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Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography, Vol. 77, No. 2 (1995), 93-107.

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SHEN CONGWEN'S LITERARY REGIONALISM AND THE GENDERED LANDSCAPE OF CHINESE MODERNITY

by
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Oakes, Timothy S. 1995: Shen Congwen's literary regionalism and the gendered landscape of Chinese modernity. *Geogr. Ann.* 77 B (2): 93–107.

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ABSTRACT. A significant theme which has emerged in cultural geography has been the relationship between literary representations of landscape and processes of socio-political and economic transformation. One especially important aspect of this theme has been the gendered dimensions of landscape representation. Rarely, however, have cultural geographers examined these issues beyond the context of Western societies. This paper explores the gendered representations of landscape in one of China's most well-known regionalist writers, Shen Congwen. By exploring both Shen's literary works in detail, and the political and cultural climate in which they were written, I argue that the contradictions of modernity in early 20th century China were metaphorically played out by Shen in representations of a gendered frontier landscape. This resulted in a landscape celebrated for its primitive vitality yet at the same time condemned to ruin as modern integration swept across China. While the obvious similarities between Shen's writing and that of Europeans such as Thomas Hardy tempt us to comment on the universal qualities of the experience of modernity, Shen's literary regionalism was in fact firmly anchored to a distinctly Chinese history and geography. For this reason, the themes articulated by Shen Congwen have remained especially important in understanding the complex relationships between modernization, nationalism, and gender in contemporary China.

Recently, feminist scholarship has been offering interpretations of the contradictions inherent in the discourse of modernity as being constituted in gendered terms.¹ These interpretations have revealed that the development of a modern bourgeois "universal subject" as unambiguously male produced a far-reaching discursive world in which women were represented (and objectified) simultaneously as superior beings and victims. The common metaphor employed in these representations was one which equated woman with tradition. During colonial independence movements, for example, tradition was often conceptualized as a highly precarious and contested realm to which indigenous resistance and identity could turn, and

at the same time, from which progressive nationalists sought to distance themselves in creating a new, modern national subject. As a result, the revolutionary subjectivities of women—as both keepers of indigenous national identity and symbols of iconoclastic and progressive change—were defined in contradictory terms.

This interpretation is highly relevant to the situation in China during the New Culture Movement of the early decades of the 20th century. The women of New Culture literature often lived a tension of contradictory subjectivities defined, on the one hand, by a modern, progressive West, and, on the other, by the spiritual vitality of China suffering foreign domination. One writer who symbolically played out this tension (that is, between the progress of change and the loss of identity) to perhaps its fullest extent was Shen Congwen. A committed modernist if not reluctant nationalist, Shen developed a literary regionalism in which modernity's contradictions were played out upon the bodies of frontier women. Shen Congwen's primitive frontier landscape of West Hunan was in part constructed by literary devices associated with European pastoralism, enabling him to transform the frontier from a landscape of Confucian anxiety to one of spiritual purity and rebirth.² In his regional literature, Shen constructed a pastoralist "modern primitive" landscape, a place celebrated for its vitality yet at the same time precarious, on the verge of ruin. Most significantly, West Hunan was represented as a beautiful woman upon whom Shen's audience could gaze before she was inevitably "taken." I use "modern primitive" here to define a literary style which drew on modern sensibilities of progress and constant change to construct an "other" non-modern world, an exotic and primitive counter-point to modernity, in which those modern sensibilities are revealed and evaluated. Shen Congwen's appropriation of modern bourgeois fiction's gendered metaphors reproduced an "archetypal" modernist aesthetic, the aesthetic of loss in the face of pro-

gress, of “creative destruction.” The women of Shen’s landscape were both the most pure and the most vulnerable to change. Only through a sense of loss could their value as liberators from both the West and Confucian China be appreciated by treaty-port audiences eager to escape from China’s political predicament.

But it would be wrong to assume that this “sense of loss” involved the simple trafficking of an idea between industrializing Europe and China. The discourse of modernity was not a free-floating universal, but was reproduced in geographically and historically specific contexts. Pastoralist ideas representing a complex of specifically Northern European experiences needed to be reworked in the Chinese context in order to be meaningful. The power of Shen Congwen’s modern primitive was, therefore, more firmly anchored by a distinctly Chinese discursive precedent: frontier anxiety. The modern primitive gained power in China only by articulating and subverting the popular discourse of the frontier as a landscape of fear and discrimination. This, perhaps, explains some of Shen Congwen’s popularity. Unlike the acidic despair of Lu Xun, Shen’s literature implicitly offered a place of emancipatory subjectivity; it was wholly new yet ancient, the antithesis of the West yet non-Confucian, distinctly “Chinese” yet individualistic. The frontier was, and still is, the place to which China would turn in finding its true self in the modern world.

1. Constructing and eulogizing the primitive landscape

When the whole river was swallowed up by darkness, fires appeared on the rafts, lights in the windows of the stilt-houses, and torches flickered as men made their way up the rocky cliff or down again to their boats. Voices could be heard ashore and in the boats; women sang by the dim lamps in the stilt-houses, and after each song laughter and shouts rang out. Under one stilt-house a lamb was bleating persistently yet softly... I reckoned that there were eleven days till New Year. “Does the little creature know that it has no more than ten days left on earth?” Whether it knew or not, it had been brought here for New Year and would die here. Its soft, persistent bleating would always sound in my ears. My heart ached. The insight into the world which this small episode seemed to give me really melted my heart.³

Random Sketches from a trip through Hunan (Xiangxing Sanji, 1934), the collection of essays in which this passage is found, chronicled Shen Congwen’s first return visit to his native region in over ten years. According to Jeffrey Kinkley, *Random Sketches* marked a turning point in Shen’s regional writing; the remembered West Hunan of his urban-induced nostalgia was introduced to a much harsher and tragic reality.⁴ Much had happened during Shen’s hiatus. West Hunan’s long standing warlord, Chen Quzhen, was quickly losing his control over the region as it fragmented under the pressures of nationalist military integration, communist insurgency, and the social and economic restructuring associated with modernization. West Hunan was increasingly accessible as roads were being extended into the region, and the opium trade had intensified, resulting in increased addiction and profiteering. Toayuan, the legendary utopia of Tao Qian’s classic “Peach Blossom Spring” (*Taohuayuan*) had capitalized on its mythic allusions and its new accessibility by creating “a giant flesh trade.” Shen’s old friends were either ravaged by opium, corrupted by profiteering, or dead.⁵

Kinkley is surely right to argue that Shen Congwen’s post-1934 regional literature became more “engaged” in the tragic history that was unfolding in West Hunan. Shen’s earlier stories of his native place celebrated a frontier region of “authorities scrupulous in the performance of their duties, protecting the land and concerning themselves only with local affairs.”⁶ This was a place where the most noteworthy incidents were the capsizing of a river junk or the death of an ox. Before 1934, West Hunan was primarily a set of Shen’s memories: “a girl he once fancied, a fellow soldier in love, border ferries traversing crystal-clear streams, soft rains, riverside prostitutes cursing their steady boyfriends, country folk bravely battling floods, haunting bugle calls, mountain songs, and melodies from an old man’s flute.”⁷ In contrast, *Random Sketches* captured a place on the brink of catastrophic change. As Shen Congwen traveled through his native region, “he arrived in each isolated Yuan River port with a sense of its impending doom.”⁸ Indeed, as David Wang points out, Shen’s subtle allusions to Tao Qian’s utopian classic heightens the sense of a paradise lost.⁹ His final requiem came with *Long River (Chang He, 1943)*, which laid bare the region’s social decay brought by provincial rule, the decadence of advanced commerce and mechanization, and the moral de-

generacy evident in the corruption of the local country folk. In "seldom hinting that social disintegration lay ahead," Kinkley argues, Shen's pre-1934 works clung to pastoralism and cultural nostalgia as an antidote to modernization, while his later regional works displayed a realist's sense of what was inevitably coming.

