

Sobriety in "Abnormality" and "Abnormality" in Sobriety: Ideological Contradictions of Cong-wen Shen around the Establishment of New China's Literary System

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Abstract: Cong-wen Shen was mentally disturbed and committed suicide around the establishment of new China's literary system; then he gradually gave up literary creation and turned to study cultural relics. Rereading the materials written by Cong-wen Shen at this stage, readers can find that his writing in the period of mental disorder is unusually sober, clearly and objectively reflecting the current circumstances and many scholars' ideological situations. However, after recovering, Cong-wen Shen became less sober, leaving some "abnormalities" in writing. He constantly denied his creation and previous achievements; he denied his literary ideals and changed his pursuit, so as to conform to the times. Cong-wen Shen tried to create works about the new era for several times, but was frustrated repeatedly. These failures also exemplify the abnormality.

1. Introduction

Cong-wen Shen is unique in the history of modern Chinese literature for his status of liberal writer and his pursuit of pure literature. He believes that literature should be separated from politics. After the founding of the New China, Shen was criticized and attacked as he refused to join in the new literary system. At that time, because of political pressures from outside world and fears in his own mind, Cong-wen Shen was once mentally disturbed and committed suicide. After being rescued and getting sober, he turned to participate in various political movements. Through constant study and reflection, Shen took the initiative to move closer to the party. As a writer who had created for more than 20 years, Shen left a large amount of materials written in this period, which truly recorded the pains he suffered and clearly reflected complicated contradictions in his mind. Reading these materials today, it can be found that Cong-wen Shen's writing when he was in mental disorder was unusually sober, which clearly and objectively presented the circumstances at that time as well as the ideological situations of many scholars. However, when Cong-wen Shen became sober after treatment, he became less sober and left a number of "abnormal" words. He constantly denied his own creation and previous achievements; he denied his literary ideals and changed his pursuit, so as to conform to the times. Cong-wen Shen also tried to create works about the new era for several times, but was frustrated repeatedly. These failures also exemplify the abnormality.

2. Sobriety in "Abnormality"

In early January 1949, Peking University posted a batch of big banners and wall posters to denounce Cong-wen Shen. One wall poster copied the full text of Mo-ruo Guo's *Repulsion of Reactionary Literature and Art*. Soon after he received threatening letters, and foresaw that the unbearable persecution would be inevitable even if he stopped writing. Under the intense stimulation, Shen felt unprecedented sense of isolation. In mid January, the feeling developed into insanity. [1] In the middle of September, the condition gradually eased... But mental rehabilitation took long time and repeatedly suffered by drawbacks. [2] Cong-wen Shen's mental abnormality was related to his personality, but the main reasons were political atmosphere and cultural system at that time. In order to monopolize the authoritative discourse, the Communist Party spared no effort to destroy a number

of intellectuals through all propaganda means and cultural violence. Feng-hua Ma, a schoolmate of Cong-wen Shen at the Southwest Associated University, also mentioned the external causes of his abnormality in an article of memory. "After the Chinese Communist Party occupied Peiping... What was really unfortunate was that there were so many 'ants on the hot pot', turning round and round and found there was no way out. Thinking of this, I recalled professor Cong-wen Shen from the Department of Chinese Literature of Peking University. From his experience after the fall of Peiping, we could find the strategy adopted by Communist Party of China in face of intellectuals: utilize scholars that can be persuaded and used, and destroy the others. If they cannot persuade you, you will be tortured and even destroyed through all kinds of ways." [3] During the period of mental disorder, Cong-wen Shen was suffered by this kind of isolation. Although he cannot communicate with ordinary people, the thought contained his writing showed another kind of sobriety in "abnormality". His disciple, Zeng-qi Wang, once said, "Mr. Shen's mind was very clear when he was on the verge of spiritual collapse; what he said was very predictive. The opinions expressed forty years ago are still very accurate today." [4] The sobriety is mainly reflected in following aspects.

Through the truthful record of this isolated situation and the objective presentation of alienation between him and his relatives and friends, Cong-wen Shen expressed his dissatisfaction and protest against the circumstances of the literature circle in an extreme way. He also reproduced the invisible cultural violence posed by the ruling party as well as the persecution suffered by some intellectuals to a certain extent. From the Yenan Forum on Art and Literature to the First Literature and Art Congress, the literary and art systems of New China were gradually established. In order to ensure the authoritativeness and standardization of the ruling party, writers were classified into different groups. The authority redefined the legitimacy of literary creation to restrain free personalities in literature. In order to survive and strive for their own writing powers, many writers had to abandon their original literary and artistic pursuit which was contrary to the new system, and rapidly adjusted themselves to integrate into the literary and art systems of New China. As a countryman, Cong-wen Shen was stubborn and rejected to give up his literary pursuit in the new era. In the particular period, he tried to protect his inner ideals and became isolated, even alienated from his relatives and friends. In his reply to Zhao-he Zhang's letter in January 1949, Cong-wen Shen wrote,

