument fails to recognize that those being repressed through dominant representations also have their own voice, and will contribute to image-making.
That is to say, not only were Han Chinese defining themselves in contrast to ethnic minorities by creating representations of minorities, but these same minorities were also participating in their own image-making process (Schein, 2000, pp. 105-6). Schein carefully notes that while many factors contribute to which representations become dominant, including “differential access to cash, to technology, to geographic mobility, to state authority, and even to literacy” (Schein, 2000, p. 105), authority “to speak” was not entirely unilateral.

The representation that came to be associated with minority women was one of primitive or natural vitality, as “the oppositions of modern-backwards, civilized-wild . . . were repeatedly enunciated through the association of ‘the’ minority woman with nature and with youth” (Schein, 2000, p. 121). Of a series of bookmarks and postcards published in Beijing, in which young minority females were pictured in decorative costumes in natural settings, she writes: “In several of the images she was accompanied by such companions as birds, lambs, or butterflies . . . this girl/woman occasionally appeared to be in direct communication with the animals who inhabited her environs” (Schein, 1997, pg. 75).

This communing with nature is mirrored in Shen Congwen’s short story “Mei Jin, Baozi, and The Goat.” In this story, the goat kid is considered a viable exchange for Mei Jin’s virginity, placing such a high value on the animal as to imply that Mei Jin is also an exchangeable part of nature. Mei Jin spends the majority of the story in natural settings, as opposed to human settlement—other than a short trip to her house to prepare her wedding clothes and gifts for Baozi, she is on the hillsides or within the cave (her male counterpart, on the contrary, spends most of the story in human settlements.) Gorily
mirroring the image cited above of minority women with lambs and butterflies, when Mei Jin dies in the cave, the small goat kid, broken just as she is, is tucked up under her chin, her hand resting on its body.

The connection between minority women and nature is also seen in Cuicui, the young heroine of Shen Congwen’s novel “Border Town.” Although Cuicui herself is never specifically identified as Miao, her ethnicity is suggested through the antiphonal singing her mother participated in when finding her own match, her grandfather’s expectation that Cuicui do the same, as well as the emphasis placed on the Dragon Boat Festival. Her name itself is a reflection of nature (“Because of the compelling deep, emerald green of bamboo stands covering the mountains on either side by the stream where they lived, the old ferryman, without a second thought, named the girl after what was close at hand: Cuicui, or ‘Green jade’” [“Border Town,” trans. Kinkley, 2009, p. 4]), and she seems entirely formed by the elements, even inhuman:

Cuicui grew up under the sun and the wind, which turned her skin black as could be. The azure mountains and green brooks that met her eyes turned them clear and bright as crystal. Nature had brought her up and educated her, making her innocent and spirited, in every way like a little wild animal. Yet she was as docile and unspoiled as a mountain fawn, wholly unacquainted with cruelty, never worried, and never angry. (“Border Town,” trans. Kinkley, 2009, p. 5)

Here, rather than simply being able to commune with nature, Cuicui is presented as a wild animal herself.

Black Cat, the heroine of “The Inn,” is also marked by the darkness of her skin. A widowed Miao of the Flowery Foot tribe, she owns an inn at the foot of a mountain, situated apart from even rural society. If her name hasn’t placed her solidly as an object of nature, the narrator relates that “when it came to Black Cat, it was always as if she
really were a cat, with no interest in the affairs between men and women, and with no part in romance... In the three years she had passed living as a widow, she hadn’t seen a single man able to move her heart” (Appendix C).

However, her not desiring men does not equate to men not desiring her. She is clearly positioned as the subject of the lodgers’ sexual fascination (and perhaps the readers’ as well), their eyes roaming over her “slender physique and bulging breasts” (Appendix C). For, as Schein states, “while Chinese internal orientalism commonly classed minority women as natural [or] nonhuman . . . this pigeonholing did not preclude their being very human objects of erotic fascination” (Schein, 2000, p. 123). The narrator posits of Black Cat: “A woman over twenty, with a sturdy and sleek body, long arms, and a robust and feeling heart—is this not completely and intentionally designed for a man’s enjoyment come night” (Appendix C)? She is so bewitching that men simply cannot forget her, and some eventually try to force themselves upon her, resulting in Black Cat’s need to hire a hunchback assistant and bodyguard (Appendix C). She is even presented to us with her shirt unbuttoned, her hair lazily piled atop her head (Appendix C). Mei Jin, it should be noted, or rather Mei Jin’s body, is also erotically presented to the reader as beautiful to the point of divinity:

“Everywhere [Mei Jin] touched was well rounded and as satiny as oil, and where she smelled there was a fragrant sweetness . . . Her entire body had grown into roundness. Every line of her body was an arc, yet her figure as a whole remained a slender compliment . . . There just should not be such model of perfect exquisiteness among mortals. (“Mei Jin,” Appendix A)

Youth and purity were also central in these representations of the Miao. Shen Congwen connects minorities with youth in his short story “Ah lin,” writing: “Today the Miao women were particularly abundant. All over were youthful appearances, young
voices, the fragrance of youth” (Appendix B). And though Mei Jin’s age is never specified as those of the other heroines are, she is half of a young couple, and sexually inexperienced. Descriptions of her are at times frankly erotic, and yet at the story’s conclusion her virginity remains pure and unmarred, her life expired before Baozi could “perform such wild acts upon her body” (Appendix A).

Cuicui is also quite young, and the reader witnesses her growth from a child into a young woman, and thus a possible erotic subject. Though her body is not described in the same sexual detail as Mei Jin’s or Black Cat’s, the story obsesses over her marriage prospects of two brothers, and she dreams of inexplicable phallic objects. Cuicui, however, is perhaps the “purest” of the heroines, unaware that her own sexuality is the source of the tension between her and the younger of her suitors. And, like Mei Jin, her purity remains intact at the story’s conclusion, one suitor drowned and the other gone for time unknown: “He may never come back; or perhaps he will be back tomorrow” (“Border Town,” trans. Kinkley, 2009, p. 162).

Though not as young as Mei Jin or Cuicui, Black Cat’s age (twenty-seven) is shown as a positive, providing her with the experience that drives her sexual awakening, and thus the plot of the story: “The good experience given to her by [her former husband] now made her remember the [sexual] right she had lost, and gave birth to a rebellion against her normal reservation. She felt she should catch one of [her lodgers], not caring who, and fulfill her own wish, undertaking some atrocious behavior on her person” (Appendix C). Though Black Cat lacks the virginal purity of Mei Jin and Cuicui, more

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3 Kinkley notes that Shen’s interest in Western ideas eventually led him to Sigmund Freud, who he read in translation. In interviews with Kinkley in the 1980s, Shen admitted works such as “Border Town” had been influenced by Freud (Kinkley, 1978, p. 187; 216).
emphasis is paid in this story to the near-religious experience of love, and the “right” to make oaths upon parting as a lover is sent home or out across the bamboo forests (Appendix C).

Mei Jin, Cuicui, and Black Cat are all heroines on the verge of a sexual awakening—Mei Jin waits to lose her virginity, Cuicui is courted for the first time and dreams of inexplicable symbols, and Black Cat finally awakes from her chaste slumber of widowhood. Their pursuits of sexuality are quite distinct from traditional Han courtship and marriage practices. The plot of “Ah Jin” also centers on marrying a widow, an act often looked down upon in Han Chinese culture. With the majority of Shen’s readership being Han sophisticates, Shen is no doubt tapping into the same erotic fascination with his characters’ relative sexual freedom that captured the attention of early Miao Album authors and readers. Although the circulation of Shen’s portrayals of minority women was not nearly so widespread as that of the images flooding the market in the 1980s, encouraging tourism to China’s more remote provinces, it seems clear they both participate in the same exoticizing and eroticizing of Han internal orientalism.

Another marker of traditional Han Chinese attitudes towards the Miao is the sense of danger that accompanies eroticizing. The sexual freedom of Miao women posed a threat to Confucian values, and though women were eroticized, “they were also attended by a kind of repressive fear and repulsion toward the implied baseness and breaches of morality that made these women so other” (Schein, 1997, p. 77). This repressive fear was expressed through tales of Miao witches, practitioners of gu poison. Gu poison is multifarious, used to poison both strangers as well as one’s own family, or to entrap young and wealthy sexual or marriage partners and thus inherit their fortune. It is only
practiced by women, and they must poison others, lest they face the ill effects of the poison themselves (Diamond, 1988). As Norma Diamond notes in her article “The Miao and Poison,” “From Tang times on the connection was made between gu and the voracious sexuality of the women of the southern frontiers. It seems not to have been applied to the Islamicized peoples of the northwest, no matter how exotic or hostile those groups may have been, probably because the constraints on women were fairly strong and behavior paralleled Han ideas about women’s place” (Diamond, 1988, p. 22). Diamond argues that these fears of gu poisoning intensified during times of frontier militarism, especially at the turn of the twentieth century. Large numbers of Han men were sent to frontier regions, where the lack of Han women led to intermarrying with local Miao. The sexual freedom of the women was both enticing and dangerous, as it eroded the structure of male-centric authority so central to Confucianism. Diamond states, “The Chinese beliefs in magical poisoning and Miao witchcraft are, I argue, not based on ethnographic fact, but are a way of talking about irreconcilable cultural differences” (Diamond, 1988, p. 3).

Does Shen Congwen, then, also portray Miao women as dangerous? It seems that through specific citations he plays into this fear, but as a whole, mainly by omission, he also dismisses it. Although Shen makes no reference to gu poison, the narrator of “Mei Jin” says, “[Most] able to easily draw your mind into intoxication or dreaming are the songs of the White Faced Miao women. When men listen to these songs, even spilling blood becomes a natural affair” (Appendix A). Here, the power of Miao women’s singing is presented as magic, resulting in spilling blood, “falling” to homely women, and being “driven to distraction” (Appendix A). Loving Cuicui and Black Cat also leads to
disaster: the older brother dies after thinking himself rejected by Cuicui while the younger brother leaves indefinitely; and the paper merchant dies on the long road after having had sex with Black Cat.

In “Ah Jin,” the widow Ah Jin hopes to marry is also presented as having dangerous allure. The narrator relates: “Today [at the market] the Miao women were particularly abundant... Thus it was even more impossible [for Ah Jin] to act indifferent towards the young widow from Baba fort. The young woman was bewitching and mysterious, more intoxicating than alcohol” (Appendix B). And yet the magistrate seeks desperately to prevent the union.

What was the reason after all? It was because the woman was too beautiful, one of those fortune telling book’s “husband beaters” in hempen mourning clothes. From an old friend’s standpoint, he wasn’t willing to let Ah Jin destroy his property or his career, accumulated through years of hard work, over some woman like a “husband beater” straight out of a fortune telling book. (Appendix B)

Ah Jin does indeed suffer misfortune, losing both his wealth and his potential wife—however, it is hard to assign this misfortune to the perils of loving a Miao woman as opposed to the meddling of the Magistrate. The latter seems most probable, given that the Magistrate is depicted as meddling and pompous; constant reassurances from the narrator that he only ‘likes to eat and gossip a little, where’s the harm?’ in fact suggests to the reader that he meddles overmuch, and does not have best interests at heart. The narrator has also made it clear to us how Han men react in general to the beautiful Miao:

The local people were known for their beauty, and more or less because they were beautiful, they attracted some injustice from other people. Han men who had no close connection to [the widow] whatsoever circulated rumors that only men would repeat. (Appendix B)
And yet, the widow is undeniably “bewitching.” Thus it seems Shen Congwen pokes fun at the Magistrate’s fear of the beautiful Miao and dismisses the way Han men talk about Miao women, while simultaneously reinforcing these same concept through his descriptions of the widow and the resulting plot. Yet, defining Shen’s as a Han internal orientalist may be too simple a reading.

Schein briefly mentions Shen as a producer of these minority images (Schein, 2000, p. 113). However, this simply demonstrates that the timeframe she assigns to her theory is incomplete. It is clear that Han Chinese had been defining the self with relation to ethnic or racial others for several decades prior to Maoism, not to mention the 1980s. At the turn of the twentieth century, the fear of China’s physical as well as cultural partition by Western powers weighed heavily on Chinese intellectuals, accompanied in many by a sense of racial defeatism (Tsu, 2006, Failure). As early as the late 1800s, thinkers such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qiqiao had begun to address the ideas of social Darwinism and eugenics as a way to revitalize China, or at least prevent its destruction. These discussions looked at race and ethnicity both outside of China’s borders as well as within. Although contemporary “studies of ethnicity and nationalism have begun to move away from either culturally or primordial-based formulations, to the analysis of power relations, particularly in contemporary nation-state” (Gladney, 1994, p. 93), this was not the case in early twentieth-century China. When Lin Shu in 1903 translated Michael Haberlandt’s Volkerkunde (titled Ethnology in English), his chose the title of “Minzhong” as opposed to “Renzhong,” stressing cultural differences as equal to or more important than racial differences in defining peoples (Tsu, 2006, p. 69). Although at the turn of the twentieth century neither ethnic minorities nor Han Chinese likely have
considered minorities as “Chinese” in the manner that they would be after 1949, this still placed minorities in a tenuous position within the Chinese psyche; they were culturally different from Han Chinese, but racially much more similar to them than to Europeans, Africans, etc—and yet the concept of ethnology was set up to include cultural difference. Thus minorities like the Miao were set up perfectly for “othering” by Han people as described by Schein.