Yet, in the regional literature written by Shen Congwen before 1934 an undeniable melancholy already pervades this pastoralism. Overt hints of coming decay may be absent, but something is clearly being lost already. If, after 1934, Shen tells us directly what is being lost in West Hunan, his earlier stories have already planted the symbolic seeds of the region's decline. Pastoralism, in other words, is already a *look back* at a time and place gone by. Shen Congwen could not even write of West Hunan as an "antidote to modernization" without condemning it, symbolically, to change and be lost forever. Even before 1934, he not only celebrated the primitive frontier, but had to eulogize it as well. What is this great sense of loss symbolized by a bleating lamb awaiting the New Year's slaughter? Why does it make Shen's heart ache? The passage reminds me of a similar scene in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* in which Angel Clare remarks on Tess's melancholic lost innocence, her lost purity and childhood. He calls it "the ache of modernism."¹⁰

This theme of pastoral decay resonates with what Raymond Williams identified as "rural-intellectual radicalism," in which images of the pastoral were constructed in British literary texts as commentaries on the inauthenticity of the homogenized modern urban landscape; that is, as an antidote to modernization.¹¹ But this antidote was paradoxically achieved by celebrating the pastoral world in terms of its imminent *loss*. What is perhaps most striking about this polarized world of pastoral and counter-pastoral are the consistently gendered metaphors employed to maintain it.

Consider, for example, Rousseau's *The New Eloise*:

I'm beginning to feel the drunkenness that this agitated, tumultuous life plunges you into. With such a multitude of objects passing before my eyes, I'm getting dizzy. Of all the things that strike me, there is not one that holds my heart, yet all of them together disturb my feelings, so that I forget what I am and who I belong to.¹²

In this passage, Rousseau's young hero, Saint-Preux, portrays an "archetypal" experience of modernity, a sense of loss: lost identity, lost roots, lost interest in everything. Here is the purity of the lost Country and the guilty drunkenness of the progressive City; for it is to his country love, Julie, that our young hero writes, writing so that her image will restore in him a sense of balance. For Rousseau, 18th-century Europe stood at the edge of an abyss; modernity was an urban whirlwind. But this was perhaps best understood by gazing on the calm of an imagined pastoral—an idyllic countryside, and a country woman—as Saint-Preux swirled in the rush of the city. Or consider Goethe's *Faust*. Now the hero, corrupted and civilized by the city, returns to the country. But he returns not just for an idyll gaze but a conquest as well. Faust's love affair with Margaret, the villager, represents the designs of the modern city on the traditional country. For Marshall Berman, Faust's idyllic gaze upon Margaret's world is "the first step in a process that is bound to destroy it. And not out of any malice on his part; it is only by shattering her peaceable kingdom that he will be able to win her love or express his own."¹³

Berman defines the experience of modernity as one infused with paradox and contradiction. The "tragedy" of Faust is that in his modern journey of self-fulfilment and development, he must destroy not only the oppressive confinement of so-called pastoral tradition, but whatever morality that tradition contained as well. More significantly, Berman's interpretation reveals how this sense of tragedy was consistently expressed in gendered terms. The contradictions in the discourse of modernity have long been played out on a gendered landscape. Two related ideas are being articulated here. Modernity is partly a story about the country represented as a woman's body—idyllic and pure—to be gazed upon by the city. Simultaneously, however, it is a story about crafting that country-as-woman to guarantee her eventual conquest by the city. How else can the city know itself and the meaning of progress? How else can Saint-Preux recover from his drunkenness? How else can Faust resolve his inner torment?

I can think of no better image of the pastoral country awaiting modernization's steamroller—squishing the land into a "flatscape," like a helpless bleating lamb awaiting New Year's slaughter—than Thomas Hardy's Wessex.¹⁴ As John Barrell has pointed out, the loss of the Wessex landscape was metaphorically played out most succinctly in

the violation and betrayal of the “pure woman,” Tess Derbyfield. Tess’s local geography, Barrell argues, is oppositional to that of the narrator. Hardy’s narrator, who approaches and explains rural Wessex, serves as the reader’s familiar eye, providing the framework with which to know the pastoral. To know it at all, for Hardy, is to threaten it, to capture it. Tess’s personal, localized geography cannot even be written until the narrator arrives to provide a wider, delocalized viewpoint from which to “see” it. This is reflected in Tess’s own coming of age; she is not “known” until she is violated:

The traveler can certainly attempt to point his consciousness on Tess, so that Blackmoor, “an engirdled and secluded region” at the start of the novel, “for the most part untrodden as yet by the tourist and the landscape painter” will be trodden, penetrated (as Tess, the bird, is “trodden” and penetrated by Alec D’Urberville) and inscribed in the list of the traveler’s other conquests.¹⁵

The literary parallels between Hardy’s Wessex and Shen Congwen’s West Hunan do not simply represent the similarities between actual cultural landscapes facing the steamroller of modernization. Rather, the similar roles played by women, simultaneously celebrated and victimized, points to the coincidence of cultural representation. Shen’s West Hunan, in other words, was in part constructed by the literary devices of 19th- and early 20th-century European pastoralism, and much of the discursive baggage these devices carried with them (including bourgeois gender relations). In its metaphorical rendering, West Hunan was doomed from the start to become penetrated, trodden, and otherwise rendered impure. The question here is not how West Hunan was changing in the face of integration and modernization, but how Shen Congwen’s aesthetic proclivities and ideals, imbedded within his literary style, *required* that this landscape change as part of a broader commentary on what he felt to be modern China’s cultural and political condition.

In short, a gaping hole of nostalgia was opened up by the experience of modernization, a hole for poets and scholars to fill with the valorization of the primitive, the traditional, the community, the “pre-modern.” These were, from the start, categories defined, like “pastoral,” not by what they were in any empirical sense, but by what it *meant*

to lose them. Shen Congwen’s version of this sense of loss has been termed “imaginary nostalgia” by David Wang, referring “not so much to a representational effort to enliven the irretrievable past as to a creation of an imaginary past *on behalf of the present*” (my emphasis).¹⁶ The primitive landscape was a modern construction, a way of knowing what modern progress meant. It was a landscape molded by a “structure of feeling” in which gender distinctions were clearly marked. As Hardy’s example illustrates, and as we will see in the writing of Shen Congwen, the frontier woman provided the main vehicle by which a “sense of loss” could be felt.¹⁷

Yet, to see in Shen’s regional literature a mere “coincidence” with the aesthetics of European pastoralism’s moral topography is to miss the more profound qualities of his work. Shen’s writing should not be dismissed as the passive mimicry of “rural intellectual radicalism.” As Lydia Liu has argued, it is necessary to interrogate the historical contexts underlying early 20th-century China’s translations of Western ideas in order to understand how the development of those ideas took on trajectories quite specific to the Chinese social situation.¹⁸ Shen Congwen’s aesthetic was meaningful not simply because it articulated a modern experience, but more importantly, because it was able to draw on an extant historical discourse of gendered frontier landscapes. It was the subversion of this distinctly Chinese discourse, more than the ambivalent radicalism of the pastoralist vision *per se*, which lent power to his words.

