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# English Translations of Shen Congwen's Stories

A Narrative Perspective

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# Chapter One. Introduction

## 1.1 Preliminaries

He who stands the test of time stands in history.

Shen Congwen (1902-1988), widely acclaimed as “one of the half-dozen great authors of modern Chinese literature” (Kinkley<sup>1</sup>, 1987: 1), experienced an eclipse of his reputation for a period of about thirty years, but today his works finally enjoy the world-renown that they deserve. His works have been translated into more than ten different languages, including English, French, Russian, German, Japanese, and Swedish. With a focus on the English translations of Shen Congwen’s stories, this project is a study of the different translations by different translators that have been brought out at different times by different publishers. Given the three most obvious problematics to be expected in the translations – namely, the radical differences between Chinese and English languages and cultures; the distinct “Chineseness” of Shen Congwen’s writings; and the huge differences among translators at different times – the question of how “Shen Congwen” is interpreted and represented in the English world, compared to “Shen Congwen” in the original Chinese world, presents itself. From a historical perspective, this study explores the following questions: the mode in which the translations exist, the differences or changes that occur in the translations, the translation tendencies of different translators, traces of different periods appearing in the translations, the effect of such tendencies or traces on translations, and the reasons for causing these differences. With these questions in mind, this study details textual comparisons and descriptions of selected stories and their translations.

1 Jeffrey Kinkley, author of Shen Congwen’s biography *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen*, and of *Shen Ts’ung-wen’s Vision of Republican China*, and also a major translator of Shen Congwen’s works.