"Little mum, I am not pessimistic at all. After finishing the work, I go to rest naturally! If optimism means to reluctantly echo other people's views and seek momentary ease through submission, what is the use of such optimism? Let other people to be optimistic; I am not pessimistic nevertheless." [5]

Cong-wen Shen realized the mental problem at that time. In order to alleviate the illness, he moved to a friend's house in Tsinghua Garden for recuperation. However, he was conscious that he would rather suffer from mental disorders than compromise with the reality. Optimism and safety at the cost of ideal was meaningless and worthless. Cong-wen Shen's independent and sober expression at that time was the same as concepts he expressed in letter to big brother in September 1942. In the letter, he expressed his willing to insist on the career of literature creation. He was unwilling to be a "third-class politician" who changed views according to circumstances; he chose to fight alone with the unreasonable system through his belief and ideals.

"Many people in the contemporary world could not bear the suffering. They changed their careers, or tired to find a post in the government through boosting third-class politicians. But I am still proud, ambitious and confident enough to learn from experience. Holding on to my pen, I am prepared to fight with popular culture and corrupted old habits. Though my enemy is the whole society, I am able to engage in my career calmly in isolation." [6]

Cong-wen Shen also paid the price for his independent thought. But in the period of mental disorder, he had his own unique analysis and judgment on his madness and the times behind his madness. In a letter to Yi-ying Zhang written in March 1949, Cong-wen Shen, who was on the verge of mental breakdown, wrote, "But now here, apart from mental breakdown and madness, you cannot reach anything. If the Communist Party only wants one person to become crazy and die, it is of course easy to realize." [7] He clearly realized that his collapse and subsequent suicide were closely related to the Communist Party's literary and art policies at that time, and that his life was in their hands. "I am very, very tired. The dog barks. What is it barking at? Eat me, it may become silent. I don't mind to

giving up my life. There's no difference in eaten by a dog and eaten by a tiger." [8] In his reply to his wife's letter, Cong-wen Shen revealed the imprint of the times in his madness more profoundly. "Barking dogs" was an obvious metaphor, rather than realistic description. In his mind, the barking in real life may be associated with Mo-ruo Guo's Repulsion of Reactionary Literature and Art, or with crazy attacks on his literary outlook and literature creation. The meaning of "silence after eating me" was more obvious. The powers of the Party's literary and art propaganda and public opinions are as strong as "dogs and tigers". Extremely ferocious, they can eat and kill people as they wish. Such words are still striking today; they make us sigh at Cong-wen Shen's fate and, at the same time, reconsider literature and art policies of that period.

Cong-wen Shen's adherence to his literary concepts also led to his isolation from relatives and friends. In his letters at that time, Cong-wen Shen expressed soberer understandings. Friends who had known each other for decades became strangers; communications with his wife and children could not be as intimate as before. At the turning point of the times, the changes in his relatives and friends' attitudes also reflect the features of this specific period. These changes not only prove the cruelty of cultural violence, but also show the difficulty and value of individuals' insistence on their own uniqueness in the face of the times and the community; sometimes the cost of insistence is the collapse of spirit and the destruction of body.

"No one understands me. None of my friends can or dare to understand that I am not mad. Everyone is reluctant to take part in since they are afraid of getting entangled... The philosopher Xun Wang does not understand me, either. They really take me as a lunatic. I think a lot of people are involved in the persecution; they are excited about what happened." [9]

At this time, the most intimate friends could not understand Cong-wen Shen, a person that was on the edge of spiritual crisis and personality split, and tried to keep a distance. They became the accomplice of the political and cultural system, passively participated in the process of striking and destroying Cong-wen Shen's spirit, and accelerated the pace of his mental disorder and suicide.

"... I just feel that life is lamentable. The relationship between people and people is so isolated that there is no communication. Despite thirty years of acquaintance, friends become strangers, even enemies. Children at home take me as passers-by; they believe I am crazy from time to time. Am I really crazy? I can't be crazy! But in fact, I may be nearly half mad." [10]

At that time, Cong-wen Shen was lingering on the boundary of madness and awakening; his mind was wandering between normality and abnormality. Seemingly mad, he still insisted on compassion in his creation, deeply analyzing and reflecting himself, describing his friends, relatives, the times and all relationships. Through these extreme changes in relationship, readers can find the pervasive cultural violence in the particular era, and realize the impacts of such violence on people's mental status and interpersonal relations.