The corrupt and secret dealings made between European powers against China during the Treaty of Versailles resulted in China’s loss of faith in Western culture as wholesome or morally superior to Confucian culture,4 and yet The May Fourth Movement also brought to prominence the concept of the ‘moral bankruptcy’ of traditional Confucian culture discussed above. With few options left for Chinese intellectuals to explore for a revitalizing force, it is unsurprising that they turned to China’s ethnic minorities. The very language that had been used to discuss ideas of nationhood and self had primed China for this move. As Tsu writes:

> Whether it is a question of awareness, an innate ability, something quintessentially Chinese . . . the making of modern Chinese national and cultural identity needed to legitimize all at once the importance of “self,” “nation,” and “people.” The contemporary vocabulary mobilized for this task included . . . “the strength of the people” (minli), “the heart of the people” (minxin), “elemental essence” (suzhi), and “character essence (qizhi). All of these terms emphasized something primordial and unexcavated that, once released, would transform and rejuvenate the Chinese people and culture. (Tsu, 2006, p. 35)

The “primordial and unexcavated” mirrors both the vitality that came to be associated with minorities, as well as ideas such as Shen Congwen’s proposed ancient heritage of the Miao in the state of Chu. A companion result of the May Fourth Movement

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4Though this by no means stopped the importation of and experimentation with Western political, social, literary or scientific concepts.
Movement was the "unprecedented interest in the folk, their colloquial oral literature, and their non-Confucian contributions to the nation" (Eminov, 1975, p. 262). Although "folk" is not explicitly ethnic, the concepts are linked through their association with borderlands and their liminal relationship to dominant culture. Thus, although the time-frame set out by Schein does not explicitly include the May Fourth period, there are enough significant similarities between the two periods that we can apply, at least in part, her theory of internal orientalism to Shen Congwen's work.

It is unsurprising that Shen Congwen includes minority portrayals in his works of fiction, as it is clear there had been a growing interest in and concern over minority peoples and cultures for some time (and in a manner different from what had been seen in past eras, such as using Miao albums as tools for dominating and subduing indigenous populations during dynastic expansion). Shen was participating in a growing intellectual movement of his time, a sub-movement of the May Fourth Movement, as it were. More surprising is how he portrayed the Miao—for all of his posturing on the superiority of Miao culture/women/etc to their Han counterpoints, Shen's stories also center around his characters' humanity, regardless of ethnicity. Although, as seen in the examples above, he does explicitly portray ethnicity in a manner keeping with Han depictions, only in "Mei Jin, Baozi and The Goat," and to a lesser extent "The Inn," does Miao ethnicity play a role crucially central to the success of the plot; "Mei Jin" is structured around antiphonal singing and the custom of young lovers arranging their own trysts and exchanging tokens (Mei Jin, the gourd of alcohol and embroidered pouch; Baozi, of course, the goat), and Black Cat eventually remarries, an act less stigmatized amongst the Miao. That being said, the theme of star-crossed young lovers is found in many different
cultures, Miao, Han, European or otherwise. And in “The Inn,” though the highly sexed descriptions of Black Cat’s body are in keeping with Han portrayals of Miao, they are by no means objectively necessary for her claim to ethnicity. Again, “The Inn’s” prevailing theme of isolation versus sexuality also works to universalize the story.

Most telling perhaps is how frequently ethnicity is only implied, mentioned in passing, or simply omitted in Shen Congwen’s works. These references lead the reader to suspect any number of characters could be either Miao or Han. Their identity then slips from ethnicity to region or class, even, as they are often identified first and foremost as West Hunanese, soldiers, or simply country folk. Yet even this identification becomes borderless. As noted in Imperfect Paradise, “if country-folk characters are types, used by [Shen Congwen] to make a point, they are not, however, perfect. They have weaknesses like anyone else: fits of anger, impatience, sullenness, greed, and unwillingness honestly to recognize their own motivations” (trans. Kinkley, 1995, p. 201).

These two disparate depictions of ethnicity within Shen Congwen’s works, the highly eroticized and the implied or omitted, create then an interesting puzzle for the reader. They are almost suggestive of two different authors, or differing positionality within Shen Congwen. One seems clearly to be writing from a Han tradition of defining the self through other, while the second is harder to place. To reconcile these seemingly contradictory depictions of ethnicity, we must first examine Shen’s ethnic positionality as an author, as well as how Schein’s theory of internal orientalism accounts for minority production of minority representations.

**Shen Congwen’s Ethnic Positionality**
Some biographers and literary scholars stress Shen Congwen’s partially Miao heritage as grounds to employ him as the authentic literary ambassador for all of West Hunan, including the Miao (McDougall and Louie, 1997, p. 125). Is this a legitimate claim to make? Shen himself did not fully learn of his heritage until his mother died in 1934, (he had been given only a rough description when he was nineteen by his father [Kinkley, 1978, pp. 21-22]). Furthermore, he did not acknowledge his Miao heritage openly until the 1980s, long after he had stopped writing fiction. Though Shen is objectively part Miao and Tuja by blood, he was raised Han. Can he still lay claim to any part of his Miao heritage? As we saw above, Chinese intellectuals chose to define ethnicity in cultural terms, thus Shen Congwen’s participation in Miao identity becomes problematic.

As Abu-Lughod writes of mixed-race anthropologists, they “cannot easily avoid the issue of positionality. Standing on shifting ground makes it clear that every view is a view from somewhere and every act of speaking a speaking from somewhere” (Abu-Lughod, 2006, p. 155). The same holds true for our discussion of Shen Congwen. To justify applying this complication of an anthropologist’s positionality to Shen Congwen’s positionality as an author is not much of a stretch. Regardless of whether in his writings he examines West Hunan culture as an outsider Han or insider Miao, Shen is implicitly making anthropological statements in his short stories (although he certainly does not address ethnicity in a scientific or even pseudo-scientific manner). Abu-Lughod’s corrective, that the anthropologist should write “against culture” and favor “instead a narrative style about individuals’ lives that reveals their relation to particular cultural tropes but also make their humanity visible in tactical ways that defy reading of them as
inalienably other” (as summarized by Schein, 2000, p. 13) quite nicely captures what Shen’s works often accomplish.

Shen’s depictions of Miao certainly do not position them as “inalienably other.” His characters are often all too human, and function harmoniously within mixed society. And yet, as we have seen above, Shen’s eroticized and feminized depictions of the Miao appear at first to locate him as a Han intellectual presenting images palatable to the Chinese internal orientalist. Does this function in direct opposition to his alleged role as spokesperson to the Miao, or can the two be true simultaneously?

When Schein touches on Shen Congwen, briefly, in her overview of internal orientalism, she seems to pull for the former. She notes that though his work celebrates West Hunan, his simple act of writing distances him from non-Han people and renders their customs, sexual and otherwise, into a form consumable by urbanites (p. 113). While this is true in part, Schein also denies Shen the chance to claim any portion of his Miao heritage, ignoring her very argument of the plurality of the image-makers creating dominant representations, be they Han or Miao, men or women.

Schein states that by late twentieth-century China, she found “five types of agents engaged in the manufacture of portraits of the self-in-negation: the Chinese state, Han urbanites, urban minority intellectuals, rural minority elites, and local villagers” (Schein, 2000, p. 105). It is surprising Schein makes no mention of non-minority rural elites, the category Shen would be most likely to fit into for his young life and a group one images could also have defined self-in-negation. Also, the state of course did not exist in the same sense in the 1920s and 1930s as after the 1949 revolution (although this does not mean his representations were never in line with their state-sponsored counterparts, as I
discuss below). These aside, Shen might be identified with the second, third, and to some extent fourth of these “agents” at different points in his life. (Shen’s family might be classed as rural elites, particularly before the family was forced to sell their estate. Perhaps his parents could have been considered more ‘rural minority elites’ than Shen, but they also lived as Han.) How well he fits into any of these categories depends much on the interpretation of ethnicity. It is also worth noting that Shen quite possibly placed himself within these groups differently from his readers or contemporaries.

If we identify Shen Congwen at the time he was writing, it is easy and at least partially correct to class him as a Han urbanite. He was living in urban environments, and as mentioned above, not only was he racially part Han, but had been raised culturally Han. The highly eroticized, feminized, young and natural portrayals of minorities examined above seem to originate from this Han position. As for his urbanity: it is possible that lifelong urbanites saw him, if not as ethnically different, at least as more of a country boy; Kinkley suggests that Shen also viewed himself as an uprooted country boy (Kinkley, 1978, p. 100; 133; 194).

But what if we identify Shen as an ‘urban minority intellectual?’ How did this demographic interact with and contribute to minority representations? Says Schein of Miao men in the 1980s:

[They] figured as key producers and consumers of “their” women as “ethnic” . . . Miao male elites not only facilitated Han consumption of their culture, but they also engaged in a kind of ritualized objectification in

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5 Schein’s use of quotations here is slightly confusing, seeming to suggest either that, in her eyes, such Miao men no longer able to lay claim to their Miao ethnicity, that these men somehow try claim ownership for the women, or that they are incapable of recognizing their own ethnic heritage; the second set suggests she believes staged ethnicity to be false ethnicity.
which they themselves partook in staging their own “traditions.” (Schein, 2000, pp. 159-60)

And specifically of those who had relocated to the cities for work:

[They] had begun to cultivate a romantic nostalgia for their forgotten culture. Miao men who partook of the native woman [through staged events] were not renouncing their cultural identity but recasting it as a form of subjectivity that remembered tradition fondly, took pleasure in gazing on it, but did not engage in it directly.” (Schein, 2000, p. 160)

This very neatly sums up much of what is captured in Shen Congwen’s writing. He is certainly facilitating Han consumption of Miao culture by writing of it, even if his readership (especially when he first began writing) was only a small percentage of the general Chinese population. He also partakes in consumption of Miao culture through the process of recasting it in fiction. And fiction writing is a rather solitary profession, known for recasting culture while not engaging in it directly. Furthermore, the conflict in Shen’s portrayals of the Miao discussed above, that is, the nearly mundane or missing identifications of ethnicity in opposition to explicit identification through highly eroticized females, could quite conveniently be explained away if these eroticized depictions were mere “ritualized objectifications,” though this seems overly simplistic.

What happens at “sites of productions of difference” if Shen Congwen is functioning as both a Han urbanite as well an urban minority intellectual simultaneously? Schein labels these “sites” as the moments when image-makers encounter their objects face-to-face. “At the moments of encounter, a more multivocal, less binarized picture emerged in which those whose images were being produced also acted to shape the process—whether by resisting, complying, or taking up their own image making practices” (Schein, 2000, p. 105). If we allow Shen to claim in part his Miao ethnicity, then we could say that the constant encounter within himself of both the image-
producing Han and objectified Miao drove him to “take up [his] own image making practices.” It is no secret that internal conflict often drives artistic creation, and here we see large cultural conflicts manifested within a single author. As discussed, his works certainly portray a “more multivocal, less binarized picture” of the Miao than was the precedent, which perhaps can also solve the riddle of the conflicting duality of highly eroticized minority depictions as well as missing ethnic identifications existing simultaneously in his work.

**Some Political Speculations**

As Schein notes, portrayals of the Miao have for the most part been political (Schein, 2000, p. 36). Shen Congwen functions without this norm, or perhaps rather through shifting portrayals advocates for the Miao simply as a part of the West Hunan polity. Famously apolitical while he was writing (although such renunciation of political affiliations is itself a political statement), he joined the Chinese Communist Party after the revolution, subsequently confessing to his various crimes against the state before being “reeducated” (Kinkley, 1978). (Kinkley also claims in the preface to *Imperfect Paradise* that Shen’s first reaction to the communist takeover was to attempt suicide [Kinkley, 1995, p. 3].) Although he had many friends closely involved with the Communist Party following its founding (most infamously Ding Ling and her lover Hu Yuping), Shen professed that political affiliation interfered with the most important aspect of writing: pure creative drive. As Kinkley writes, “his was a message of moderation, of deliberate disengagement from any group or writers’ association, left, right, or even center, that might divert authors from their own creative visions” (p. 194).
And yet at least part of Shen’s creative vision is tied inexorably to a region. Although Shen was an incredibly prolific and experimental writer, drawing influence even from such writers as Joyce, his main legacy seems to be his portrayal of West Hunan. (Though of course one must also consider the readers’ importance in selecting and defining a writer’s legacy.) If Shen is not writing from a communist, nationalist, or even traditionalist or moderate political stance, could it be that Shen was advocating for West Hunan as a political and cultural entity?

