Let me introduce three aspects regarding the study of Shen Congwen in Japan.

1. Why Shen Congwen and his works in Japanese translation have been welcomed in Japan

Shen Congwen was first introduced into Japan in 1926. His short story “Mother” was translated into Japanese by Haru Kasumi that year. After Zhou Zuoren praised Shen Congwen and Fei Ming for their literary excellence during his second visit to Japan in 1934, members of Japan’s Chinese Literature Research Society (Chūgoku Bungaku Kenkyūkai), which was founded in the same year, began to read Shen’s works. Japanese scholars such as Takeda Taisun, Okazaki Toshio, and Matsueda Shigeo began translating and studying Shen Congwen’s works.

Okazaki in a 1934 lecture entitled “Lao She and Shen Congwen” said that “A national literature needs a characteristic spirit. But Chinese literature today lacks this Chinese spirit.” He felt that only Shen Congwen and Lao She embodied this Chinese spirit. He called Shen Congwen a “most gifted writer with a unique and refreshing style.” Citing Su Xuelin’s essay, “On Shen Congwen,” he said, “Shen Congwen’s ideal is to infuse the fresh blood of the West Hunanese people into the veins of the Chinese people, to reinvigorate them.” In March 1934, members of the Chinese Literature Research Society, which was constituted mainly of the graduates and current students of the Chinese department of the Tokyo Imperial University, agreed unanimously that their mission was not loudly to clamor against Japanese militarism during its war of aggression against China, but to allow the Japanese people to know and understand the mood and perceptions of contemporary Chinese under the aggression; hence their urgent duty was to introduce contemporary Chinese literary works. It was the only thing they could do to oppose the stupid war of aggression.

Takeda, Okazaki, Matsueda, and other members of the Chinese Literature Research Society esteemed the works of Shen Congwen and Lao She above those of the proletarian literature popular at the time, because the former works fully and lyrically described the tragedies, triumphs, and vicissitudes of life of rickshaw pullers, boatmen, prostitutes, peasants, and others in
the lower ranks of Chinese society, so that Japanese readers could have a common appreciation of the lives and feelings of Chinese of their own day. The essence of their works was for the most part the common human nature of humanity, not some superficial ism or strained idea of their social class nature.

When Shen Congwen visited Japan in 1982 as a member of a delegation commemorating the tenth anniversary of the reestablishment of Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations, he brought with him a copy of Researches into Ancient Chinese Costume, which he had edited. At a welcoming ceremony at the Tokyo City University, Matsueda Shigeo said, “I am so excited to be able to meet Mr. Shen Congwen, whose works I like so very much.” In 1938, Matsueda had translated eight of Shen’s stories from a Chinese anthology, including Border Town, “The Husband,” “The Lovers,” “Lamp,” “Huiming,” “Baizi,” “Long Zhu,” and “Under Moonlight”; they were published by the Kaizōsha Publishing House. Subsequently other translators rendered “Ox,” “Dusk,” and other short stories into Japanese. In Japan, the very mention of Shen Congwen’s name brings to mind Matsueda’s translations of his works. A great many Japanese students have read them, been influenced, and thereby felt inspired to study Chinese literature.

An Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature with a volume eight devoted exclusively to works by Shen Congwen appeared in 1954; it printed 11 works by Shen, including the eight translated by Matsueda, Tatsuma Shōsuke’s translation of Congwen’s Autobiography, and Okamoto Ryūzō’s translations of “The Inn” and “Before the Wedding.” When Tokyo University professor Kuraki Takashiro visited China in 1954, the Chinese Writers’ Association took exception to the Shen Congwen volume, saying that “Shen Congwen is not a representative Chinese writer,” but Japanese editors maintained Japan’s independent judgment on Shen Congwen and brought out the Shen Congwen volume anyway. That is according to the recollection of the late Professor Maruyama Shōichi. A 1970 book called Modern Chinese Literature printed works by Shen and Ding Ling together, but, due to the influence of China’s Cultural Revolution, it included only five works by Shen: Border Town, “The Husband,” “The Lovers,” “Lamp,” and “Huiming.”