In materials left by Cong-wen Shen in this insanity period, he frequently mentioned that the loneliness, craziness and alienation from the community, as well as the alienation between him and his relatives and friends, were sober experiences in "abnormality". Being alone means was less regulated by the system; in that situation, Cong-wen Shen could have further deep thinking and adhere to his ideas and concepts. At the same time, these materials also revealed the influences of literary standardization demand on the literary circle and other writers at that time. The isolation from friends and of relatives showed Cong-wen Shen's unique sobriety. Seemingly crazy, it is actually the unique sobriety of a lunatic.

3. "Abnormality" in Sobriety

Cong-wen Shen was transferred to a psychiatric hospital after he was rescued from suicide in March 1949. His abnormal mental state continued and began to ease in the middle of September, but the insanity still occurred from time to time. In the process of mental transformation from "abnormality" to "normality", Cong-wen Shen gradually became normal. However, in the normal period, his courage and insights which were manifested in the crazy period were missing; "abnormal" phenomena appeared in his writing. The abnormality is mainly manifested in following aspects. On

the one hand, he constantly denied his previous creation, criticized and reflected on his creative ideas, and even stopped writing. On the other hand, he was unable to give up his love and passion for literature creation, and looked for opportunities to write articles for many times. But after changing his literary concepts, Shen could not accomplish some of his works; even finished, the articles were not approved or published. The phenomenon not only reflected the abnormality of Cong-wen Shen in the waking state, but also showed the abnormality in the literary field at that time. A writer's writing style is the result of long-term accumulation of life experience, as well as his world outlook and outlook on life; it cannot be fundamentally changed through short-term political education and cultural violence.

Cong-wen Shen, as a representative of liberal writers, had formed his own unique literary pursuit and writing style in the long-term creation. He adhered to the independence of literature, created a large number of works with unique characteristics, and found his own path of literary creation. The passage wrote in 1930s in the Preface to the Selected Works is a perfect illustration of his creative ideal. "There are people in the world that want to build a lofty pavilion on sand or on water, but that's not me. I just want to build a small Greek temple. I choose a mountain and build the temple with hard stones. Greek temple is my ideal building: exquisite, graceful, well proportioned, small but not delicate. This shrine enshrines human nature." [11] Through literary creation, Cong-wen Shen persisted in building "Greek temples" and presenting "the life form which is beautiful, healthy and natural, and conforms to human nature". The description of human nature made him far away from the times and politics; he weakened or neglected the political propaganda function of literature. Cong-wen Shen chose writing as his career, building up his fortune from scratch. Writing became the whole part of his life and the persistence of his life. In the Black Nightmare wrote in the 1940s, Shen pointed out that the creative undertaking "entangled my life and would last for a lifetime; nothing could change this course." [12] Even in May 1949, when he was seriously ill, Cong-wen Shen clearly expressed the importance of writing in his life in a poem.

"I'm a normal person

...

... Words in my life,

Just like all kinds of notes in the hands of

A great composer or conductor,

Are sensitive and emotional, showing the vitality of life in combination." [13]

In the face of the great changes of the times, Cong-wen Shen was trembling, like walking on thin ice. Undergone sufferings and destructive attacks of mental disorder and suicide, he survived. However, after recovering, Cong-wen Shen expressed another kind of "abnormality" in his writing. Once he regarded literature creation as his life, but under the pressure of the times and the external world, he had to change and give up. He denied his ideal and fruitful achievements, and doubted his own creative abilities. His successive creative attempts afterwards also aggravated this "abnormal" thought.

Cong-wen Shen's thought began to change during the period of hospital treatment. In diary written on April 6, 1949, he wrote, "at the same time, we can see that literature is bound to be combined with propaganda, which is of great significance to education. Compared with personal liberalism, Baiyu actually contributes. They have contributed a lot to the education of people." [14] In these sentences, readers can find his envy of writers who could be smoothly integrated into the new system, and his recognition on the current literary policy: the unity of literary and propaganda, and the combination of literature and politics. At this time Shen began to gradually deviate from his own literary ideal. Later, in November's diary, he continued to reflect and criticize his early literary creation activities, constantly denying and doubting. "I am full of humility and shame, and feel deeply sorry for the country. Why? I don't understand. I just think my past works are meaningless, because they are totally incompatible with the common demands of people. These works are arrogant and self-conceited. [15] "Works in the past are meaningless", he totally denied his past, which he was so proud of and prepared to struggle for a lifetime. To negate his past means to negate his own life. Combined with internal and external situations at that time, it is difficult to tell whether Cong-wen Shen's reflection

and self-criticism are the results of rulers' opposition or his own choice. Readers cannot find out whether Cong-wen Shen was really awake or pretended awake under the pressure of the current situation. Being awake is a normal state of human beings, but Shen's resolute denial and reflection after awakening is a state of "abnormality".