As discussed above, Shen may be partially credited with the “idea” of West Hunan as a region. And yet his depictions, though humanistic and progressive, may not have created the impact he wanted, given the political climate that followed the creation of the People’s Republic of China. Shen’s progressive depiction of country folk as complex, thinking, and feeling people perhaps stymied West Hunan’s political advancement. As Kinkley notes, “his social classes [were] not the same as Lenin’s and Mao’s” (Kinkley, 1978, p. 148).

Mao Zedong was similarly given to restating peasant liabilities as virtues, but instead of seeing country people as leading dignified and stable lives on their own terms, he praised them for quite the opposite characteristic: a revolutionary malleability predicated on precisely the view Shen Congwen wanted to contradict, that country folk were not necessarily ‘poor and blank.’ (Kinkley, 1978, p. 160)

An illuminating parallel might be the ironic example of the sexuality of minority women versus the May Fourth thinkers’ “new woman.” As noted by Schein, “the image of sexual promiscuity and fluidity of gender roles commonly used to characterize minorities was misrecognized as a mark of backwardness in a metropolitan Chinese framework, which, despite being overtly progressivist, continued, despite itself, to assess “civilization” in terms of the fixity of Confucian gender/status hierarchies” (Schein, 2000, p. 128).
Similarly, by stressing West Hunan as traditional, even in a non-Confucian manner and as an attempt to highlight the vices of modernity, Shen was perhaps playing into what would become the state’s early progress narrative—the “teleology that consigned their people to the backwater,” as Schein describes identity politics implicating Miao women as native conservators (Schein, 2000, p. 161).

Shen Congwen’s portrayal of minority women in the highly eroticized fashion seen above also perhaps played into the formation of the state-sponsored norms of minority identity. As Gladney notes, “of the fifty-six nationalities introduced in the state-sponsored English-language pictorial Chinese Nationalities (1989), only three nationalities are represented in the first picture as males. All fifty-three others are represented as females, by a beautiful, alluring young woman, in a colorful ‘native’ costume” (p. 97). Though Shen does explicitly label male characters as Miao, such as “Ah Jin’s” eponymous protagonist, these are perhaps not the narratives looked for depictions of the Miao to or remembered by Han orientalists.

**Conclusion**

**Shen Congwen: A Writer of the 1930s or 1980s?**

Shen Congwen’s relationship to minority ethnicity in both his fiction and his own life is complex. Although by his omitted and male portrayals of ethnicity Shen transcends easy labeling as a Han internal orientalist as described by Louisa Schein, it remains that at times he also presents Miao women through the highly sexualized and naturalized images of internal orientalism of the 1980s. Beyond the tie of internal orientalism bonding Shen’s works to the 1980s, he is also credited with inspiring or being
associated with the *xungen* (search for roots) and *xiangtu* (native soil) literary movements that came to prominence in the 1980s. Furthermore, his works are rather unique amongst May Fourth writers in their apolitical nature and lack of proscriptive social mores. With the rediscovery, revival and celebration of his works in the 1980s, one might ask: Where does Shen Congwen belong in the history of modern Chinese literature? As a 1930s May Fourth writer, or a 1980s native soil writer?

David Wang writes:

Native soil writers may claim that they derive the local color of their works from objects and moments they are or were most familiar with, but in rendering these objects and moments, they are engaged in a task of *defamiliarization*, a task that allows them to assume an outsider's viewpoint and see things on a contrastive basis. (Wang, 1993, p. 110)

Thus described, the task of a native soil writer seems quite similar to Schein's characterization of Shen as a minority writer, that is, by writing of the Miao, he simultaneously distanced himself from them. However, as discussed above, this reading is overly simplistic. Schein herself demonstrates that through the commodification of culture, drawing the line between culture production for oneself and for a consumer becomes nearly impossible. Although minority culture in the 1930s had not been commodified to the extent it was in the 1980s, there is clear evidence that Chinese intellectuals in the early twentieth century were interested in exploring minority and folk culture as a method to revitalize China. Shen is restating culture in works of fiction, yet he was simultaneously partaking in that culture. How does this then relate to Shen as a native soil writer? Though he certainly wrote of his native land and of the strengths of a native China unaided by Westernization and modernization, it seems incorrect to describe Shen’s process as “defamiliarization.” This is in part due to the highly imaginative
aspect of Shen’s West Hunan; as cited above, Shen partially created the notion of West Hunan as a cultural entity. Thus his writing of West Hunan seems to be more an act of hyper-familiarization, rather than the defamiliarization cited by Wang as seen in later native soil writers.

Nonetheless, Shen Congwen was “reenvisioned” in the 1980s as a great nativist writer (Kinkley, 2003, p. 425). To draw associations between writers, we rely on several assumptions on the psychologies of those authors, tracking clues within texts such as sentence patterns, local color, an “elegiac mood,” or even the “spirit” of a work (Kinkley, 1993), thus it become a nearly impossible task to place a writer out of context into any one literary group. Furthermore, as a writer whose “legacy was free from all entanglements with orthodoxy—except insofar as it had become a social force unto itself, a ‘cause’ for the Hunanese” (Kinkley, 1993, p. 104), Shen can be easily taken up as influential to many spheres. And as Kinkley warns, the hiatus between May Fourth literature and literature of the 1980s was so complete that we can “be startled to see any continuities . . . [and are] hence prone to exaggerate them” (Kinkley, 1993, p. 72). This is not to argue that there are no similarities between Shen’s works and nativist writers of the 1980s, or that his works did not influence later writers (the Chinese Writers Association even took to sending young writers to West Hunan for inspiration in 1985 [Kinkley, 1993, p. 98]), but to argue that rather than remove Shen Congwen from his setting as a May Fourth writer and transplant him to the native soil movement of the 1980s, he should be allowed to flourish in his setting of the 1930s, where his writings managed to be unique while in keeping with contemporary emerging interests in minority and folk culture. The 1930s and 1980s were both moments of national soul-searching in Chinese
history, where opening doors to the West became hugely influential (even if this meant turning to a native solution), and both time periods saw increased interest in minorities and folk. As Sandra Eminov writes, “As in so many other countries, nationalism and the Chinese Folklore Movement very nearly coincided; the rise of nationalism encouraged interest in folklore and "the people" in general. Folklore was never, however, a field of purely scholarly interest, as it was closely tied to the political and intellectual struggles of early twentieth-century China. When the tremendous insecurities and uncertainties of the period were overcome, the study of folklore no longer appeared to be vitally important” (Eminov, 1975, p. 268). Perhaps as current Chinese nationalism changes and insecurities are again laid to rest, Shen Congwen will fade out of the popular literary tradition.

Whether through internal orientalist representations of beautiful Miao women or tales told by an adventurous young soldier whose ethnicity is unknown, Shen Congwen’s writings invite the reader to explore a West Hunan quite different from age old perceptions of a violent and barbaric region (see in particular Appendix D, “The Plight of the Miao”). If one can ascribe a mission to Shen Congwen’s writing of West Hunan, perhaps it would be similar to Abu-Lughod’s for writing of the Bedouin: “My desire to ‘write against culture’ had emerged both from trying to do justice to the complexity of the lives of those I knew in this Bedouin community and from my strong sense of the ways that representations of people in other parts of the world, particularly parts of the world that are viewed with antipathy in the West, might reinforce—or undermine—such antipathy” (Abu-Lughod, 2008, p. xii). Although it is at first tempting to class Shen as an internal orientalist whose depictions of sexualized women attract Han readers, and thus account for the revived popularity of his works, this is overly simplistic. Shen writes
from a more complex mixed ethnic positionality, and his ability to engage readers in West Hunan across eras should be viewed as a testament to his captivating style and passion for representing a region.
Appendix A

Mei Jin, Baozi and The Goat

Introduction

“Mei Jin, Baozi and The Goat” is Shen Congwen’s most elegiac work of the pieces translated here, filled with beautiful pastoral imagery. Where in other works Shen describes the ills of the city to highlight the simple goodness of the countryside, here Shen lets the countryside speak for itself:

It had reached the time when all woodcutters should return home, when shepherds should send their sheep back to their pens. The day is spent. Those who pass it peacefully can turn a page of life’s book, and won’t necessarily question first what it is that’s recorded upon the next. This is the time when all people, from the mountaintops, from the riverbanks, from within the paddies, should return home and have a meal.

This story is also the most metafictional of the works translated here, blurring the line between fiction and reality. Shen employs a story within a story, told by a folksy narrator, who assures us this version of the story is the truth, factual and passed down by those who knew Baozi. He further places the reader in his story through references such as: “A wine-colored mist similar to tonight’s dusk scenery enveloped Wild Chrysanthemum Mountain.” Though the content is the most fantastical of the three short stories translated here, it is also presented as nearest to our reality. Through the many descriptions of the natural world and physical settings, Shen creates a complete and distinct naturalistic mood.

6 There is a reference to the inability of Shanghai intellectuals to image Mei Jin’s beauty, as well as mentions of Miao women slowly resembling Han women. However, the Shanghai reference was deleted from later works (though still occurs in some versions of the work, including the copy I translated from), and the Miao versus Han dichotomy is not presented in terms of city versus country, as it is in “Ah Jin.”
If you take someone who doesn’t know the sweet taste of the Ma pears from Ma Pear Market, then telling them how good the songs sung by the girls of the White-faced Miao sound is wasted words. There are some who hear the sound of rowing and find it beautiful. Some also hear the sounds of wind and rain and find them beautiful. There’s never a lack of idiots who find beautiful a child weeping in the middle of the night, or the delicate echoes of reeds in a soft wind whispering dream words. These sounds are poetry. But even more poetic than these, even more able to easily draw your mind into intoxication or dreaming, are the songs of the White Faced Miao women. When men listen to these songs, even spilling blood becomes a natural affair; this magic has been passed down through history and tradition. One familiar with Miao tales could tell you fifty winding stories of famous and handsome men falling to the beautiful songs of homely women. He could then tell you another fifty stories of handsome men driven to distraction by hearing the White Faced Miao women’s beautiful voices. If he’s one who tells these types of stories, but has left one story untold, then it can only be that he’s forgotten to spin out the tale of Mei Jin and Baozi. 

Mei Jin’s story is this: She was one of the most beautiful women of the White Faced Miao. At the same time, amongst the Phoenix people there was a man entirely

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7 Mei Jin means “charming gold,” while Baozi means “leopard”.

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virtuous and as handsome as a leopard. Through singing they became a couple, both sides exchanging their passion through song. The woman invited the man to go to a cave that night and meet with her. The man promised he would. This man’s name was Baozi.

Baozi promised to the woman that in the night he would go to the cave, and because it was the first time, he prepared to lead a small goat kid as a gift for her, to use the white kid in exchange for Mei Jin’s red virgin blood. Even if doing so was a disastrous evil, it seemed the gods would allow it. Who would have known that by nightfall, Baozi would forget this matter, while the waiting Mei Jin, without a man’s warmth, died of cold in the cave? In his home Baozi slept until daybreak, only then remembering. He left immediately, but the woman was already dead. Baozi right then and there used his own knife and killed himself by her side. There’s yet another version of Baozi’s death, that after that night he often heard Mei Jin’s song, but could never find the singer, and thus killed himself.

But this is all a rumor that people cobbled together. The real situation wasn’t like this at all. According to this passed down version, right before facing death Baozi used a little twig to write a poem in the sand at the mouth of the cave, conveying that Mei Jin might have blamed him for missing their meeting. When Mei Jin waited for Baozi but he didn’t come, she thought she had been deceived, and thereupon killed herself. However, it was because of that little goat that Baozi missed their date, and when he arrived Mei Jin was already dead. So he pulled from her breast the knife, plunged it into his own, and sunk to the floor of the cave. Thus for news of the goat after this event, or why Baozi, who was always very trustworthy, yet on the night of his meeting turned into an untrustworthy man—these questions you should put to the goat. It’s all because of that
one little sheep a joyous event turned into a tragedy. It’s no wonder that to this day the people of the White Faced Miao won’t eat goat meat.

But where would you go if you wanted to ask the goat? Every lover will give to his beloved a little white mountain goat, and to express his devotion and steadfast love, men always say their goat is of the same bloodline as the goat Baozi gave the young Mei Jin that year. In reality, even whether that goat was a buck or a doe, in the end no one can be sure.

Allow me to write out what I know. My story’s source is the great bandit Wu Rou, a descendant of those who inherited the goat lost at the time by Baozi and Mei Jin. Furthermore, his ancestor was Baozi’s boxing instructor, thus the story passed down is factual, and naturally dependable. What follows is that story.

There was a mountain. Mei Jin stood on the south side, Baozi stood on the north side, both singing from dawn until dusk. The mountain is that very same one still known today as Singing Mountain. At that time its name was Wild Chrysanthemum Mountain, as chrysanthemum flowers were abundant, and come fall the entire mountain would be covered in blanket of yellow. Today, yellow flowers still fill it as before; it’s only because of Mei Jin that the name was changed. Mei Jin, after singing all day, admitted her conquest and knew she should give herself to Baozi, and let him do with her as he pleased. She sang:

Red leaves pass over a ridge, it is in surrendering to the autumn wind,
The only one who can make me a woman is you.
When Baozi heard this sung he leapt with joy. He knew then he was victorious. He understood that this woman, the most beautiful and distinguished of the White Faced people, had decided to surrender everything to him, and answered quickly:

Best woman of every and all of the White Faced people,
Please go to Huang Village’s Cave of Precious Stones.
When it reaches time that all great stars gaze upon one another,
Then I will look upon you, and you will look also upon me.