Because Shen Congwen’s reputation was rehabilitated under the new policies of reform and opening up after the smashing of the Gang of Four, at the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution, new scholars began studying Shen Congwen in Japan, too, and they translated some previously untranslated works. Among the single volume collections published were Shiroya Takeo’s translations in a book called A Look at Shen Congwen (2004), which has renditions of nine stories, folk songs, and essays, including “Morning: A Soldier on a Mound of Earth,” “Living,” “Xiaoxiao,” “Pipe,” “Little Scene in Guizhou,” “Ten Years Later,” “Songs of the Zhen’gan Folk,” and “On the Creation of Chinese Fiction.” Kojima Hisayo’s translations in Selected Short Stories of Shen Congwen (2007) include “Guisheng,” “Red Nightmare,” “After Snow,” “Qiaoxiu and Dongsheng,” and “Truth Is Stranger than Fiction.” She also translated all 12 chapters of Discursive Notes on a Trip through Hunan (2008), and published new translations of Border Town, “The Husband,” “Under Moonlight,” “Woman,” “Shantuo,” “Love and Desire,” “The Street,” “Quiet,” and “Gazing at Rainbows,” in the collection Love Stories from a Border Town. Shiroya published an annotated translation of Border Town in 2012. Huke Michinobu has published, in periodicals but not in stand-alone volumes, Remembering Ding Ling, Parts 1 and 2, and Shen Congwen and Zhang Zhaohe’s Letters during a Trip through Hunan. Saitō Hiroki has concentrated on translating Shen’s early works, including “The Simpleton,” and published “Beijing’s Literary Periodicals and Writers.” Nakazatomi Satoshi has translated “Three Men and a Woman.”
2. Can Japanese research on Shen Congwen engage in dialogue with research on Shen Congwen in mainland China and other countries?

Here I can only introduce Japanese studies of Shen Congwen and some of the circumstances under which this research has responded to Chinese and foreign influences. Although these other studies are naturally of great interest to me, I can only read articles in other languages translated into Chinese, because of my limitations in reading other languages. Japan in fact has young scholars who are multilingual, but their numbers are small. I have engaged with Chinese works by Su Xuelin, Han Shiheng, He Yubo, Liu Xiwei, Wang Yao, Ling Yu, Wu Lichang, Xiang Chengguo, Liu Hongtao, Zhang Xinying, Zhou Renzheng, and the like, works by the Americans C. T. Hsia, Hua-ling Nieh, Jeffrey C. Kinkley, and David Der-wei Wang, as well as Wong Yoon Wah (Wang Runhua) of Singapore. Japanese scholars not only have read these works but also translated them into Japanese. For instance, after Imaizumi Hideto translated into Japanese Li Kailing's essay, “Subtle and Yet Deeply Felt: Discussing Shen Congwen’s Literary Distinctiveness through His Story ‘Xiaoxiao’” and David Der-wei Wang’s essay, “Invitation to a Beheading: Lu Xun and Shen Congwen,” Imaizumi published an article called “Two Child Brides: The Achievement of Shen Congwen’s ‘Xiaoxiao,’” which was inspired by the articles by the other two scholars. From this we can say that Japan’s Shen Congwen scholars are very interested in and much enlightened by the research of those abroad.