2. New Culture and the frontier woman

That the contradictory ideas incorporated within modernism presented an *ambivalent* radicalism for China’s treaty-port intelligentsia is important to understanding the significance of Shen Congwen’s regional literature. “Modernism,” here, is taken to mean not simply radical form in literature and art, but an entire intellectual outlook which celebrates the perpetual disintegration of the old as well as the prospect of progressive renewal and rebirth. The “creative destruction” espoused by modernism ultimately presented China’s literary vanguard with a political predicament. Avant garde modernism offered radical forms to fuel the literary elite’s anti-traditional iconoclasm, yet those forms also confirmed China’s experience of subjugation to the West. Patriotism and nationalism required an *indigenous* wellspring to

draw from in building Chinese national identity and political autonomy. Ultimately, this would be found in a valorized peasantry as the communists, under Mao Zedong, took their revolution to China's interior, away from the modern treaty-ports. Yet, although he despised politics of any kind, Shen Congwen's regional literature offered an alternative source of Chinese vitality, one which has clearly outlived the ideology of Maoism. The gaze Shen directed on the frontier in the 1920s and 30s remains potent today as an inspiration for China's modern identity.

After an adolescence of soldiering in one of the warlord armies of West Hunan, Shen Congwen came to Beijing in 1922, determined to be a writer. According to Kinkley, Shen had become convinced that China's future lay in the modernizing cities, and this idea heightened his sense of disillusion at the violent and reactionary elements of militarism.¹⁹ Armed with the romantic alienation of poverty, Shen wrote at a feverish pace, digesting the styles of modernism which swayed so much of China's intelligentsia during the New Culture Movement. As a literary stylist and rebellious critic, Shen embraced modernism and celebrated its iconoclastic appropriation in the destruction of China's Confucian tradition. But his bohemian pretensions only went so far; there remained aspects of China's tradition which Shen's military-inspired sense of loyalty sought to preserve. He deviated from modernism with eclectic combinations of traditional Chinese and Western forms. Nor was writing the only avenue for Shen's appropriation of new ideas. Western social science was enjoying much influence in China's academies, where Shen felt his ideals truly belonged. Western sociology, psychology, and ethnography contributed to Shen's growing sense of aesthetic appreciation for the world he had left behind in his quest to participate in China's urban literary vanguard. For Shen Congwen is an intriguing figure in that his mixed ethnicity, his military past, and his country home clearly set him apart from the urban intellectuals of Beijing and Shanghai.

Modernism, as a set of intellectual ideas in addition to radical artistic forms, was teaching Shen Congwen a new aesthetic. One cannot neatly separate the so-called "traditional" and "modern" components of his style. Rather, tradition was, to amend David Wang's term, (re)imagined as modernity's nostalgic residual, the dark side of the modern consciousness, the refuge of a spiritual realm decried by the rationality of modernization.

According to Kinkley, Western ethnography and psychology, especially, taught Shen to seek understanding of the "modern condition" in the study of primitive cultures.²⁰ Perhaps most significantly, this aesthetic offered Shen Congwen a means by which to transform his mixed-blood (Miao and Tujia, which he kept hidden) and frontier roots into a stage from which to direct China's New Culture. Driven by alienation and loneliness in the city, Shen found that his nostalgia for West Hunan could itself be appropriated as an ally of the modern vanguard. What Shen came up with, then, is accurately termed by Wang as a "radical melancholy."²¹ What was radical was conferring "the dignity of intelligence and creativity" on China's frontier country folk and tribespeople. They were symbolized as "critical counterpoint" to China's old urban civilization, the spiritual remedy to Confucianism. More than this, their lives also "stood as a reproof to the inhumane forces accompanying modernization."²² Yet it is with this latter claim that we begin to see the nature of Shen's melancholy. For like Goethe's Margaret and Hardy's Tess, Shen's country folk must critique modernization by playing out its tragedy. As the examples in the following section will illustrate, Shen Congwen invested West Hunan with the symbolism of decay—the primitive simultaneously celebrated and eulogized—even before his return in 1934 confirmed what was happening.

We must first explore, however, the metaphor of the frontier woman in the context of China's New Culture Movement in order to understand why Shen Congwen's regional literature did not simply mimic the aesthetic of radical pastoralism but in fact drew on a Chinese discursive precedent. This is crucial to the claim that Shen's West Hunan offered a region of emancipatory subjectivity, a place in which the fragments of a decaying pastoral held out the hope of resolution to the predicament of modern China. As David Wang puts it, "At a time when Peach Blossom Spring is lost, it is the surviving elements of the noble savages, residual remembrances of the golden time, or lingering impressions of the landscape that one must learn to capture and decipher so as to reconstruct things past."²³ The New Culture Movement was demonstrating that modernist forms in art and literature were solid enough to smash the "old society" (*jiushehui*), but iconoclasm only left intellectuals with confusing and competing discourses. Many, like writer Ba Jin, espoused anarchy in their condemnation of the Confucian family (*jia*).²⁴ It was

an appropriate response: what, really, could replace such a basic foundation to Chinese society? The political and cultural imperialism of Western colonial powers must have seemed an unsavory alternative. Indeed, according to Naoki Sakai, it was Lu Xun who saw in Western modernity a force of such totalizing quality that it rendered the whole notion of a “modern China” (as distinct from the imperialist West) meaningless.²⁵

Ba Jin’s inability (and Lu Xun’s refusal) to describe substantially what a post-Confucian society would look like was a problem shared by all who wrestled with the abstract modern concepts of individual, nation, society, class, and gender. The Western discourse of modernity invested these terms as universal signifiers, and they appealed to intellectuals in providing subjective platforms from which to decry the *ancien regime*. In one sense, they offered a means of escape. Yet it was not entirely clear, at the onset of the era, to where intellectuals saw themselves escaping. Bourgeois fiction offered narrative models for expressing individualistic feelings, but it offered little else. Carried to their radical extreme, these models simply collapsed into Lu Xun’s despair or the hysterical insanity of Ding Ling’s Miss Sophie. As Tani Barlow has argued, Western discourses of modernity had no immediate Chinese precedent, no discursive world to anchor themselves with. Thus, they needed to be remolded in such a way that they could at least be spoken (and written).²⁶ With the May 4th protest of 1919, a trend toward the nationalist concerns of patriotism and socialism was initiated which would ultimately provide a totalizing discourse of sufficient hegemony to draw together the dislocated threads of New Cultural thought, and ground them in the practical problems of building a New China.

That Shen Congwen was less a patriot or nationalist than his fellow intellectuals would be an unjust claim. Rather, it was the prescribed subjugation of art to the cause of politics which disgusted him. Through the sublimity of art itself would the nation’s cause be advanced. The contrast between Shen’s artistic aesthetic and the more overt politics of his fellow intellectuals is perhaps best illustrated in their contrasting metaphorical representations of women as the “modern” symbols of both society’s oppression and China’s liberation. For New Culturalists, Confucian hegemony had robbed women of their most basic, most natural identity: their physiology, their

“half of China,” their sex. The modern woman shared a common social oppression with all women of China, regardless of class, status, or any other competing identities; she was often a character read from the pages of Flaubert, Stendhal, Rousseau, Baudelaire, Hardy, and others. The subjective identity of woman constructed from European bourgeois literature was an essentially sexual identity. For woman to be a powerful modern symbol with which to overthrow Confucian protocol, sexual difference needed to be elevated above all other social relations, and that difference was promoted in scientific terms. Biological and reproductive difference formed the essence of womanhood, and these were transformed into a sexual essentialism which found resonance in the literary modernism so popular among treaty-port intellectuals. With no clear idea, beyond these literary models, of what a modern woman should be, New Culture constructed woman in a dualistic fashion—a counterbalance to man.²⁷

In other words, the historical context in China made it difficult to construct the image of a truly independent woman beyond her role as the bearer of society’s oppression. China had no dominant customs or behavioral patterns which could accommodate the assertive individual, much less a female one. Beyond the fictional world of New Culture elites and their sexual female subjects discovering their true selves in a post-Confucian dream world, lay a country in which women *and* men faced very real lives deeply embedded within cruel structures of oppression. Ultimately, it would be there, in the countryside, that the contradictions of “bourgeois feminism” would be mediated through Maoist nationalism and Marxist class struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party. The empowerment of women would only be subordinated to the cause of the nation and the new socialist society. As Zhou Enlai argued, women “did not need emancipation from family, men needed to take family responsibilities as seriously as women.”²⁸ In its turn to the countryside of the peasant revolutionary, the transcendent category of woman thus never achieved the individualistic power with which it had developed in the atomized and market-oriented urban societies of Europe.