Mei Jin again sang:

My wind, I’ll do whatever you suggest
My only wish is that your heart is as honest as bright sunlight,
My only desire is to melt into your sun-like heat.
Let no one laugh that the Phoenix people’s beautiful men are faithless,
And never forget what you want me to do!

Baozi sang again:

Be at ease, peerless goddess of my heart,
You will bear witness with your own eyes to Baozi’s beauty.
All people will attest to Baozi’s honesty.
Even if when time to meet the sky lets fall knives of rain,
Nothing will keep me from coming to your side, and your kiss.

Night slowly fell. A wine-colored mist similar to tonight’s dusk scenery enveloped Wild Chrysanthemum Mountain. In the sky lingered a few red flowerlike clouds, sending the sun back beneath the horizon as he said farewell. It had reached the time when all woodcutters should return home, when shepherds should send their sheep back to their pens. The day is spent. Those who pass it peacefully can turn a page of life’s book, and won’t necessarily question first what it is that’s recorded upon the next. This is the time when all people, from the mountaintops, from the riverbanks, from within the paddies, should return home and have a meal.

Baozi gave a final whistle, and bid Mei Jin farewell. He hurried home, and prepared to search after dinner for a newborn goat kid to bring to his meeting with her in the Cave of Precious Stones. Mei Jin also returned home.

Upon reaching her house, Mei Jin ate dinner. She drew off her underclothes and wiped her body with perfumed oil, powdered her face, and, facing a bronze mirror, wound her hair into a long coil, then twined about it a lengthy sixteen-foot crepe headscarf. When all was accomplished, she grabbed a gourd filled with wine, an embroidered pouch filled with money, as well as a small and sharp knife, then headed for the Cave of Precious Stones.

The Cave of Precious Stones of those days was not at all different from today’s. The inside was dry and covered by a fine white sand, and there was a bed and bench cleverly fashioned out of stone. There was a place for a cooking fire, and nature had
chiseled out a skylight through which one could stargaze. The only difference is the cave that year provided a place Mei Jin and Baozi could make their bridal chamber, whereas today it has become just a shrine. That era has passed. Good traditions are like pretty women—all must gradually wither. It was a good place, a haven prepared completely by nature for young people; a place where you had no fear of either catching cold or sunstroke. Now it has been consecrated as holy, and although the patron deities are none other than those two who died for love, if Mei Jin and Baozi were alive, they both would think the place shouldn’t have been changed. Since this haven is one where two lovers died, to commemorate the pair some manual improvements were added and it’s been fixed up nicely. But other than being particularly convenient for teenage boys and girls to meet and sing sweet nothings at one another in, the place really has no more suitable use. I’ve already said: the place’s best custom has already perished. The passion of Miao people is diminishing, and their women slowly resemble Chinese women. They’ve taken their love and now invest it in the falsity of material wealth. It’s obvious love’s status has already fallen low. Beautiful voices and beautiful bodies have similarly become meaningless objects in the face of prevailing materialism. In having this good place provide so much convenience for young people, I fear for Mei Jin and Baozi, who can’t stand to see these pretended passions and romances. It would be better to still treat it as a holy place, to save it from the stain of modern love!

But now let us address Mei Jin’s arrival at the cave.

She had come early, and was waiting for Baozi. Once within the cave, she immediately sat down upon the large bed formed from the limestone. It was the bed on which she was to be made a bride—a stone bed, strewn with dry grass stalks and a grass
pillow, with the vaulted ceiling of the cave hanging about it like a canopy. It seemed as fit for use as many other beds. She hung the wine-filled gourd from a nail on the cave wall, placed the embroidered pouch beside the pillow (these being the two things she had prepared for Baozi), and in the darkness waited for her young and magnificent lover. The mouth of the cave was lit faintly from without, and she sat looking toward it, anticipating the great black shadow that would appear.

She sang some songs softly, keeping herself amused. She used songs to praise her leopard’s bravery amongst mountains and her leopard’s beauty amongst men. She sang to describe her and Baozi’s emotions at that time. With her hand she investigated every place on her body, and then again with her nose did the same. Everywhere she touched was well rounded and as satiny as oil, and where she smelled there was a fragrant sweetness. She removed the long scarf from her head and loosened her coiled hair, allowing it to trail loosely on the floor, blacker still than the black night. Mei Lin had always been an incredibly beautiful woman of the White Faced people, and Baozi was the first among men to deserve performing such wild acts upon her body.

This woman... Her entire body had grown into roundness. Every line of her body was an arc, yet her figure as a whole remained a slender compliment. She had a tiny little mouth, a round face, and a long nose. A pointed chin. Still more, a pair of long eyebrows. Her appearance seemed as if her mother modeled her after the Lotus Goddess. There just should not be such model of perfect exquisiteness among mortals. Just imagine: After passing one or two hours, to then throw off all clothing and act as a man’s new bride—such a woman, at this type of place—blushing slightly, receiving all the passion and strength of an impetuous man—this is really quite moving!
Were there a literary man born into 20th century Shanghai, in 1928—good at prying up gossip among his friends, spreading rumors everywhere, with a gift for gab and much beloved, with intelligence to shock the world into submission—if you asked him to imagine what a beautiful woman Mei Jin was, he’d still find it a tough task. 8

Following Mei Jin, the grace and distinction of the White Face Miao women have been extinguished for a long time. This is something anyone would believe. The women you see today, although they’re nothing but the lowest of the low, they’re still enough to make countless men fall in love, to make influential Han men bow their heads low. Mei Jin’s good looks are something we can thus infer.

The word “love” has long since been tarnished by limitless filthy and hypocritical lust. It’s impossible to regain the purity of another era, and I’m unwilling to ornament our description of Mei Jin’s frame of mind with fashionable clichés. Other than to say her heart was pounding as she waited for that man to come and draw her close, she was not at all as an average talent would imagine, sighing or soliloquizing.

She simply hoped Baozi would come quickly. She knew full well her leopard was yearning to bite someone, and she was willing to be bitten, eaten up.

Well, what about that leopard amongst people then?

Baozi’s family didn’t have a goat, so he headed to the home of an old local magistrate to buy one. He had grabbed four strings of bronze coins to buy a little white doe, and when he entered the door of the magistrate’s house, immediately stated his desire.

8 Kinkley notes that this paragraph was removed from a later edition of the piece. However, it was included in the edition I translated from, published in 2007.
When the magistrate saw Baozi come asking for a goat, he understood what good thing had occurred, and asked Baozi, “Which family is this pretty youth getting ready to marry into tonight?”

Baozi replied, “Your eyes, uncle, can make out where Baozi’s new bride is.”

“But only the camellia flower goddess is fit to accompany Baozi in his room. Only an enchantress from the Big Ghost Cavern is fit to requite Baozi’s love. But who in this world it could be, I still can’t discern.”

“Uncle, everyone says the Phoenix people’s Baozi has a majestic appearance, but compared with my new bride, I don’t deserve to be even a mat beneath her feet!”

“Son, don’t overdo your humility. When a man surrenders in front of a woman, it makes him look as though he’s utterly worthless.”

“Uncle, that’s just what I’m saying! There’s nothing I can say for myself when I’m in front of her. I beg your pardon, Uncle, but on this night I will go to be a man. As for my love for her, what’s in my heart, how can I express it? I came here to see if Uncle could spare a goat kid, to take and present to that goddess who is giving me her blood.”

The magistrate had lived long years, and was skilled in prophecy and reading fortunes in faces. When Baozi mentioned blood amidst such a happy topic, he gave a start. Looking as though in his heart he had understood some omen, he said, “Son, there’s something not right in your manner.”

“Oh Uncle! Naturally things are different for me tonight than they were in times past.”

“Bring your face beneath the lamp and let me have a look at it.”
Baozi did as the old man commanded, and turned his face toward the large vegetable oil lamp. After having looked at it, the magistrate nodded his head, but wouldn’t speak.

Baozi said, “Far-seeing Uncle, can you tell me what kind of luck of this event has?”

“Son, knowledge is a just a diversion for the elderly, and is of little use for you youngsters. If you want a goat, go out to the corral and choose one. Take whichever one strikes your fancy and go. Don’t give me money. Don’t thank me. I’m willing to wait until tomorrow when I see you and your new wife’s . . .”

The magistrate went silent, and presently led Baozi behind the house to the goat corral. Baozi searched amongst the herd for a kid he liked, while the magistrate held aloft a lamp, casting light. In the corral were about fifty goats, half of which were kids, but despite searching everywhere, there wasn’t a one that matched Baozi’s ideal. Those with a pure white coat were too big, while the smaller ones were all filthy. It’s only natural that a larger goat isn’t suitable for this type of thing, while one without unsullied wool didn’t seem fitting to give to Mei Jin.

“Don’t think too hard, Son, just choose one,” the magistrate urged.

“I’m done choosing.”

“There isn’t a single suitable goat?”

“Uncle, I’m not willing to have a mottled goat be used in comparison with my new bride’s spotlessly white chastity.”

“Be that as it may, just choose any one of them and quickly go see your bride!”
“I can’t go empty handed,” Baozi replied, “but I also can’t use any of the goats Uncle has here. I have to go look at another place!”

“I wish you would loosen up some.”

“Thank you Uncle, but today is the first time Baozi’s ever won a woman’s confidence. It would be wrong of me to use an average goat just to fill the role.”

“But I advise you that without a goat, you’ll also be successful. To make your bride wait is not a good thing. After all, it’s definitely not the goat that she wants.”

“I can’t act according to Uncle’s advice, because I promised it to my new bride.”

Baozi thanked the magistrate, and went to another house in search of a goat. The magistrate saw him to the door, and gazed after Baozi’s figure as it turned, winked, and disappeared into the darkness. He heaved a sigh. Like everyone else, this seer had no alternative other than to close the door and wait for news.

Baozi went to five other houses, but all were without a suitable goat. If it wasn’t too big, then its coat wasn’t white enough. Good goats in this place were like good women: to satisfy Baozi’s ideal was a rare occurrence!

By the time he’d left the fifth shepherd’s house, stars had already filled the sky. It was the quiet time of night. He thought to himself, if the first time someone makes a promise to a woman, but doesn’t fulfill it, will they still be able to win women’s trust afterward? To go empty handed, to tell her that after searching high and low, the entire village was without a suitable goat—isn’t this obviously a lie? He thereupon was filled with determination. There was no option but to exhaustively search the entire village!

He went knocking at all the doors he knew, and when the door had been knocked open, inquired about a goat in a low soft voice. Baozi’s good looks had already made
him known to the entire village, so when they heard him say he wanted a goat, there was not a one who didn’t respond. Like the magistrate, with enthusiasm and patience they led him to the pasture to see the goats. This is the way of country folk. The unfortunate bit is that when all the goats had been looked over, there was not a single suitable kid.

As for Mei Jin waiting at the cave, feeling anxious—Baozi hadn’t forgotten about that. The promise about to come due, that he would come when the stars came out, was still parked in his ears. But he had also promised this woman he would carry a kid to her, and up to now he still hadn’t gotten one, so Baozi was so anxious that all he thought about was searching for this goat and he lost track of the time.

It seemed finding a pure white goat in his home village was impossible, but as he definitely wanted one, there was nothing to do but go to the next village over and inquire. It was three li away. He looked at the sky, and mistook the time as still early. For the sake of keeping his promise, Baozi resolved to run to the next village to buy a kid.

Baozi was intimately familiar with the path he now ran on, which led to the next village. He had already left his own village and was running furiously, but before reaching even half a li, he heard from the grass beside the path the sound of a little goat’s bleat. Incredibly low and feeble, when our man heard it he just knew it was the bleat of a kid. He stopped. Bending an ear to listen intently, he heard again the low bleat, and realized the goat had fallen into a deep pit beside the road. Alone for a day in a pit, having lost its mother and missing its home, it now called out and cried in the darkness.

Using the moonlight, Baozi pushed aside the wild grass and saw the mouth of the pit. When the kid heard the grass move it called out again, its weak little voice rising from within. Baozi was extremely joyful. He knew the weather had been sunny and
clear recently, and there wouldn’t be water in the pit, and so slipped himself down into it. The pit was only as deep as Baozi’s waist, the floor hard and dry, and once inside he quickly saw the goat. When the goat knew someone had come it began crying out even more piteously, but also didn’t approach Baozi’s side. The little kid was a newborn, not yet ten days old, and when it saw another shepherd it wasn’t afraid. But when the herd was being driven away it had fallen into the pit, and had fractured a foreleg.