Specialized study of Shen Congwen in Japan began in the second half of the 1980s, with my “‘Constancy’ and ‘Change’ in Shen Congwen’s Literature, with a Focus on Border Town and Long River” (1985), which was informed by Ling Yu’s research. In December of that year, Shiroya Takeo’s Investigation of the Themes in Border Town, written after his on-site investigations in Chadong, clarified the fact that the “Borderlands that All Three Provinces Don’t Care About” is an area of mixed Han, Miao, and Tujia ethnicity, an area symbolizing struggle between the three groups, as well as a special region that Sichuan, Hunan, and Guizhou have preferred not to administer. Putting together the fragmented human relations of this special “border town” area, he with philosophical depth contemplated the story’s tragic character. Shiroya’s “Comparative Research on Shen Congwen and Nakagami Kenji,” included in Research on Shen Congwen (2008), was informed by Jeffrey C. Kinkley’s comparative research on Shen Congwen and William Faulkner, but Shiroya, from a Japanese standpoint, compared Shen Congwen and Nakagami as people who originated in an unprestigious region. I wrote four articles from 1990 to 1994 about “Under Moonlight” and other stories in the book that appeared under that title (my articles were collected in Shen Congwen: The Man and His Works). They built on the research of China’s Xie Huichang’s Shen Congwen and Buddhist Stories (1989) and particularly the methodology of Kitaoka Masako’s essay on Lu Xun’s “The Power of Mara Poetry.” After a detailed comparison of the Under Moonlight stories with those in the Forest of Gems in the Garden of the Dharma and other Buddhist tales, I analyzed how Shen Congwen rewrote the Buddhist Jataka tales and Tujia folklore, making them into modern works of literature. A Chinese translation of my first article about “Under Moonlight” was included in the 2006 Chinese compendium, Research Materials on Shen Congwen. I have also written about Shen Congwen’s Alice’s Adventures in China. Su Xuelin regarded it as children’s literature and called it a failure within his oeuvre. Other critics of the era also panned it, and Shen Congwen himself felt that it was a failure. But Ling Yu saw it as a satirical work, not as children’s literature, and I, as well as other critics, agreed. In my “Alice’s Travels in China: A Pastiche,” after detailed analysis, I found a parallel symbolic master-slave relationship: that of the Miao (slaves) and Han (masters) and Chinese (slaves) and imperialist powers.
(masters), as indicated by the sign in the Shanghai Bund park, “No dogs or Chinese allowed.” Shen Congwen’s work clearly exposed and satirized how the Miao were plundered and insulted at the bottom of society, under a double layered oppression of the ruled by the rulers. Kojima also pointed out that Shen Congwen, having mixed Miao, Tujia, and Han ancestry himself, bore the contradiction of ruler and ruled within himself, and therefore could more sharply and penetratingly understand this contradiction than other writers.

Most research on Shen Congwen in recent years has analyzed works from his Beijing period, or investigated his connection with Lu Xun and other social relationships. For instance, Kō Airei’s Shen Congwen, Hu Yepin, and Lu Xun in Beijing, 1925 (1993) overturned previous ideas by establishing that the tension between Shen Congwen and Lu Xun originated in rivalry over publication in literary journals.

Saitō Hiroki, after investigating the social relations of Shen Congwen, Hu Yepin, Xu Zhimo, Wen Yiduo, and Yu Gengyu during Shen’s Beijing period, wrote “Hu Yepin’s Trip to Hunan: Shen Congwen and Hu Yepin in June 1925” and “Zikuan in [Lu Xun’s] Hesitation: On Shen Congwen’s ‘The Simpleton’” (2002), which produced a true portrait of Shen Congwen through his social relations. Under the direction of Prof. Wu Lichang of Fudan University, Nakano Tomohiro wrote “Shen Congwen in Wusong” (2001) after investigating Shen Congwen’s friendships while he taught at the Wusong China Institute; he established the existence of a Wusong literary group. Imaizumi Hideto used narrative theory in “Border Town’s Story: Shen Congwen and National Consciousness” (1992). His “Two Child Brides: The Accomplishment of Shen Congwen’s ‘Xiaoxiao’” (2008) was influenced by his translation of an article by Li Kailing that compared Lu Xun’s “The New Year’s Sacrifice” to Shen Congwen’s “Xiaoxiao.” Tsumori Aki’s “The ‘Native-Soil Quality’ Hidden in Shen Congwen’s Images of Women: White Goddesses or Black Rural Maidens?” (2007) raises an idea contrary to that of xiangtu (rural, native-soil, or homeland) literature as used by Prasenjit Duara and Lu Xun so often cited in the study of modern Chinese literature, in an attempt to establish Shen Congwen’s real “view of the native soil.” Another article of Tsumori’s, “Dissolving the Inner Emptiness of the ‘Rural’: Beginning with Shen Congwen’s Images of Women” (2007), analyzing “Three Men and a Woman” and noticing that there is no concrete description of the women, very interestingly points out that the inner emptiness of the femme fatale creates a sense of unfathomability. She also points out the colorfulness of Shen Congwen’s works about West Hunan. Inspired by Prof. Liu Hongtao’s New Views on Shen Congwen’s Fiction, who was influenced by Gérard Genette’s Narrative Discourse, Tsumori uses the idea of the “repetition mode” to analyze the treatment of time in Shen Congwen’s native-soil works.