While Shen Congwen may have anticipated the communists in his turn to the countryside of West Hunan as a source of vitality for modern sensibilities, his country folk were far from the “blank

slates" ultimately valorized by the Maoists. His frontier was neither proletarian nor Confucian, but something else entirely. The West Hunan of Shen Congwen was a world in which the power of woman would, instead of being subsumed under the causes of nation and class, provide a bridge between the discursive worlds of radical European pastoralism and China's ancient discourse of the primitive frontier. Here could be found women who still retained a natural vitality, the fragments of a spiritual purity. Unencumbered by ideology, the frontier woman sheltered a morality appreciated by modern sensibilities, but judgmental of modernization itself. The gendered frontier became, for Shen, the discursive precedent necessary to anchor the modern experience in China. The frontier was, after all, a place where that "archetypal antagonism" between country and city made historical sense; intrusive Chinese walled garrisons had long been at odds with an alien and hostile indigenous countryside. Shen Congwen grew up in such a garrison. By subverting this antagonism, his West Hunan countryside became anti-Confucian, while at the same time it touched what he felt to be the buried soul of China. The culture of the frontier, found especially in Miao women, represented a vitality which "once belonged to the Han, before the Han became insensitive and narrow of vision; the Miao way, in Shen's imagination, is that of the Chinese race when it was young."²⁹ Thus, unlike the urban landscapes of downriver China, West Hunan was not Western, but was represented as more fundamentally Chinese than even the Confucian world of China proper. The frontier landscape was a place of non-Western emancipation, a place unencumbered by the myopic dilemmas of Lu Xun and his iron house. Its representation as such depended on the appropriation of a modern primitive woman, upon whose body the vitality of youth, and the inevitability of change, could be experienced by the gaze of Shen's urban audience.

3. The gendered landscape of West Hunan

Two integrated themes thus appear as we begin to examine Shen Congwen's stories and the landscape in which they're placed: first, valorization of the primitive by celebrating woman as nature, country, and purity; and second, the imminent loss of the primitive landscape symbolized by the sexual maturing of Shen's female characters. In order

for these aesthetics to become truly meaningful in the contemporary Chinese context, though, they needed to be anchored to the dominant ways the frontier landscape was understood in China.

Shen's representation of a gendered regional landscape was aided by fundamentally modern dualisms which included female/male, country/city, nature/culture. Like Hardy, Shen saw a kind of liberating power in equating the purity of woman with nature, country, and the primitive. Describing landscape through the metaphor of a woman's body was an especially potent strategy in New Culture China, for in celebrating a woman as aligned not with culture (which was Confucian and male and civilized) but with nature and primitiveness, was a way to undermine the repressive strictures of Confucian society. Tani Barlow puts it this way:

Not kinship but personal identity, not procreative fertility but sexual expression, not appropriate behavior but natural behavior should regulate human lives. People in China would naturally become masculine and feminine to the degree they liberated themselves from culture.³⁰

There were plenty of antecedents in dominant Chinese representations of the primitive frontier for Shen and his audience to draw from which made the potentially "liberating" qualities of his regionalism understandable and profound. The producers of downstream popular culture had long been directing the urban Chinese gaze toward a sexualized—both tantalizing and fearful—frontier. Centuries of colonization in China's southern peripheries had produced landscapes of discrimination and fear in the mountains.³¹ In keeping with Barlow's assessment, it should also be noted that Shen Congwen's primitive landscape was gendered in both feminine *and* masculine ways. The men of Shen's region certainly did their part to keep the frontier a fearful place for the Chinese, and they overtly retained the celebrated vitality of primitive culture perhaps to an even greater extent than the frontier women. But frontier men have never been subject to the kind of voyeuristic fascination which frontier women have experienced. More significantly for our purposes, though, Shen's frontier men, despite their virility, tended to occupy an ambivalent position as participants in West Hunan's tragic history. As we shall see below,

the sexual presence of Shen's frontier man plays a symbolic part in precipitating (or at least foreshadowing) the region's decline.

An especially potent subject in the discourse of frontier fear and desire was the Miao witch. Norma Diamond has written that fear of Miao *gu* poison was merely the outward manifestation of Chinese anxieties about the Miao in general. "The Chinese beliefs in magical poisoning and Miao witchcraft are," she argues, "not based on ethnographic fact but are a way of talking about irreconcilable cultural differences."³² These differences were especially apparent regarding the lack of proper Confucian sexual morals in Miao women.³³ Because they did not seem to know their place, Miao women were endowed with extraordinary powers, and their supernatural abilities were paraded by moralists as a warning for Chinese to stay away. Diamond documents a story which surfaced in Beijing, about an official who had brought back a Miao woman with him from Yunnan. Even in Beijing, the very center of Han culture, she was able to devour the brains of innocent Chinese babies. As Diamond comments, "There is a very clear message here about the wisdom of not becoming involved with native women."³⁴ It was because of the extreme piety of Confucianism that a whole range of Miao practices were found confusing and obviously morally corrupt to the Chinese. Differences in social stratification, marriage customs, land tenure, female modesty, and social freedoms all fed the flames of fantasy and anxiety about Miao sorcery.

It is important, at this point, to recall briefly the insights of Raymond Williams regarding "residual culture." Specifically, he addresses the tendency in dominant cultural discourse to idealize, fantasize, and exoticize (and, we should add, sexualize) "residual" cultural functions marginalized within that dominant culture as "alternative and oppositional"; that is, the tendency to project deviance onto some "other" people and place, thereby negating its presence at home. By Diamond's account, attributes of Miao culture, specifically witchcraft, should be seen not as inherently Miao but as the idealization of a "lesser function of the dominant order itself."³⁵ Thus, Diamond devotes some of her work to tracing the myth of *gu* as not a Miao but a Chinese creation:

The *gu* form of magic is allegedly of Miao origin, but in fact it is a Han Chinese creation that goes far back in time, long before the pacifica-

tion and colonization of the southwestern provinces in the Ming (1368–1628), and Qing (1644–1911); and well before any systematic studies were done of the cultural and social organization of the various non-Han populations of the southwest.³⁶

For Shen Congwen, equipped with modern social science, the myths of Miao sorcery were merely excuses for social repression. In constructing a landscape which would liberate society from the weight of Confucianism, Shen flipped Confucian morality on its head. All that the downstream world feared was to be held up as virtuous. After all, "the Miao have preserved certain ancient Han customs that the Han long forgot."³⁷ The frontier folk remained the bearers of China's cultural residue (thus maintaining a familiar discourse for Shen's audience to latch onto), but it was now to that residue that China had to turn to in order to reclaim its vitality. The women of Shen's world knew this all along. Writing of his hometown in "Fenghuang" (*Fenghuang*, 1938),³⁸ Shen notes:

This is Miao territory in the borderland, and these semi-primitive people's belief in spirits exerts a tremendous influence on everyone. There are spirits everywhere, in trees, caves, and cliffs. ...Because people love each other and moral concepts are extremely strong, legends arise about love between mortals and spirits or monsters, and women find an outlet here for their sexual repression.