Baozi saw that the kid had been injured. He gathered it up in his arms and climbed out of the pit, knowing that no matter what, this was the goat he would use, and then headed towards his meeting with Mei Jin at the Cave of Precious Stones. While on the road, the kid continued to cry out lowly. He realized what pain the kid must be in, and thought to himself that there was nothing to do but take it to the magistrate’s house. He would ask him to apply some medicine to the break before heading out again. So he again turned around.

Because of Baozi’s affair, the magistrate had been unable to get any peaceful sleep at all. When the knock came at his door, the thought it must be the arrival of some fateful news concerning Baozi. From behind the door he asked who it was.

“Uncle, it’s your nephew! I got a kid, but because the pitiful little thing was injured, fell and broke its foot, I brought to Uncle’s place in search of treatment.”

“Son, you still haven’t gone to your bride? The night is already half gone, quickly, take the goat and go! Don’t tarry another moment!”

“Uncle, I’ve determined that this little goat is precisely the one she’ll like. I still can’t see its coat clearly, but when I was carrying it, I was guessing that this is a pure white goat! Its tenderness is the same as my bride’s, its...”
The magistrate became very nervous when he heard the man had unexpectedly picked up an injured goat. When he heard Baozi begin to wax poetic, he threw back the bolt and opened the door with a bang. A beam of lamplight illuminated the goat’s body within Baozi’s embrace, and Baozi was finally able to make out the color of its coat.

Its body was as white as a snowfall of marble. Baozi excitedly hugged and kissed it.

“Son, what are you doing? Have you forgotten that you were meant to act as a husband tonight?”

“Uncle, I have absolutely not forgotten! My goat is a gift from heaven. Please, quickly put some medicine to its foot, so that I might carry it to my new bride.”

The magistrate only shook his head, and received the kid into his hands for inspection under the lamplight. When the kid saw the light, it stopped calling out, but closed its eyes and whistled a breath out through its nose.

Not long after, Baozi was already running up the road to the Cave of Precious Stones, the kid sleeping peacefully upon his breast. His heart was full of desire at the thought of seeing Mei Jin in the cave and relating to her the affair of the heaven-sent goat. He let his footsteps fall freely and didn’t stop for a moment, just continued up the mountain, scaling countless tall bluffs and crossing countless gullies until he reached the Cave of Precious Stones.

By the time he reached the cave, the eastern sky was already brightening. Stars still filled the sky, and their light fell on the cave’s entrance. Indoors looked deserted, and he didn’t see anyone.

He called lightly, “Mei Jin, Mei Jin, Mei Jin!”
He took another step forward, but from within the cave escaped a scent, entirely without echo. The very experienced Baozi knew at once what it was: the reek of blood. He was stunned. Struck slightly dumb, he cast the goat down and rushed into the cave.

After entering the cave, he went directly to beside the bed. After a short while, from a faint reflection of starlight he made out the shape of Mei Jin, tipped over on the bed. This was where the smell of blood was emanating from. Baozi threw himself towards her, feeling with his hand her forehead, her face, her mouth. Only her mouth and nose retained a little warmth.

“Mei Jin! Mei Jin!”

After having her name called twice, Mei Jin voiced a faint moan. “What were you doing...?”

The was the sound of escaping air, but it seemed to come not at all from her mouth or nose, but rather from her belly. After it, Mei Jin rolled over, wanting to sit up but unable to. Serenely she continued to speak. “Oh, but is it the person I sang to in the day?”

“It’s he, my love! In daytime he often sings melancholically, at night he often sleeps lonely. But tonight, tonight he was preparing to come here and act as a new wife’s... Why are you like this!”

“Why?”

“Yes, why! Who is it that’s hurt you?”

“It was that promise-breaking youth of the Phoenix people, he spoke lies. Beautiful and perfect people, they always should have some shortcomings, so God gave
him an instinct for lying. I’m not willing to be taken advantage of by a liar, and now I have come to an end.”

“IT’s not at all like that! You’re wrong! It’s entirely because this Phoenix man was unwilling to break a promise to a woman, so he searched all night until he unexpectedly found the promised goat. But getting the goat has lost him the woman. Heaven! Tell me, which side of the promise should I have kept!”

Mei Jin, facing death, heard these words and knew the reason Baozi was late was the goat. He hadn’t deliberately missed their meeting. When in despair she had sunk her knife within her breast, she had done wrong. She asked Baozi to help her up, and leaned her head upon his breast, letting his mouth come to rest on her forehead.

She said, “I’m going to die . . . Because I waited but you never came, when I saw the sky would soon be light, I thought I had been betrayed . . . so I placed my knife in my breast . . . You wanted my blood, and now I’ve given it to you. I don’t hate you . . . Pull out my knife for me, let me die . . . And you, use the brightness of day and flee this place, as you are wholly without crime.”

Baozi listened to her speak haltingly about her death and wept silently. He thought for a moment, then softly felt Mei Jin’s chest; felt her breast washed entirely with blood; and in between her breasts, a bloody knife handle. His heart froze, and he trembled.

She said, “Baozi, why won’t you do what I say? You said everything is for me, so now listen to my command, pull my knife out, save me from pain!”

Baozi still remained silent.
After a moment, the woman again spoke. “Baozi, I understand you, you don’t want to be sad. Let me look at the goat you brought.”

At this Baozi carefully lay Mei Jin down and went out of the cave to pick up the kid. The pitiful goat was half dead after being thoughtlessly tossed aside by Baozi, and lay on the ground panting.

Baozi looked to the sky. It was completely daylit. Far in the distance a cock crowed, and he heard the noise of a distant waterwheel. It was as though he was having a dream on an ordinary day.

He embraced the goat and took it inside to Mei Jin, then lay it down on her breast.

“Baozi, help me up, let me share a kiss with this goat that you brought.”

Baozi embraced her, sitting her up, and for her lifted her hand and placed it on the goat’s body.

“This pitiful goat was also hurt, take him away . . . Please, pull this knife from me, my love. Don’t cry . . . I know that you love me, and I don’t hold a grudge. Take the goat and flee to another place, that’s best . . . You fool, what are you doing?”

Baozi bared his own breast, and went and pulled out the knife. The knife had entered deep into her and with great effort could he pull it out. Once the knife was out, blood bubbled forth, and Baozi was bathed in it. Baozi took the blood-covered knife and struck it into his own breast. Mei Jin, just able to see, tucked her mouth into a smile and died.

Dawn broke, and after dawn broke, the magistrate led a search party to the Cave of Precious Stones. He saw the two lifeless forms, as well as the half-dead goat he himself had previously tended to. It seemed also that when facing death, Baozi had used
a twig to write a song in the sand. The magistrate thereupon committed the song to memory, picked up the goat and went home.

The White Faced Miao women of today no longer have this type of passion. They’re still able to forgive men, still often sacrifice themselves for men, and are still able to use their mouths to sing out songs that move the soul, but none can ever again be as Mei-lin was!
Appendix B

Ah Jin

Introduction

Shen Congwen’s short story “Ah Jin” follows the Miao man Ah Jin for an afternoon while he prepares to pay the bride price for a beautiful Miao widow. However, the meddlesome town Magistrate gets in his way, and eventually Ah Jin is unable to make the payment.

The story contains Shen’s typical comparisons of the countryside to the city. For example, “city people” spend money in frivolous ways, such as to “buy a wolfhound named “Napoleon” . . . buy a block print book from the Song dynasty. . . . [or] use freely on prostitutes and gambling,” while Ah Jin simply wants to buy a bride, and thus obtain “ineffable happiness.” For “Ah Jin [is] a Miao person, born and raised in a Miao village, and [doesn’t] understand these city people ways.” Thus the urban-versus-rural conflict also operates in terms of ethnicity, Han-versus-Miao.

Shen rarely presents cases of ethnic discord within West Hunan, by West Hunanese, thus more surprising is that the conflict between the Magistrate and Ah Jin can also be read in terms of ethnicity. Although the Magistrate’s ethnicity is never explicitly stated, it is implied he is Han:

The local people were known for their beauty, and more or less because they were beautiful, they attracted some resentment from other people. Han men who had no close connection to this woman whatsoever circulated rumors that only men would repeat. The Magistrate was a close friend to Ah Jin, therefore he naturally felt some responsibility towards him.
Thus it appears that the Magistrate is one of these rumor-circulating Han men. This seems to be confirmed when the Magistrate’s main reason for not wanting Ah Jin to marry the widow is because she resembles a “‘husband-beater’ straight out of a fortune telling book.” This can easily be read as the type of superstition that Miao women were subject to as a result of their relative sexual independence in comparison to Han women, as discussed above.

If this story is read as a conflict of ethnicity within the rural setting, perhaps the true crisis of the story, as much as the loss of the beautiful widow, is Ah Jin’s lost claim to his ethnicity. Gambling is clearly listed as a “city person” (and thus Han) activity, one that Ah Jin supposedly shouldn’t understand. As he succumbs to the vice of gambling, he then also succumbs to ethnic subjugation. Although the story doesn’t provide Ah Jin’s emotional response to his losing his money, the reader imagines he is devastated. Yet doubly devastating, perhaps, is the sense of encroachment upon what Shen has presented as Ah Jin’s ethnic innocence and purity.

Ah Jin

At Brown Ox fort’s 15th Market day, Yala Camp’s Magistrate was in a dog meat shop in the front of the market. Having eaten a catty of fatty dog meat, and drunk half a catty of corn liquor, he was offering some mild suggestions to his good friend, Ah Jin, a man preparing to marry a widow. This Magistrate’s ability to talk was much like his
ability to eat dog meat: he could eat all day and not be full. It also seemed that when his appetite was good, his words in turn were particularly abundant.

“Manager Ah Jin! I’m really just like a spring onion, have to get everything out there. Whether or not you listen is all on you. What I’m telling you is easy as two plus two, clear as day. I’ll lay the situation out in front of you, and if you don’t like it, you yourself can decide. You’re already grown up. You understand lots of things other people don’t understand—take using an abacus—when all is said and done, it makes people admire you. You’re bright, and not a drunkard. If you want to take a wife, this is your affair, and you don’t need other people playing general and making plans. But I’ll say, a woman’s temperament is hard to fathom. We’ve seen lots of men who can manage accounts, but can’t manage a wife; he’s got riches at home, but he can’t enjoy them; his feet get itchy, and before you know it he’s sneaking off with the female lead in some flower-drum opera. We also have to acknowledge that when many high-ranking men lead troops and officers, they have accomplishments and tactics, make their own decisions and are awe-inspiring—but once faced by a woman become a mess. Why is it the joke known everywhere of the high-ranking patrolling defense corps major, made by his wife to kneel on a wooden bench as punishment? Why is it people talk about our well-whipped county Magistrate and even act out skits about it? Why is it that in Yala Camp, honest Ah Jin will also one day drink a woman’s dirty foot-washing water? Since you’re not afraid of what people say, why should I worry about what people say?”

The Magistrate gave this advice to Ah Jin with the best of intentions, again and again applying old adages to the present situation, saying that some people just shouldn’t marry. He was like a little gong, clanging around in your ear.
By this time the man called Ah Jin looked a bit fed up of listening and stood up, looking purposefully for a chance when he could step out and slip away. But the Magistrate was sharp-eyed and quick of hand. He single-handedly fished Ah Jin back from across the table, and wouldn’t immediately let him go. Leaving was no longer an option. The Magistrate was strong, knew martial arts, and was more than a match for two Ah Jins.

“Brother, don’t be nervous! Finish listening to my good advice, you won’t be late. I’m not afraid of people saying I have a selfish heart, and hope that Yala Camp’s upstanding citizen Ah Jin will become my niece’s husband instead. Even if the hearsay comes from heaven, I still won’t be afraid. I’m not seeking wealth, I’m not looking for fame, just urging you to think about it for another day or two. Why are you in such a hurry? If you can’t finish listening to what I’m saying, if it’s just wind in your ears, in the left and out the right, then how in the future will you be able to grow old with that woman?”

Ah Jin, adopting a beseeching manner, said, “Older Brother, let go, I’m listening to you!”

The Magistrate laughed. He gazed at Ah Jin and smiled, as he himself knew that convincing by force wouldn’t truly convince. He laughed at Ah Jin for being fascinated by this woman to such an extent that without the slightest consideration thought only to introduce her into his home. It really seemed as though Ah Jin had eaten some magic potion. He also smiled at himself acting like an old friend, as he didn’t fully understand why today he was so particularly interested, why he must say everything he had to say. Seeing Ah Jin begging for mercy like this started to seem funny. It wasn’t just this
particular moment: from the start the magistrate had nothing but good intentions for Ah Jin, and didn’t harbor selfish motives.

Other than being chatty and loving a little idle gossip, the Magistrate was known as upstanding by people in Yala Camp. It was just chatting and liking to say a little this and that, but in many people’s eyes he still didn’t count as a bad person! If a magistrate didn’t like to talk, didn’t like to spend the day going here and there to sit for a meal and a drink, was like a mute, then what about him was a magistrate? The role of a county magistrate, according to what locals say, is just to take a sedan chair to the countryside; to take a sturdy body weighing 148 catties and give those three palanquin bearers the pressure to squeeze out a body’s worth of stinking sweat. A magistrate who didn’t like to talk would never have been able to become a magistrate!