In the early 1950s, Cong-wen Shen was sent to the North China Revolutionary People's University to study. He spent every day in studying documents and reflective reviews. The aim was to remold his ideology, help him to cultivate a sense of identity with the new regime, and integrate into the new era as soon as possible. During his period, Cong-wen Shen expressed following opinions in his letter to a man named Budd in April.

"I have deeply reviewed myself. I have spent thirty years in learning how to write, but there is a fundamental mistake: ignorance of reality. I always regard short stories as exercise, thinking that I need a longer period of exercises to become mature and integrate these works with ideas. Because of this attitude towards work, I cannot adapt to the demands of social development; all efforts are certainly meaningless." [16]

In this letter, Cong-wen Shen deeply reviewed the "ignorance of reality" in his writing for the past three decades, regarded it as a "fundamental mistake" and considered that all his previous efforts were "meaningless". The fundamental denial of his early career was also reflected in a letter to Ying-mao Cheng in the autumn of 1950. "It has been almost two years since I stopped writing. The pen has lost its meaning completely." But actually, the successful of Cong-wen Shen's creative career owed much to his perceptions of reality. The sober Shen was determined to draw a clear line with his past, totally denying what he had insisted in his earlier period. Such a great turning and the era that caused the great turning are obviously abnormal and deserves our deep thinking.

Cong-wen Shen wrote a large number of works in the 1930s and 1940s, which established his position in the literary world. At the turning point of the times, Cong-wen Shen gradually recovered from mental disorder. Although he repeatedly denied his creative ability, Shen still wanted to express his views on the new era through writing, and wanted to return to the society as soon as possible. But abandoned familiar creative ideas and principles, Shen encountered many obstacles in writing. The "returning" process was not smooth. The brief chronicle of Cong-wen Shen chronicle compiled by Hu-chu Shen has following records.

"In the summer of 1950, during his study at Revolutionary University, he established a special friendship with old cooks in the canteen and tried to write the realistic novel *The Old Comrade*, which was unsuccessful.

January 14, 1952, the seventh draft of *The Old Comrade* was completed.

May 1952, the third manuscript of *The Old Comrade* was submitted to a publication and was rejected in August.

In the first half of 1952, he tried to write a documentary sketch *Production Detachment* to describe the life of land reform, which was unpublished.

1955, he tried to be write *The Rich Ren-rui Song* and his *Son*, which was unfinished.

In August 1955, Shen went to Qingdao for nearly a month. He tried to write a short story to criticize intellectuals' poker games, which was unsuccessful.

In February 1958, Shen finished *The Rich Ren-rui Song* and his *Son* which he began to write at 1955. It was the only complete novelette after he changed his profession. The article was unpublished."

As a mature writer, Cong-wen Shen's creative attempts after the founding of New China ended in "unfinished", "unsuccessful" or "unpublished". It is "abnormal" for a writer at the peak of his creative career. This "abnormality" is the product of the times, and inevitably leads to Cong-wen Shen's decision of giving up literature and engaging in studying cultural relics. Thus, the Chinese literature system lost a writer, but the archaeology circle had a new researcher. This is the impermanence of individual's destiny, and the choice of the times and history.

4. Conclusions

Cong-wen Shen's mental disorder after the founding of New China was related to individual personality, but the main reasons were external political pressure as well as cultural violence and oppression. It has particularity and epochal characteristics. The "abnormal" Cong-wen Shen can temporarily put aside the "normal" value judgment system and external public opinions under the cover of "a lunatic", looking on social reality coldly, listening carefully to inner voice, maintaining the independence of his thought and uttering sober words.

Influenced by group pressure, individuals tend to have same perceptions, judgments, believes and behaviors with the majority of group members. Social psychology calls the phenomenon as herd behavior. [17] Psychological experiments have shown that most people act in conformity with others' behaviors when facing uncertain situations, since they are afraid of deviation and being separated from the group. After recovering, Cong-wen Shen lost his independent value concepts under the influence of realistic pressure and living predicament. He approached to the majority of people in judgment and pursuit, and made some "abnormal" sounds.

Cong-wen Shen is a legendary writer and a unique existence in the history of modern literature. His mental disorder, suicide and career change around the founding of New China are closely related to changes of the times and the re-formulation of literary and art policies at that time. To truly comprehend Cong-wen Shen and the literary history at that time, it is of great significance to reinterpret his sober voice in "abnormal" state and "abnormal" sound in waking state.

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