There is little ambiguity here about where liberation can be found; it is in the very spirits and monsters which the Chinese have for so long feared.

It is thus necessary to situate Shen's celebration of the primitive frontier and its liberated female subjects in the appropriate context. Though Shen appropriated the devices of European pastoralism to construct a gendered landscape in which Confucianism was turned upside down, this move could not have made much sense without the discursive precedent of a historical discourse of Chinese frontier anxieties. The historical experience of internal colonialism in China made Shen's regionalism truly meaningful for his audience. The frontier, in other words, grounded the discourse of modernity unambiguously in China itself. Already equipped with images of the exotic, sexual, and dangerous Miao, it was really quite a small leap for

Shen's audience to shift its gaze upon the Miao from bearers of Chinese anxieties about Confucianism to bearers of anxieties about the new experience of modernization and the unsettling "drunkenness" of change. A transcendent female subject made the leap that much easier.

It is therefore understandable that Shen's frontier women enabled him to push radically the acceptable limits of vernacular fiction. Shen valorized "women's work" in ways which, for his audience, could only be acceptable in a frontier setting. In the naturalness of their sexuality, Shen's women acted out what modern male intellectuals could only dream of. In "The People of Yuanling" (*Yuanling de Ren*),³⁹ he valorizes the manual labor done by women (since most of the able-bodied men have been conscripted to serve the warlord's army in protecting the region). These "handy and efficient" women are especially good at building roads. Shen comments that:

In China [that is, downriver], the movement for women's rights has been active for twenty years, yet in public its members are still not ashamed to address each other as "madam." Moreover they all congregate in cities, living a pampered life. By comparison these working women, who equate eating with sweating, compel our admiration and sympathy.

The contempt for urban culture is clear. Yet by no means have these women lost that essential quality which makes them "women" (in the bourgeois sense):

Although working all day, they remember they are women, and retain the natural feminine love of beauty. The embroidery over their breasts and the borders of their trousers is done beside an oil lamp after work... Although these women's daily tasks are so heavy, their clothes are neat and clean.

"The People of Yuanling," part of the collection *West Hunan* (*Xiangxi*, 1938), is one of Shen's later regional works, and, along with the rest of the collection, was written as a realistic defense of the character of the West Hunan folk as the region slipped into anarchy and decay with the onset of provincial rule and intensified commercial penetration. Shen devotes much of the essay to chiding scholar-tourists who come seeking the uncanny and the weird. Their civilized pretensions are

harshly judged as the vapid casualties of urban modernization. Taunting their fascination with the rumors of local magic, a recluse rails at them, "You're so nosy about the use of the *Song of Righteousness* to drive the dead, I'd like to know what song of evil drove you, a living creature, here to me?" Yet despite his ostensible purpose of "laying bare" the "realities" of the West Hunan folk, Shen Congwen leaves a trail of "residual fragments" for us to collect along the way, betraying perhaps a deeper pride in the innate spirituality of the place. There is always the possibility here that all the legends, perverse and morbid as they may initially seem, are "real." Perhaps the local bragart is indeed telling the truth when he claims, for the tourists, to have seen the Chenzhou sorcerers perform their magic. And if travelers looking for Chenzhou magic are frustrated, there's always the lovely landscape: "what is most moving is to gaze around at the surrounding hills and all the ranges beyond like a landscape painting. The water, deep here, flows fast. The sturdily-built women rowers, fearless and levelheaded, stand in the prow heedless of danger... All these, you can see at a glance, are very good, simple women." It is ultimately toward the women that the traveler may direct his gaze in seeking not only a tourist's satisfaction, but a deeper appreciation of something lacking in his own world.

Another essay from *West Hunan* is "Fenghuang," and it displays a similar intermingling of magic and reality, so that the reader (and, indeed, the author himself) is not sure of the distinction between the real and unreal. Fenghuang's "local authorities" include "deities, officials, village heads, and attendants of spirits." As for the legendary Miao jinxes, these have a "real" explanation (arsenic), and an "unreal" side (belief in the intermingling of spirits and mortals). Shen always leaves open the possibility that the magic of ancient Chu still wraps his region in its fragments. Witchcraft exists all over China, claims Shen the social scientist, and he dismisses it as the work of lazy vagrants and clever charlatans. "But in Fenghuang it is different." In Fenghuang it is much harder to distinguish reality as the descendants of Chu grip the traveler with their dream world. Witchcraft becomes a kind of "woman's work" which plays a positive role in maintaining the morality of the place.

Another type of "woman's work" valorized by Shen Congwen is prostitution. Of course, it is only the frontier prostitutes who display any moral vir-

tuosity. In “Baizi” (*Baizi*, 1928),⁴⁰ the downriver prostitutes are chided as “unclean” and only concerned with money, as revealed in this exchange between a river prostitute and Baizi, a boatman who plies the river between the lowlands and the mountain frontier:

“Oh, you’re strong, Baizi—strong as an ox!”
 “If I wasn’t, you wouldn’t believe that I had behaved properly down the river.”
 “Well, tell me—dare you swear you are clean enough to enter the Temple of the Heavenly King?”

Afterwards, Baizi pays her not with money, but with “feminine gifts” such as powders, perfumes, and oils from Changde. In *Border Town* (*Biancheng*, 1934)⁴¹ Shen comments that “there is a curious purity in the habits of the frontier people.” Thus, the prostitutes charge downriver merchants, but not the local boatmen. In this, Shen’s most famous novel, the prostitutes congregate on the River Road outside the walled garrison town of Chadong. Outside the intrusive city’s walls, closer to the clean flowing river, they are simply part of the natural landscape of the frontier, and are clearly “more virtuous than the city dwellers,” who for their part are generally portrayed as cowards, sheltered by the city wall from the river’s spring torrents.

It is in the symbol of the sexually free woman, especially a young woman just coming of age, that Shen finds his most powerful expression of a primitive landscape that is pure and virtuous. Love and passion themselves are the most natural of human conditions. Thus, in “Longzhu” (*Longzhu*, 1929),⁴² Shen comments that “it was clear that if the women refused to pursue those whom they adored, madly and with all the cunning in their power, the race would decline and at last be no better than the Han.” It is in the pursuit of passion that the vitality wanting in modern civilization may be found.

“Under Moonlight” (*Yuexia Xiaojing*, 1933)⁴³ similarly weaves a mythical world of legends into a potent judgment on the rationality of progress. Here, in an isolated tribal world of villages resembling “graceful poems filled with harmonious colors” and “surrounded by thick pines and firs,” can be found the “remnants of a people long neglected by mankind and forgotten by history.” We turn to this place on the frontiers of reality itself to learn

that “human beings were driving forward too quickly. Man was superior to all creatures in intelligence and more immoral than anything under the sun. ...The divinity of man was gradually giving way to evil.” Evil, here, is symbolized by the moon, with its “cold light of intelligence,” and is illustrated by a local custom which prevents a woman from marrying the man to whom she loses her virginity. “Rationality” would thus encourage a young woman first to sleep with a passing stranger rather than risk being unable to marry the one she loves. Under moonlight, the two young lovers of Shen’s story weigh this option. But they possess a love given by the sun itself, a divine love beyond all sense of reason. During the day they frolic in its warmth, eating “mountain fruits when hungry” and drinking “spring water when thirsty.” “But when the sun began to sink at last, they felt something lacking and inexpressible in their lives, and when dusk was drawing near, the mooing of the calves on the slopes sent their hearts shivering.” Rather than submit to the path that reason dictates (“Let the moon fall when she has to fall [when we are able to marry]; Yet now she must ride overhead [we must not submit to passion]”), they surrender their fate to the gods (“I cannot live without the sun”), and commit suicide together. Only with this act of sacrifice does the moon fade away behind the clouds.