After having seen Ah Jin seated again as before, the Magistrate drew Ah Jin’s right hand out, grabbed the knife from the table and started to slice—after he sliced, it went straight to his mouth. (He was slicing dog meat!) He chewed on the oily and fatty dog meat, and from inside his mouth came the noise of his chewing. He closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them, he expounded again on the pros and cons of Ah Jin’s marriage.

In short, he wanted Ah Jin to think about it for another day. Even if it was just for one day, an old friend’s advice deserved a little extra consideration! Since the Magistrate couldn’t say he didn’t approve of the matter, he later finally came up with a new plan.
Everything would wait until tomorrow to be said. It was as if today there was some extreme significance to everything. Come tomorrow it would be like the “revolution”; would make the whole world change; the whole world would be at peace.

Ah Jin had originally planned to finalize the marriage that evening. In his pouch was a bunch of bank notes, which he had prepared to use as a betrothal gift of engagement money. This man of the countryside now thirty-three years old, he had rubbed the bills and foreign coins in his hand until he was sick of them. Now he wanted to switch to rubbing a pretty new pattern. This couldn’t count as an inappropriate desire! But then he also couldn’t help it that the Magistrate would use his privilege as an old friend to urge him repeatedly, saying that what he wanted was just a matter of one day, just thinking for one day, that whether or not he would do it would still come from himself. To not yield would really seem like letting down this good person. In the end he had no choice but to agree.

In order to make the Magistrate believe him—and also because it seemed only by making the Magistrate believe him could he then escape—Manager Ah Jin raised his glass and drank his *baijiu*[^9], right then swearing an oath of guarantee. He said he wouldn’t go around to the matchmaker’s house today, but would absolutely return home and deliberate; absolutely consider the pros and cons. When he finished swearing, the Magistrate, having obtained an assurance for his interests, smiled even more contentedly, and let go of Ah Jin’s hand as though releasing a prisoner.

Ah Jin went into the marketplace and wandered about for some time. Today the Miao women were particularly abundant. All over were youthful appearances, young

[^9]: White Liquor, a Chinese distilled liquor with high alcohol content.
voices, the fragrances of youth. Thus it was even more impossible to be indifferent towards the young widow from the Baba fort. The young woman from Baba fort was bewitching and mysterious, more intoxicating than alcohol—it’s impossible to deny. Manager Ah Jin thought over the woman he hoped to bring home. She really was the woman amongst those at the fort with the strongest body and the whitest skin.

In most other places, if a person has put aside some time, then as a rule they can take care of a lot of business. Or they could spend five hundred in silver, and buy a wolfhound named “Napoleon”; or spend a thousand in silver, and buy a block print book from the Song dynasty. In one way or another, there’s always something money can be spent on that will feel appropriate and make one happy. Then there are the army officers who kill innumerable people, and make innumerable profits, which they use freely on prostitutes and gambling, spending it bam-bam-bam, easy come easy go, all very naturally. Ah Jin was a Miao person, born and raised in a Miao village, and didn’t understand these city people ways. He simply followed the hopes of a normal local boy, and wanted to take advantage of a good opportunity, save up his energy and money, and spend it on a wife. Only wealthy people could take pleasure in delicacies; this is common knowledge to any place in the world that uses money. This woman’s betrothal price was worth five oxen, and any man who could come up with this betrothal price was qualified to be her husband. Since Manager Ah Jin didn’t lack this sum of money, naturally he thought to take this sturdy but exquisitely pretty woman to his home, and make her his wife.

The woman hadn’t been widowed long, and though her husband’s family could, in accordance with the standard, turn her out on the streets, she would regain a parting
sum of money. The local people were known for their beauty, and more or less because they were beautiful, they attracted some resentment from other people. Han men who had no close connection to this woman whatsoever circulated rumors that only men would repeat. The Magistrate was a close friend to Ah Jin, therefore he naturally felt some responsibility towards him. When the Magistrate advised Ah Jin, it wasn’t because his own niece had her eye on Ah Jin, or because he himself had his eye on the widow. His purpose was just to obtain Manager Ah Jin’s understanding. It being the case that he was an understanding old friend, Ah Jin in all seriousness felt that he shouldn’t go to the matchmaker’s house that day.

Many people knew of Ah Jin’s intention to soon become the beautiful widow’s new husband. These people had gathered together in Brown Ox fort’s market today, and as soon as set eyes on Ah Jin would ask, “Manager Ah Jin, when can we start eating the wedding banquet?” And this honest country man, happy in his heart, would blurt out, “Soon! Within a month!” Ah Jin was obviously very happy when responding to them. According to local tradition, when one talked about eating and drinking, it also meant they would send congratulatory presents. The season had just entered the tenth month, the “little yang spring month.” The mountain peach blossoms had opened, and it was a lucky season for people everywhere who played the trumpet or were getting married.

Speaking of this woman, it seemed to Manager Ah Jin as if getting close to her white flesh or kissing her face would create in him some ineffable happiness and excitement. Although physically he roamed about the market, his heart was still set on

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10 An old colloquial way to refer to the month.
the matchmaker’s house, just as those at the matchmaker’s house were also waiting for Ah Jin to say the word and settle things.

Although he had sworn that little oath, had said he’d resolved to think about things for another day, in the end he couldn’t do it. His “post-station horse star” had already moved and he involuntarily walked off towards the matchmaker’s. As he was walking past a dog meat street vendor, he ran head on into the well-meaning magistrate, who stretched out a hand to block his way.

“Manager Ah Jin! This is your affair, and I really don’t need to meddle. But you promised me to think it over for a day!”

The Magistrate’s nature was sly, and he had been waiting at this place in advance. He had known Ah Jin would renege. Ah Jin took one look at that large nose, ruddy from drink, and without even listening much to what he was saying, turned around.

With nothing but good intention, the Magistrate had positioned himself at the door of the matchmaker’s and prepared to block Ah Jin. This was the depth of his concern. When Ah Jin understood the meaning of this concern, he had no choice but to turn about and go back.

After turning around, he again circled about the market, where he passed a place selling livestock and saw people busy doing business. Those who recognized Manager Ah Jin all came out and asked him if he was wanting to buy meat. He only wanted a person. He wanted to exchange the silver he had prepared, worth six bulls, for a plump-bodied, fair-skinned, twenty-two-year-old woman. Gazing at the people successfully making their transactions, he felt a little sad, and without knowing it, again started

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11 This refers to a superstition about having a specific star that leads one to rush off to toil at hard work.
walking towards the matchmaker’s house. When still a ways away, he heard the voice of 
the Magistrate talking with people, and knew that the meddlesome person was holding 
fast to his position like a dog guarding a door. For the second time he turned around.

The third time he had already quietly slipped past the Magistrate when someone 
latched onto him for a chat, and so in the end was again discovered by the Magistrate, 
and quickly turned around without outside prompting. Once again he was unable to enter 
the matchmaker’s house.

The fourth time he had just started to think about it when he was informed by an 
acquaintance that the Magistrate was still stationary at the dog meat vendor’s stand, 
chatting with people, talking about Ah Jin’s promise. Even more embarrassedly Ah Jin 
again went to take his chances.

The Magistrate’s good intentions truly were all for Manager Ah Jin. He 
absolutely wasn’t looking for Ah Jin to be indebted to him, and also wasn’t thinking to 
break up two lovebirds. In the end, the reason why he didn’t want Ah Jin to carry the 
pouch of money to the matchmaker’s wasn’t easy to understand. But all along he had his 
own reasons. Although the Magistrate by disposition was a bit prone to meddling in 
others’ affairs, it wasn’t so much—it was just that today he had drunk half a catty of 
“knock off your moustache” and ate a catty of “bark bark bark,” and felt especially 
concerned about Ah Jin’s marriage. What was the reason after all? It was because the 
woman was too beautiful, one of those fortune telling books’ “husband beaters” in 
hempen mourning clothes. From an old friend’s standpoint, he wasn’t willing to let Ah 
Jin destroy his property or his career, accumulated through years of hard work, over some 
woman like a “husband beater” straight out of a fortune telling book.
To avoid trouble, Ah Jin decided to wait until the Magistrate returned home for
dinnertime before going again to make his payment at the matchmaker’s house. Without
thinking about it, Ah Jin wandered to the front of a gambling den off the marketplace, to
people watch. For someone with something on his mind, it’s easy to gamble without
being careful. Ah Jin entered the gambling den, and, same as others, started small and
went up, gambling excitedly for a period of time. By the time he left, day had become
night in earnest. It looked that by now, no matter what, the Magistrate would have
returned home and be eating red-stewed pig’s feet. But Ah Jin’s pouch was empty! He
flipped it over to look, but its contents were exhausted, the money completely lost. It
seemed there was no longer any reason to return to the matchmaker’s house and discuss
escorting his new bride home. This simplified everything, and he didn’t have to worry
about any taboos.

A few days later the Magistrate, a Yala Camp citizen honest and friendly to
everyone, was walking down the street when he bumped into Ah Jin’s matchmaker. He
asked how Manager Ah Jin’s marriage had ended up. The matchmaker replied that
Manager Ah Jin hadn’t been able to come up with the money, and the woman had already
been taken away by a silk merchant from far away. Having seen with his own eyes the
large amount of cash in Ah Jin’s pouch, the Magistrate thought it definitely the case that
Ah Jin had listened to his advice—that he felt it wasn’t possible to make a new wife from
a beautiful widow. Thus he had abandoned the idea of marriage, pretended not to have
the money, and didn’t make another appointment. The Magistrate still thought he had
done a good deed for his friend, and immediately went to fetch a gourd bottle of alcohol to visit Manager Ah Jin within Ox village, to congratulate him on his resolve.


Appendix C

The Inn

Introduction

Shen Congwen’s “The Inn” depicts a day at an inn run by a Miao widow. The owner, named Black Cat, has eschewed the love of men since the death of her husband, but, “today, for no reason at all, Black Cat’s temperament change[s].” The building sexual tension between her and a customer and Black Cat’s eventual sexual awakening drive the piece, seemingly culminating in a brief relationship with one of her lodgers. However, on a closer reading, the true culmination of the piece seems to be the marriage between Black Cat and her hunchbacked assistant. Though this marriage is at first presented as though simply a convenience, there are clues that indicate a deeper and more satisfying union.

The piece begins with a simple statement: “It is only the one awake, who goes and looks at another sleeping, that feels there is something interesting there.” At first this appears to function simply as a method of drawing the reader into the story, as a description of the sleeping lodgers immediately follows. But it also can be applied to Black Cat’s slumbering sexuality—though she is fascinating to her sexually awake customers, truly “unforgettable,” she has “no interest in the affairs of men and women.” Her refusal of the men who court her only seems to increase their interest, until some feel compelled even to try to force a sexual awakening in her.

To strengthen the sense of awakening within the story, Black Cat’s sexual awakening is paired with physical awakening; of Black Cat, her hunchbacked assistant, the customers, roosters, dogs, even a distant grindstone—they all come to life with Black
Cat’s sexuality. How then does the piece remain interesting to the reader? For if only the one awake finds something interesting in one slumbering, what remains of interest in the piece after Black Cat has awoken sexually? A possible answer is the dormant romance between Black Cat and her assistant, which by the conclusion emerges as the relationship most important to the story. The narrator makes clear that Black Cat has no interest in typical relationships motivators such as physical attractiveness, political power, and wealth: “The appearances of the White Ear tribe men near her had lost their alluring power, and the Cotton Clothes tribe men’s singing voices also failed to capture her heart’s castle. She truly had no desire for the riches and honors of the local chieftains, and she felt the extravagances of crude opium sellers were just laughable.” This leaves the reader wondering just what it is that Black Cat is attracted to. The construction of the story subtly provides the answer, as the following sentence introduces the presence of her assistant, assuring the reader he is only there to do miscellaneous chores and act as a bodyguard. Yet for Black Cat, a bodyguard is necessary to guard against those who would take her sexuality; thus the assistant already assumes the role normally performed by the husband.

The interactions between Black Cat and her assistant seem like those of an old couple. They bicker, tease each other good naturedly, and quickly move on with no hard feelings. The assistant is aware of her sleeping sexuality, and feels she should pursue relationships. Whatever unusual quality of the day affecting Black Cat is also working on him: “It was probably the weather making him strange, but today he especially felt that the owner shouldn’t act as a proper, law-abiding widow.” Whether he thinks Black Cat should pursue a relationship with one of the paper merchants, or wants to act
on his own affection for her is left for the reader to interpret, though there seems to be supporting evidence for the latter. A similar moment left open to the reader’s interpretation is seen after the paper merchants depart: “Black Cat stood dumbly by the door for half the day, and sat by the stove for the other half, without a single word to say to the hunchback.” Why does Black Cat have nothing to say to the assistant? Has she forgotten him? Or does she feel embarrassed or guilty of betraying him?