This analysis brings us back to the theme of loss. In replacing Confucian ethics with modern primitive aesthetics, and secularism with indigenous spirituality, Shen Congwen set the metaphorical clock of modernity ticking away to the inevitable corruption and penetration of this landscape and its primitive peoples. Again, this was not such a new idea to Shen’s audience. The frontier had been in a process of pacification for centuries. But it was a gendered representation which enabled this pacification to be experienced through a profound sense of loss. Shen’s modern aesthetic introduced a vocabulary for articulating a contradiction which was relatively new: the progress of change (read: modernization) versus the loss of identity. As argued above, Shen’s pre-1934 works are particularly intriguing in this regard. These works are undercut with a “radical melancholy,” disturbing in its subtlety, which seeks to teach us the value of frontier morality by injecting that morality itself with an impending doom. While the whole range of Shen Congwen’s regional literature—before and after 1934—employed this technique to varying de-

grees, it is the earlier works which display a symbolic richness seldom recovered by Shen after 1934.

Shen Congwen's West Hunan was by no means a pristine landscape. Kinkley argues that, "He does not further rarify the natural world, like a Western arcadian, into a virginal existence subject to rape by mankind, not even when he critiques the advance of industrialism in the countryside."⁴⁴ As has already been mentioned, Shen's frontier women were often sexually repressed. Along with the occasional marauding bandits, nature itself often exacted a cruel toll on the people. In "Under Moonlight," we are introduced to ancient traditions which Shen clearly regards as cruel and grotesque. Yet Shen is not willing to leave it at that. As is demonstrated in "The People of Yuanling," he leaves us with the fragments of a better world, as does "Fenghuang." David Wang has termed this an "aesthetic of the residue or the fragment" and argues that Shen exercises a "connoisseurship of the imagination" which suggests "what the missing whole might have been as well as the impossibility of restoring it."⁴⁵ What Wang's interpretation does not emphasize, however, is the *dynamic* quality of this aesthetic. Shen's stories present us not only with the fragments of a missing whole, but also play out the very *process* by which a world that "might have been" is continually being lost.

The subtleties of this process of loss can be illustrated by returning to "Baizi," one of Shen Congwen's earlier regional works. In this brief story about a sexual encounter between a prostitute and a boatman, there are no overt hints that the region is doomed. Baizi spends a month's wages on "feminine gifts" in exchange for one evening, but his money is "well spent" and he leaves rejuvenated by an appreciation of the higher spiritual plane on which the encounter has placed him. On his return to his boat, he sees a woman breast feeding her child, and hearing "the sound of sipping milk" he decides against singing one of his vulgar river songs. The story ends in peaceful bliss. Like the landscape itself, the prostitute is a revitalizing force. "He remembered her body perfectly: there were curves and quiet pastures, there were hills and caves. It seemed to him that he could still caress it, still describe those curves even though he was a thousand miles away from her." Yet Shen loads the sexual encounter with the symbolism of a sanctuary being rendered impure. Baizi, being a

boatman, travels between two worlds, and brings with him the "dirt" of downstream corruption, symbolized by his muddy feet. At each stage of the encounter, Shen refers us first to Baizi's "muddy foot-prints on the yellow floor," then to his dried footprints, "more sharply etched on the floor than before," and finally to his "muddy legs" hanging by the bedside where, "round the upper part of his legs there was wrapped a tiny pair of feet bound in red silk." At the end of their lovemaking Shen adds that, "Something new was taking place," with no further explanation. While it is clear that there is a purifying aspect to the encounter, it clearly represents a threat as well. Throughout an act which brings such peace to Baizi, we are forced to consider the impurity he brings with him from downstream. When asked to swear that he is "clean," Baizi only replies, "Um... Perhaps your mother would believe in oaths. I don't have any faith in such things!" While the prostitute must take his "rough behavior" as evidence enough of his purity, we are left to scrutinize his muddy feet over and over again.

If a "local color" story like "Baizi" merely plants the seed of corruption, Shen allows it to grow and prosper in his more developed works, especially those with young heroines. A young woman's coming of age symbolizes for Shen the entire gradual penetration of downriver society into the morally pure frontier. It is truly upon her body, as woman, as nature, as landscape itself, that the forces of change are played out and made meaningful. This is most obviously portrayed in "Sansan" (*Sansan*, 1931),⁴⁶ in which a miller's young daughter faces a possible betrothal to a consumptive man from the city. He is clothed in white (the color of death) with a sickly pale face, and yet all the villagers (except Sansan) find him "so handsome." Though in the end he dies before arrangements have been made, Sansan has been changed, for the man, despite his ugliness, had begun to attract her interest in city life. She finds herself gripped by a mixture of desire and revulsion. Everything about the man's world seems backward to her. "His face is white like a girl's," the color of white camellias. His nurse, on the other hand, resembles and behaves like a man; she can write, something Sansan finds disgusting in a woman. Even the man's illness is interpreted as a luxury by Sansan's mother. Townspeople, she says, "have many names for diseases, for they like to be ill," whereas country folk can only "afford to have a few illnesses."

Townpeople, she marvels, are even frightened by dogs.

Sansan is pure country. She is "hardly distinguishable from [the trees] in her green dresses.... It seemed as though the fish were friendly to her.... She grew up surrounded by clouds and chaff...." But the mill where she lives symbolizes her change; it grinds coarse rice husks into fine white seeds. Her eventual marriage, foreshadowed by this brush with death, will be the inevitable succumbing of the Country to the City. It is a nameless force which confronts Sansan's world, almost invisible to all but her. Indeed, we never learn the name of the man from the town. Even though she cannot name it, Sansan can see what he represents. One evening she spies the man walking with his host, two ghostlike "white figures walking in the trees" talking vaguely of "draining a river" and "building a school." It is no accident that the discussion eventually turns to the townsman's interest in marrying Sansan, the final act of the modern traveller's conquest. Sansan, however, is luckier than Goethe's Margaret, for the man soon dies. Yet although he dies, and everything should be normal, it seems Sansan's life will never be the same again. The grinding of the mill where she lives only becomes more acute:

Sansan looked down into the clear stream, feeling that she had lost something. The stone-roller was beginning to grind the rice, and because the axles were screaming, her mother was looking everywhere for the oil-bottle. Sansan could see it hanging behind the door, but she said nothing. She was gazing into the stream. She tried to recall the name of the thing that was lost, but though she tried for a long time, she never found this name.