Black Cat’s encounter with the paper merchant results in a “little black cat.” “People all said it was the hunchback’s child, and because of this dubious rumor, after the little black cat had entered the world he became Black Cat’s husband.” Despite this presentation of their marriage as a means to avoid rumors, it seems to be a truer union. That Black Cat marries him as a cover-up at all seems most “dubious.” She has been presented all along as independent in thought and action, not the type to conform to social pressures. Furthermore, if their marriage was simply a way to stop rumors, one might imagine little actual change between them. However, it seems to be a true and satisfying marriage. Earlier in the story, the paper merchant flirts: “Boss lady, you must have slept well last night! . . . If you had a boss with you, then it would be even better.” And by story’s conclusion, “Black Cat truly [can] respond to those words spoken by the large-nosed lodger: having a boss really [is] better.” Thus the story remains interesting to us not just through watching Black Cat slumber sexually, then to be awoken by the paper merchant, but also to watch her sleeping romance with the assistant blossom into a marriage.
The Inn

It is only the one awake, who goes and looks at another sleeping, that feels there is something interesting there. They had come from a distant place, eighty li, or perhaps the long distance of one hundred li, and they were exhausted down to their bones. Thus when they could they snatched some deep sleep, their mouths open like corpses, laying down on heated brick beds with dry straw spread out, snoring. There they dreamed—dreamt of nothing but quarreling, thirsting, burning mountain brush, gambling, and so on. During the day, they lived within a simple existence that had become custom: eating, drinking, traveling, and swearing. They felt all of this was enough, so that when it came time to sleep they simply stretched out their feet, lay down, and one minute later were already sleeping. These types of people are common everywhere.

Yet those who live in the city, or even those with talent, cannot grasp that these people live in the same world. People with PhDs are the type of top-notch men who understand things, and yet they also won’t know that these types of people exist. Russia’s Gorky, England’s George Bernard Shaw, and all of China’s great literary masters, as well as poets, professors; Changhong, who left the country; important persons preaching the Principle of Peoples’ Livelihood; especially those like Zhao Jingshen, familiar with the world’s literary scene; featured guest male writers in a female authors’ special journal issue—there is also not a one among these who know.¹² Revolutionary

¹² The Principle of People’s Livelihood was a political philosophy developed by Sun Yat-Sen to strengthen China. Zhao Jingshen 赵景深 was a May Fourth writer, educator, and literary historian who worked as the editor of Literary Weekly, a Shanghai journal which
writers seemingly should know, but the majority of them go looking to find love organized in revolutionary sentiments, and seem extremely ignorant.

Not only do the majority of Chinese people live in a situation of being forgotten by the average person, but they also live outside the writer’s imagination. The land is so broad that even war isn’t easy, and the rest have never discovered them—this should be naturally understandable. For this affair here, make China’s center Nanjing your starting point, face south and walk five thousand 7i, or even more—then you’ll reach to the region of a different tribe, the interior of what is called the Miao burrow. This here relates some situation that occurred there one day.

The sky would soon be light. At a small inn owned by a person named Black Cat, four men who had walked the long road were still sleeping on a large wooden bed, dreaming. They had come from past Zhenyuan, a paper producing place, and each visitor had come carrying a load of paper on his shoulders, preparing to go upstream where Qu Yuan had stopped his boat at Chenyang.13 They had walked almost halfway. In another ten days they would be able to sell their paper to a shop, and turn around. In doing this they were like wandering monks, and, for the sake of their children, they had been made to rush about for long years. After each trip they could rest for ten days, which added up to spending about three quarters of every year’s nights at different small inns. Custom

published many stories of May Fourth writer Lu Xun (whom Shen had an antagonistic relationship with). Later he became a professor at Fudan University.

13 Qu Yuan was a loyal minister to the state of Chu during the Warring States Period, who, in legend, was banished by the king of Chu when he fell under influence of corrupt ministers. After learning of the state of Chu’s demise, Qu Yuan committed ritual suicide by drowning.
had made them even more resistant to hardship than most businessmen, and inns and homes came to closely resemble one and the same place.

This inn was established at the foot of a mountain. This mountain must be crossed to pass from Hunan to Chenzhou, thus many of those who walked on the long road lodged there, preparing in one night to let their exhausted bodies recover, storing up strength to climb the tall mountain. Their host was a twenty seven year old woman, a Flower Footed Miao. Why this woman came to be called “Black Cat” by people is a hard history to trace. It’s probably because her skin was deeply dark, and because she was fond of teasing others. This name was also apparently one her husband had picked out. The husband, who picked out such a good name for his own wife, went unexpectedly to an early grave, but he left that name for all the transient customers to call out. That name given to customers to call out usually wasn’t really important, and since her husband had died, her body wasn’t as easily possessed by ordinary men as her name implies.

Being fond of white skin—this trait runs deeper in Han than among the Miao. As for knowing dark skin, a man from the White Ear tribe is more knowledgeable than any Chinese person. And since Black Cat’s husband died, she had continued the inn’s business, sold food and drink, and even entertained those lodging customers who came from distant places—yet one never heard of someone able to know what was inside Black Cat’s skin. Every single one of those wandering businessmen had eyes, and most of those eyes were able to look past business and see women’s faces, but when it came to Black Cat, it was always as if she really were a cat, with no interest in the affairs of men and women, and with no part in romance. The matter was anything but strange, as she wasn’t your average Flower Footed Miao woman. Her body didn’t lack the
accomplished loveliness and cleverness of the Black Matron women, and she had been endowed with much of the passion of the Flower Footed Miao. At the same time she had the self-respect and astuteness of a White Ear tribe woman, and when her husband died she let him go and chose to continue living as a widow.

In the three years she had passed living as a widow, she hadn’t seen a single man able to move her heart. The appearances of the White Ear tribe men near her had lost their alluring power, and the Cotton Clothes tribe men’s singing voices also failed to capture her heart’s castle. She truly had no desire for the riches and honors of the local chieftains, and she felt the extravagances of crude opium sellers were just laughable. For miscellaneous chores at the inn, and as a bodyguard, she hired a forty-something hunchbacked assistant. There were those who harbored improper thoughts towards her in their hearts, and though they weren’t able to obtain it, agreeing to stop coming was also impossible. Black Cat’s body was something that attracted business, to the extent that there truly were people who felt the dishes she prepared with her own hands tasted better.

Because it was this way, that Black Cat lived in this situation of being unforgettable, naturally fortune and hardship both came easily and she got all she deserved. Black Cat’s business saw success yet it was unavoidable that disasters to her body also came. Since using a singing voice, folk customs, and wealth were all unable to overcome Black Cat’s heart, there were some who thought to use force to make that final move. Luckily Black Cat was perceptive, and men still hadn’t had their way with her, though there were many instances of this. Thus it was until this most recent day, today.

As soon as the sky brightened, Black Cat would typically get up with the hunchback and heat water for the customers to wash their faces with, or heat a pot of
wine. She would have the customers put on their straw sandals beside the stove’s flame, then open the door and send them off. After sending the customers off, if the day was still young, (and if it was winter), she could still curl up in her cotton blanket and take a nap. If it was any day between March and September, then in early morning when every place was blanketed in fog, she would walk to the large roadside well and carry water, drawing until the jug was filled with clean water. Black Cat always dealt with carrying water herself.

Today Black Cat woke especially early. When she woke she hung up the burlap mosquito net, and pushed open the small bedside window. The stars filling the sky, the insect voices filling the courtyard, and the cold wind blowing in all told her that today’s weather certainly would be sunny and cloudless. It seemed the dew had wetted the insects’ voices, and the stars also appeared watery—the weather was just too beautiful. At this time, it is impossible to know just how many young women are softly singing, sending their lovers off across the bamboo forests. We can’t know how many young men hear the call of the rooster then, and take the women who playfully passed the night with them and send them back to their families. And we can’t know how many people at this parting time are shedding tears and making vows! Black Cat thought about these, until she almost thought herself strange. It shouldn’t be that she had no part in these things other people did! Other female inn owners all had the right to listen to some faithless man’s bedside pledges at times like this—but she was unable to do this. Other women all had the right to leave a mountain cave, have some man to take off their woven rush raincoats and drape it over their shoulders, sending them home—but she was unable to do this.
A woman over twenty, with a sturdy and sleek body, long arms, and a robust and feeling heart—is this not completely and intentionally designed for a man’s enjoyment come night? But the man who could enjoy her had been peacefully sleeping in the earth for four years, and had given up this right. The others then . . . They all were of no use.

Today Black Cat really was a little different from usual. Under the starlight, she thought about something that usually didn’t come to mind: the affairs between a man and a woman. She would have typically been thinking of the lodgers’ merits and faults from the perspective of disputing of their bill, but this time she recalled the guests from a different and not entirely clear perspective. These four customers would pass through about fifteen or sixteen times a year, and for several years had stayed with her. Because they were familiar with one another, she quite clearly understood all the affairs of their families. That all four of them had wives was something she knew early on. But if they so desired, they could leave the family aside and have some of that intimacy husbands and wives enjoy, without the formalities, without any real harm. The mountains were high and the rivers long, and people were separated for a month’s time. Because it was hard to be at one place, it could be even more interesting. At other times she had thought about these matters, but the problem was always that there still wasn’t one among the men she wanted. Among the four paper merchants there now wasn’t a one she could cry or make vows to. Even if she was willing to choose a bowl out of these four dishes, because these men were too familiar with their host, it was just too hard for them to have the self-confidence to bring up their wild ambitions to this famously proper woman.

But the strange thing was that today, for no reason at all, Black Cat’s temperament changed.
An improper desire was suddenly growing in her heart, and Black Cat began to ponder whom amongst the four lodgers she could be intimate with. What she wanted was a strong, satisfying, and sound persistent assault, and then a simple change, the calm after a storm. The good experiences given to her by that man, who was already peacefully sleeping in the ground, now made her remember the right she had lost, and gave birth to a rebellion against her normal reservation. She felt she should catch one of them, not caring who, and fulfill her own wish, undertaking some atrocious behavior on her person. As she was pondering this, she thought she heard the sounds of people coming up the mountain.

Again she gazed from her window onto the stars. The magnitude of the constellations was unknowable—the largest emitted a white light, and at the top of the mountain there appeared the silhouette of a temple, indicating that in any case it would soon be light.

She heard the voice of a rooster, heard the whimpering voice of a distant grindstone, even heard the voice of dogs. The dogs’ barking clearly said that some had already taken advantage of the early coolness and hit the road. At another time, she naturally would have gotten out of bed then, but today she thought that sometimes the dogs chased ruthless customers, that they harbored resentful natures; and she lazily closed the window again.

The hunchback was an extremely accurate clock. As he got older, he felt not raising at daylight was unacceptable, and he was now beside the kitchen stove lighting the fire. Black Cat could hear his voice. From her bed she called out angrily, “Hunchback, what are you doing this early?”
“It’s not early, I know. Today’s weather is good, and the Bodhisattva really blesses August this year!

As usual, after lighting the stove, he took it into the lodgers’ room to wake them up.

A customer asked the hunchback how the weather was.

“It’s great weather! This type of weather attracts the young women up to the mountaintops to sleep. That better even than weather for traveling!”

The hunchback’s words attracted laughs from three of the four lodgers. The fourth was in the process of yawning. This yawning person was completely engrossed in his yawn, so didn’t hear. As if meaning to let someone other than the four customers hear, the hunchback opened his mouth and said, “If there’s a change today, everything won’t be as good as it was before. Today’s people get up earlier and earlier to do things. For the past twenty years young people have many affairs, and they also get up earlier; but what they’re doing is crawling home from their lovers, or sending their women home. If they part, they’re all standing on the hillsides, where the fog is so thick they can’t see someone standing in front of them—but they still use their mouths to whistle and sing. Today has come, and there are very few women whose emotions are pure.”

The owner Black Cat was behind the room and heard what the hunchback had said. She shouted out, “Hunchback, heat the water, and say fewer stupid words in there!”

“Yeah, yeah,” the hunchback replied, still pulling a face at the lodgers, expressing that his words weren’t baseless, it was just that the hostess was a woman who wasn’t interested in such matters of the heart. He talked to himself as he walked, saying, “The world has changed, and women don’t sing and drink as they should when they’re young.
Then they end up being the owner of an inn. And as the owner, they also don’t . . . ” He
finished speaking because he had reached the stove, and the god of the kitchen was there.
It was probably the weather making him strange, but today he especially felt that that the
owner shouldn’t act as a proper, law-abiding widow.

Black Cat heard him sigh. She had risen, slipped on shoes, and gone into the
room beside the customers’. Her clothing still wasn’t buttoned properly, and her hair was
haphazardly coiled on her head like a disheveled falcon’s nest, reminding one of Mei Jin
on a wolf hair mattress in a mountain cave, waiting for her lover and before she had
killed herself. One of the customers, who had heard the hunchback’s uneven words, saw
Black Cat’s slender physique, saw her two bulging breasts, and a harmless little idea
raised its head. He said, “Boss lady, you must have slept well last night!”

She said, “Sure! I never have bad nights.”

“If you had a boss with you, then it would be even better.”