This theme is developed more thoroughly in Shen Congwen's masterpiece, *Border Town*. This is perhaps Shen's most idyllic work, paced by the rhythms of the seasons, which are measured out by the annual dragon boat races. The story begins in a seemingly timeless bucolic idyll, where people fulfill their appointed tasks, men are "brave and chivalrous," houses are "all perfectly placed in harmony with their surroundings," and "everyone lived quietly and meditatively, and this silence increased their conception of the power of dreams." Here, as mentioned above, even their "trade in human flesh was regarded... as proper and even respectable." Yet, despite all this, things are not en-

tirely right in this dreamy world. Shen's entire plotline is driven by the misunderstandings among his characters. Cuicui (the heroine), her grandfather, even the two brothers, Tianbao and Nusong, who compete for her hand, as well as their father Shunshun, are all poor communicators despite their meditative calm. Further offsetting the sense of timelessness, Shen begins the whole story as if it all happened long ago: "near the river you will find a white pagoda and a small isolated cottage, where there once lived a family...." Whatever used to be there is perhaps already lost from the beginning.

The symbolic decay of the frontier is played out metaphorically on Cuicui's maturing body. Her name translates as "Green Jade" but it is also a homonym for "fragile" as well as "pure," or "unadulterated." As she grows into her full sexual being, facing the prospect of marriage, she dreams of the downstream world, of "big ships on Dongting Lake," and she does not know why. Her maturing even disturbs her grandfather, who cannot bear to part with her childlike innocence: "For seventy years he had lived close to nature, but nature herself was now surprising him with all its curious complexities of change." Ultimately, he dies during a violent storm, having been unable to fulfill his duty of betrothing Cuicui. But it is Cuicui herself who most emphatically embodies the disquieting changes facing her world. Listen to the way her change is described, at dusk on the first evening that Tianbao and Nusong begin singing her praises by moonlight:

Gazing at the molten-red clouds in the sky and listening to the confused voices of the wandering peddlers crossing the stream, Cuicui felt a silent melancholy creeping over her heart.

The twilight was as beautiful and peaceful as always; and all those who watched this evanescent tranquillity must have suffered the same sorrow in their hearts. For them there is sorrow in every day that passes. Cuicui felt that something had been lost in the world. She was helplessly watching the days pass by, and she was never able to detain them with a bright passion of excitement. It seemed to her that all life was commonplace, and there was no end to it.

"I would like to sit on a junk and float quietly towards Taoyuan, and disappear in the direction of the Dongting lake. Grandfather will call my name, and beat gongs for me all over the city, he will send out messengers with lanterns and torches and he will never find me!"

This is a very different Cuicui from the girl described at the beginning of the story as nursed and educated by nature. Then, she was “as innocent and agile as a young animal. She was as gentle as a mountain antelope, never took thought of cruelty or sorrow, and she was never angry. Whenever she saw a stranger on the ferryboat paying attention to her, she gazed back at him with bright eyes, as if she could escape into the hills whenever she liked.”

Cuicui and the landscape that cradles her represent two interrelated ideas for Shen Congwen. In her primitive naturalness she is the antithesis of stifling Confucian morality and stricture. Appropriating and celebrating her body thus liberated Shen's audience from a decaying social order which was regarded as responsible for China's vassalage to the West. But her valorized identity as primitive is paradoxically a very modern identity. Her nature, and the purity of her landscape, is a vision of nostalgia, a dissenting commentary on decrepit Confucianism. But she is doomed, for only in her imminent loss of innocence can that innocence be known at all. Not only is her subjectivity borrowed from the likes of Tess Derbyfield or Goethe's Margaret; she herself plays Rousseau's young hero, Saint-Preux. Indeed, nothing holds her heart anymore. She has forgotten what she is and who she belongs to.

Drawing on such obvious parallels, one can claim evidence for a certain “universal” quality to this modern aesthetic. It is, in a sense, an “archetype” in the cultural experience of modernization. The aesthetic of loss was indeed one of the more profound legacies of European Romanticism, out of which radical pastoralism developed. Yet it should be equally clear that this aesthetic was reproduced in historically and geographically specific social contexts. The female subjects of European bourgeois fiction provided liberating models for New Culture intellectuals only when they were articulated within a Chinese historical discourse which would make them meaningful. Many intellectuals, finding such a discourse wanting, subsumed the woman subject under the causes of nation and class, for which clear antecedents were apparent. Shen Congwen, on the other hand, maintained the frontier woman as liberating model by turning to, and subverting, the historical discourse of frontier anxiety. He was, in this sense, a pioneer figure himself. For the current resurgence of non-Han cultural production in China has refocused the urban gaze on the frontier with

unprecedented clarity. Now that modernization is a state ideology in China and ethnic tourism is on the rise, we may see Shen's work as an eloquent guidebook for metropolitan China's return to the frontier as its spiritual raft.

It is with this current situation that I conclude. For after reading Shen Congwen, it is striking to me the extent to which the present infatuation with China's non-Han periphery reproduces Shen's modern primitive discourse of subverted frontier anxiety. It would be wrong, in other words, to draw safe historical boundaries around Shen's New Culture era of colonial modernity. The modern primitive discourse has ridden the backs of celebrated and eulogized frontier women right up to the present. Labeling the current situation—call it neocolonial or internal colonial—is not as important as the historical continuities themselves. For example, consider the popularity of the film “Sacrificed Youth,” about a Han Chinese woman who finds spiritual rebirth among the Dai of Southern Yunnan. What is significant about this film is not only the construction of an idyllic landscape on the frontier, but the fact that this landscape must be destroyed at the end of the film for us to appreciate its worth. Or consider this, from Li Xiangting, editor of *Fine Arts in China*, writing in 1987 about the increasing Chinese infatuation with Tibet:

We see [the Han] approach the question [of Tibetan culture] with a sense of overriding superiority. It's all well and good to say that the very elements of primitive color, strength, mystery, and even barbarism, are just what is lacking in Han civilization. This fascination with “frontier culture” is understandable. But what is happening, in fact, is that these Tibetan elements of the primitive are being used in China as a *spiritual raft* during a transitional period of weakness, frustration, and vacuity. *They enable the oppressed self to be temporarily liberated from the constraints of society.*⁴⁷

If a carefully selected frontier is becoming some kind of Chinese theme park of unprecedented cultural and economic proportions, it will not be for any new reasons that this has come about. Shen Congwen articulated a modern aesthetic which has become the rapidly accumulating capital of a new cultural economy. But the power context in which this aesthetic has thrived—the frontier relationship between Han and other—has been sta-

ble for centuries and centuries, and shows few signs of disappearing. The production of exotic difference has long been integral in the telling of stories not about others, but about ourselves.

Acknowledgments

A shorter version of this paper was originally presented in a session titled "Texts and the symbolic encoding of landscape" at the 1992 Annual Meetings of the Canadian Association of Geographers, Vancouver, BC. Thanks to Jim Bell and Patricia Price who helped put the session together and inspired me to focus my scattered ideas. Ann Anagnost and Louisa Schein offered critical input and encouragement in bringing about the current version. I am also indebted to Tani Barlow and an unknown reader for their advice and critical comments, some of which I have, for better or worse, not heeded.

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Notes

- ¹ For example, see WOODHULL, W (1991): 'Unveiling Algeria', *Genders* 10: 112–131; and MANI, L (1987): 'Contentious Traditions; the debate on *sati* in colonial India', *Cultural Critique* 7: 119–156.
- ² By "European pastoralism" I am identifying a 19th and early 20th century European trend (also evident to some extent in the United States) in literary and artistic representation, political activism, and academic scholarship. Inspired by the Romantic movement, this trend idealized a sense of moral order in rural, non-industrial places, generally as a progressive antidote to the social decay evident in the experience of industrialism. See, for example, GRUFFUDD, P (1994): 'Back to the land: historiography, rurality and the nation in interwar Wales', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (NS) 19: 61–77, for a discussion of pastoralist sentiments in 1930s Wales which were strikingly similar to those expressed in Shen Congwen's literary regionalism.
- ³ SHEN, CW (1982 [1934]): 'A Night in Mallard Nest Village' (*Yakewei de Ye*), in SHEN, CW (1982a): *Recollections of West Hunan*, trans. by G. YANG, Panda, Beijing, p. 50. All passages from Shen's stories in this essay are from published English translations. For useful Chinese collections of Shen's works on West Hunan see SHEN, CW (1981a): *Shen Congwen Sanwen Xuan*, Renmin, Changsha, which contains collections previously published as "Congwen Zizhuan," "Xiangxing Sanji," and "Xiangxi," and SHEN, CW (1981b): *Shen Congwen Xiaoshuo Xuan*, Renmin, Changsha.
- ⁴ KINKLEY, J (1987): *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, p. 228.
- ⁵ *ibid.*, p. 234.
- ⁶ SHEN, CW (1982 [1934]): 'Border town' (*Biancheng*), in

SHEN, CW (1982b): *The Chinese Earth*, trans. by R PAYNE and J DI, Columbia University Press, New York, p. 203.

- ⁷ Kinkley (1987), p. 229.
- ⁸ *ibid.*, p. 233.
- ⁹ WANG, D (1992): *Fictional Realism in 20th Century China*. Columbia University Press, New York, p. 255.
- ¹⁰ It is worth quoting the entire passage here, for in it Tess expresses a sorrow which we will later hear echoed by Cuicui in Shen's *Border Town*. In this passage, Tess's local geography, in which she was merely an extension of the natural world, has been shattered; she has been victimized by Alec D'Urberville:

"The trees have inquisitive eyes, haven't they?—that is, seems as if they had. And the river says 'why do ye trouble me with your looks?' And you seem to see numbers of to-morrows just all in a line, the first of them the biggest and clearest, the others getting smaller and smaller as they stand further away; but they all seem very fierce and cruel and as if they said, 'I'm coming! Beware of me! Beware of me!' But *you*, sir, can raise up dreams with your music, and drive all such horrid fancies away!"

"He was surprised to find this young woman—who though but a milkmaid had just that touch of rarity about her which might make her the envied of her housemates—shaping such sad imaginings. She was expressing in her own native phrases—assisted a little by her sixth standard training—feelings which might almost have been called those of the age—the ache of modernism" (Oxford World Classics Paperback Edition, pp. 128–129).

- ¹¹ WILLIAMS, R (1973): *The Country and the City*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. Wang (1992, p. 248) offers a complementary label for Shen's brand of pastoralism: "radical melancholy."
- ¹² Cited in BERMAN, M (1982): *All That is Solid Melts into Air; The Experience of Modernity*. Penguin, New York, p. 18. My interpretation of Rousseau's romantic novel is largely borrowed from Berman, who claims Rousseau's was the "archetypal modern voice in the early phase of modernity."
- ¹³ *ibid.*, p. 53.
- ¹⁴ The image of a flatscape is borrowed from RELPH, E (1976): *Place and Placelessness*. Pion, London.
- ¹⁵ BARRELL, J (1982): 'Geographies of Hardy's Wessex', *Journal of Historical Geography* 8: 347–61, p. 360.
- ¹⁶ Wang (1992), pp. 248–49.
- ¹⁷ The concept "structure of feeling" is from WILLIAMS, R (1977): *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. To my knowledge, Williams never illustrated it with reference to gender. Instead, his cultural materialism focused on the articulations between political economy and "art and literature." But in so far as structure of feeling is a "way of defining forms and conventions in art and literature as inalienable elements of a social material process" (p. 133), bourgeois gender relations surely become a major component of such a structure.
- ¹⁸ LIU, L (1993): 'Translingual Practice: the discourse of individualism between China and the West', *Positions* 1: 160–193.
- ¹⁹ Kinkley (1987), p. 64.
- ²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 112.
- ²¹ Wang (1992), p. 248.
- ²² Kinkley (1987), p. 114.

- ²³ Wang (1992), p. 257.
- ²⁴ See DIRLIK, A (1991): *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution*. University of California Press, Berkeley; especially pp. 10–46 and 148–196, for discussion of anarchy's role in China's revolutionary movements during this period.
- ²⁵ SAKAI, N (1988): 'Modernity and its Critique: the problem of universalism and particularism', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 87: 475–504. Sakai's general argument is that modernity itself defined the terms of its own resistance, such that attempts by East Asian nationalists to define their independent national subjectivity in terms of resistance to Western modernism found themselves entrapped in its hegemonic monological world. Resistance thus brings a subjectivity which in fact turns out to be modern and Western.
- ²⁶ BARLOW, T (1991): 'Theorizing Woman: Funu, Guojia, Jiating [Chinese Woman, Chinese State, Chinese Family]', *Genders* 10: 132–160, p. 138.
- ²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 141.
- ²⁸ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 145.
- ²⁹ Kinkley (1987), p. 11.
- ³⁰ BARLOW, T (1989): 'Introduction', in BARLOW, T and BJORGE, G (eds): *I Myself am a Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling*. Beacon, Boston, p. 13.
- ³¹ For specific accounts, see the essays in HARRELL, S ed. (1995): *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontier*. University of Washington Press, Seattle; particularly those by Cheung, Diamond, and Harrell.
- ³² DIAMOND, N (1988): 'The Miao and Poison: interactions along Southwest China's frontier', *Ethnology* 27: 1–25, p. 2.
- ³³ Foreigners also did their part in contributing to this frontier anxiety. The missionary Samuel Clarke, for example, had this to say about Miao women: "Chinese women are known to drink some, but at least they don't show themselves in public. But Miao women glory in their shame, and are not infrequently seen hilariously, helplessly drunk, parading, or trying to parade, along the village street." See CLARKE, S (1911): *Among the Tribes in South-West China*. Morgan and Scott, London, p. 34.
- Legends of Miao poison were often reproduced by foreigners as irresistible bits of local color. GOULLART, P (1955): *Forgotten Kingdom*. John Murry, London, p. 193, offered this account of the Miao in Northwest Yunnan:
- "[Stopping at a teashop once on the ascent to Upper Ngatze] Aiya Aiya looked rather anxiously at another table where some tribesmen were sitting. I noticed that he was trying to isolate me from them. I asked him what was the matter. He said that many of the local tribesmen, including the Miao, were adepts in casting evil spells. It was accomplished not by occult methods but by throwing a microscopic pellet of poison called *ndouk*, by a flick of the finger, into a person's cup of tea or wine. Without anything being apparently wrong with him, the man's health steadily declined and he died in a couple of months... He said they had a different mentality from ours and often followed strange, irrational fancies, doing many abominable things just for the fun of it."
- ³⁴ Diamond (1988), p. 11.
- ³⁵ Williams (1977), p. 122.
- ³⁶ Diamond (1988), p. 6.
- ³⁷ Kinkley (1987), p. 12.
- ³⁸ Shen (1982a), pp. 105–128.
- ³⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 88–104.
- ⁴⁰ Shen (1982b), pp. 15–21.
- ⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp. 190–289.
- ⁴² *ibid.*, pp. 137–151.
- ⁴³ *ibid.*, pp. 88–102.
- ⁴⁴ Kinkley (1987), p. 166.
- ⁴⁵ Wang (1992), p. 257.
- ⁴⁶ Shen (1982b), pp. 70–87.
- ⁴⁷ Cited in BARMÉ, G and MINFORD, J eds. (1988): *Seeds of Fire; Voices of Chinese Conscience*. Hill and Wang, New York, p. 416, emphasis added.

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