In normal times, if Black Cat had heard this, her expression would have
immediately become very grave. But today she cast a sidelong glance at that joking
customer and smiled. She summed up that this lodger had a pair of sturdy biceps. She
looked over his shoulders, his waist, and his thighs, and finally gazed upon that nose of
his. That nose was both long and large.

The lodgers had already arisen, and everyone had put on their clothes and
fastened their belts, and after tidying up had all gone to put on their straw sandals next to
the stove. The joking lodger was the last, and alone. After his three companions had
gone, Black Cat looked over at this large-nosed customer, and she truly must have had
indescribable subconscious thoughts, for her hand slipped inside her clothes to her own
bosom, and she swayed, thinking to speak a few words with this lodger. But although this lodger had joked with Black Cat, he never had thought that Black Cat would desire him. After his companions had left he had found Black Cat beside him, and he didn’t have a word to say. He slowly finished wrapping his legs, and left the room. At this time Black Cat should have arranged the comforters, but she only leaned over the bed and sniffed like one drunk.

Another customer came in from outside, looking for a parcel of leaf tobacco at the head of the bed. Black Cat quickly came over and grabbed a light for him. He found his tobacco, and didn’t notice any big change in Black Cat from her normal self, so left again.

Black Cat took the lamp out of the room with her and put it beside the stove, then went to go look at the water jar. There wasn’t enough water stored there, and she would have to fetch more, so she grabbed the carrying pole, and dragged the water buckets from under the table. She opened the inn’s door, but two or three wild dogs on the street came over, so she hastily shut the door again. “Hunchback,” she called, “how is it that there been more and more wild dogs recently?”

“It’s like this every year, come fall. I’ve said it for a long time, I should load up a crossbow with poison arrows, but I never find the time. I’ve heard people say that a wild dog pelt goes for three or four liang of silver apiece in Chenzhou, and if you can get a pair of fox-like dogs, then you can make a fortune.”

That large-nosed customer said, “Only three or four liang silver? I’ve seen with my own eyes people pay ten dollars for a single spotted-tail badger.”
“This can’t be true.” Another customer had doubts, because if this news was reliable, then their paper business should turn into a fox hunting business.

“Who’s lying? They sell otter for twenty liang silver, I’ve seen it with my own eyes, I would swear on it.”

“You’ve seen what with your own eyes? There are lots of things your own eyes pass right over. If you have eyes, then earlier—” These words were spoken by Black Cat. After saying them she laughed.

None of them knew the meaning of her words, or understood why she laughed.

But the large-nosed lodger seemed somewhat in the know. When it was convenient, and overlooked by the others, he fondled Black Cat’s waist. Black Cat didn’t make a sound, just used her eyes to look at his nose—it seemed like this nose was an object able to do strange things.

Although there were wild dogs, the wild dogs weren’t able to eat a large person. There was no use for fear, and after a while Black Cat opened the doors again to go and carry water. The large-nosed customer sucked on a pipe and followed her, planning to hit the dogs, or urinate—it had to be something. It seemed that this time when she carried water it was over a li away, and when Black Cat returned, she didn’t say a word, but sat and warmed herself beside the fire.

The hunchback saw the big-nosed customer return even later, and said he had thought the lodger had been eaten by dogs. Maybe a dog, maybe a cat. Every place had those dogs and cats able to eat a person. There are people who might be scared by dogs, but a cat, this was something you really couldn’t be scared by. If someone asked him about this, the big-nosed customer could have said a thing or two.
After she had washed her face, the owner for some reason or another ended up specially making a bowl of poached eggs for the customers, putting a little bit of honey in the center of it. After eating they gave her money, and as the day was already quite bright, the four lodgers put their carrying poles on their backs, turned, and left. Black Cat stood dumbly by the door for half the day, and sat by the stove for the other half, without a single word to say to the hunchback.

After about a month, the inn once again had the lodgers. But amongst the four selling paper she didn’t see the one with the big-nose, and upon asking discovered he had taken sick on the road, and died. After another eight months, the inn had another little black cat. People all said it was the hunchback’s child, and because of this dubious rumor, after the little black cat had entered the world he became Black Cat’s husband.

Afterwards Black Cat truly could respond to those words spoken by the large-nosed lodger: having a boss really was better. Those three paper sellers still came and went, staying at the inn. Once they came within the inn and saw how it was with the hunchback, they couldn’t understand the reason why he made Black Cat so happy, they just didn’t see what it could be. Who can understand these matters? For example, before there were four companions, yet they had also become three—this is something no one can understand clearly.
Appendix D

The Plight of the Miao People

Introduction

Shen Congwen uses his short persuasive essay “The Plight of the Miao People” to outline some of the basic problems that led to the region’s difficulties at the time of his writing. His focus on poor government due governing leaders’ lack of understanding is the strongest aspect of the piece. Shen writes, “Those in charge are woefully ignorant of West Hunan... West Hunan must give authority back to the West Hunanese, and the leaders must take delight in jointly shouldering responsibility with the outstanding citizens of West Hunan.” His calls for equality for the Miao in education, the economy, and human affairs, as well as ending discrimination are also inspiring, speaking as much to modern American race concerns as to mid-twentieth-century China. Though his final sentence may seem self-evident (“If the ruler does not consider himself a “conqueror,” and does not treat the Miao as the “conquered,” then the situation will become entirely different.”), it is a courageous move to acknowledge so openly this power dynamic.

The essay’s main failing is Shen’s totally absolving the Miao or West Hunanese of responsibility in contributing to the problems of the region. In sharp contrast to the ease with which he calls out governing leaders’ as responsible for the current difficulties, he seems unable to even refer to the Miao or West Hunanese without an attached accolade. They are “kind and decent,” “pitiable compatriots,” “extremely lovable, good,

14 Miaoomin wenti could also be translated as “The Miao Problem,” or “The Question of the Miao.”
and honest citizens.” His inability to present a realistic account of West Hunanese people causes the reader to question the credibility of his blame as well.

He also gives several mixed messages about the state of banditry in West Hunan: at first he writes that West Hunan doesn’t at all live up to its reputation as a bandit district, but then later concedes that it does have a slight problem with banditry—however, “They are not all West Hunanese, and they particularly are not kind and decent Miao, who love their native land and are unwilling to leave. The majority comes from the borderlands, people from Sichuan, Guizhou and Hubei, as well as a small number of West Hunanese.” He cites decades of civil war and unrest as the source of these vagrants. This may very well be true. In fact, the likelihood of this makes it even stranger then that he further denies West Hunanese or Miao agency in their current problems, as he has already provided a legitimate source of blame separate from the local people.

Perhaps most interesting is Shen’s general treatment of the Miao, or lack of. While the piece is titled “The Plight of the Miao People,” Shen spends the majority of the piece discussing the problems of West Hunan in its entirety. Though he addresses the ethnic tension within this “mixed Han and Miao district,” it is presented as between incoming Han government leaders and the Miao, never in the context of West Hunanese Han at odds with West Hunanese Miao. This notably missing mention of ethnicity is similarly seen in his fiction, and is somewhat a trademark of Shen’s; he sets up antagonistic relationships between West Hunan and the rest of China, rather than finding any fault within West Hunan itself. Whether this indicates Shen feels regional identity
for West Hunanese is stronger than ethnic identity, or that Shen finds the subject simply too sensitive or distasteful to mention is left up to the reader’s personal interpretation.

The Plight of the Miao People

West Hunan’s Miao people are concentrated within three counties: Yong Sui county, at the upper reaches of the Bai River and adjoining Baojing; Qiancheng county, at the upper reaches of the Dong River; and Fenghuang county at the upper reaches of the Mayang River and bordering Mayang. On a map, these three counties adjoin one another. If we’re to discuss the plight of the Miao, we should first trace the region through history for a time. Its course of development, changes, and *tuntian*¹⁵ policy problems are inseparable, as are the failures and successes of the previous governments’ policies toward it, and the myriad influences wrought by the civil war and the founding of the Republic of China. If their livelihood in the past or present was supported in some way, perhaps the future would be different. If they somehow obtained weapons, went from being good citizens to becoming bandits, and again went from being bandits to experiencing reform, we could then hope that they would become the current day’s most needed element in protecting the nation’s territory. This problem is the same as other West Hunan problems: though it keeps getting talked about, there is simply too much to say on the matter. But this text will not imitate these types of discussions. I’m afraid that

¹⁵ Policies adopted after the Han Dynasty in which soldiers or peasants were recruited to cultivate land within the garrisoned area.
when most people worry about this place, it is not about how the Miao will be reformed, but rather if these pitiable compatriots, forced to move to the borderlands, truly are such that if they come across fortune will immediately snatch it, if they see people will certainly kill them? Are they so barbaric they’re unable to listen to reason? In the future, will they still...? This string of questions is inevitable, precisely because at one time the locality did indeed have the types of problems described above.

Adding up these old debts truly pains people. We should know that, in former times, West Hunan was without exception regarded by others as barbaric. Although willing to become a vassal, in the end it has inevitably been regarded as beyond the pale of civilization. To be discriminated against is quite natural, for two reasons. One relates to government tactics: those responsible for ruling a province, in the error of habit and following precedent, assume that they must restrict this and promote that—only then will they be able to control this mixed Han and Miao district. The other is a lack of understanding: those in charge are woefully ignorant of West Hunan. Since they have never once examined all the aspects of its modern society, and have also never done historical analysis of the ethnicity’s characteristics, they rely on the impressions collected by a group of ignorant, false, and corrupt petty officials and functionaries who came to West Hunan, and then decided on the so-called administrative tactics. This lack of understanding results in policies having temporary and minor successes, and then the entire area nearly being ruined. This matter that we speak of now has already become past history. In the future then, West Hunan must give authority back to the West Hunanese, and the leaders must take delight in jointly shouldering responsibility with the outstanding citizens of West Hunan. Moreover, they must desire the help of outside
intellectuals, to take the place and improve it some. Only then will there be a turn for the better. As for the problem in its entirety, though there are myriad complications, we have no way to discuss them. As for the problem of the Miao: those who come to these thirteen counties to serve as officials, regardless of their being foreign or local, must abandon the millennia-old psychological attitude of occupying conquerors. There ought to be a basic principle, namely, that all are equal. Within education, the economy, and human affairs, we should strive for equality. Banish discrimination, banish prejudice, banish all severe harassment that occurs due to custom. Under certain possible situations, marriage between Miao and Hakka people should even be rewarded. If we are able to act this way, then West Hunan’s Miao people won’t become a problem. As for today’s stability, if there is one who is thinking of coming to West Hunan (other than the traitor to China, the trafficker of narcotics, and that one who still holds in his heart preposterous and vain schemes, the hoodlum who prepares to come to West Hunan to extort and exploit; these three will not be welcomed), the temporary war refugee, the honest business man who has come to make an investment, all the intellectuals and government functionaries who have been assigned to the backlines, as well as the homeless refugee women and children; if they are to come to West Hunan, all will certainly receive proper care and assistance. They won’t suffer unnecessary hardships. The West Hunanese are fond of friends, know to respect knowledge, and need people to come to develop the land, to conquer the land, and to organize the masses and educate the multitudes. All those who come to West Hunan, they need only to be willing to use a bit of time to first get to know West Hunan, to understand West Hunan, to regard West Hunan as a whole, and they’ll form a new opinion. It’s unlikely that their strong first impression will be of fear.
In general it’s the person that always misses the point completely who thinks West Hunan is a bandit district, and amongst those bandits considers the Miao the most numerous and the most cruel. Even if this isn’t intentional slander, it’s a misunderstanding. One hardly realizes that if a province’s leaders are the right people, if those in power have at least some intelligence and conscience, and don’t go so far as to harshly blackmail this type of ordinary citizen who lives in the mountains, then the majority of them really are still some of the most hardworking, thrifty, simple, able to produce and carry out their duties in accordance to the law, and extremely lovable, good and honest citizens among the Chinese people.

People from West Hunan fulfill their military service, but then are subject to corrupt officials’ harmful baajia\(^\text{16}\) system to the point that they have no other options left—and it is all too easy to go into the mountains and become a bandit, though it truly is not because they enjoy being bandits. If one was able to implement the enlightened politics of worthy men, the politics of honorable men, and politics of true experts, then governing West Hunan should be easier than governing any other place.

Admittedly, West Hunan does have another group of vagrants who consider banditry a profession, but the source of these members is complex. They are not all West Hunanese, and they particularly are not kind and decent Miao, who love their native land and are unwilling to leave. The majority comes from the borderlands, people from Sichuan, Guizhou and Hubei, as well as a small number of West Hunanese. This, you could say, is the result of several decades of civil war in China. These bandits house themselves on the borders of these four provinces, coming and going without a fixed

\(^{16}\) An old administrative system of governing based on households.
home. These bandits cause West Hunan to both come to ruin and further bear the status of a bandit district. To resolve this issue, we should start from the basics, and let West Hunan become China’s West Hunan, open for development, and open for education. If the ruler does not consider himself a “conqueror,” and does not treat the Miao as the “conquered,” then the situation will become entirely different.
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