Hamada Maya analyzes the images of young women students in her article, “An Unsolvable Riddle: The Image of Women Students in Shen Congwen’s ‘Xiaoxiao.’” She argues that the value of the story lies in the author’s ability to categorize and objectively view the objects of his affection, while adopting the country person’s view of such women students. Availing herself of research by Li Kailing, Zhang Bifang, Yang Yuzhen, and others, she goes a step beyond them in her own viewpoint. Hamada believes that if [Lu Xun’s] “Regret for the Past” describes an urban male’s love for the new woman that ends in failed romance, then “Xiaoxiao” is a story that moves the stage to a mountain village in the borderlands to depict how country folk see the young women students in the latter’s new collective and abstract state. Hamada points out that when Xiaoxiao encounters the students, her inner feelings are not indicated, because Xiaoxiao cannot express them in words, or perhaps simply does not “understand” what she has seen. And perhaps Shen Congwen in life similarly did
not “understand” Zhang Zhaohe, because he expressed his love of her through “monologue” instead of “dialogue.” I further note materials that Hamada has uncovered in the Shen Bao (Shanghai News) indicating that Zhang Zhaohe was indeed a multitalented new woman, which would suggest that Shen Congwen, the country bumpkin, must have had feelings of inferiority before this woman of both talent and beauty.

Tsumori Aki’s “From Seeker of Scents to Worshiper of Music: On Shen Congwen’s Wavering Trajectory in his Seven Color Nightmares Collection”32 is included in revised form in the present book, so I will not go into detail, but I still must mention it as an outstanding contribution to Shen Congwen studies. This article profoundly and conscientiously analyzes the reasons for Shen Congwen’s attempted suicide in 1949, using both extrinsic methodology (giving due importance to evidence from historical documents, the background of the times, his biography, and thought), and intrinsic methodology (giving due importance to the various explanations of researchers). In light of Shen’s proposition in The Candle Extinguished to the effect that writing is a lesser endeavor than painting, which is in turn a lesser endeavor than music, Tsumori analyzes each essay in the Seven Color Nightmares in comparison to the emphasis on smell and sight in Shen’s 1930s works Congwen’s Autobiography and Discursive Notes on a Trip through Hunan. She concludes that the Seven Color Nightmares waver between the sense of hearing and that of sight; passing from scenic descriptions coming from the sense of sight, he gradually entered onto a wavering trajectory of gradual escape from reality by reverting to the proposition that “music equals nature.” By meticulously comparing different editions, Tsumori Aki extracts from Water and Clouds the proposition that “beauty cannot stand still in the landscape.” She also points out that Shen Congwen’s descriptions of sounds in his 1930s works are always sounds of nature or folk songs, whereas in the 1940s he experienced a conversion to the melodies of Western music: “in the music to which he had converted, the author always sought ‘respite’ and ‘salvation.’” This is another form of release that Shen Congwen sought when he attempted suicide in 1949. This argument is very persuasive, and this essay won an Ōta Katsuhiro award.

Tsumori Aki’s “Shen Congwen’s Fetishes: Writing about Hair and Corporealized Difference between the Urban and Rural” analyzes Shen Congwen’s descriptions of women under three rubrics. (A) His praise of West Hunanese women under the standard that “West Hunan is good” and “cities are degenerate.” (B) His criticism from the standpoint of realism. (C) And, from analysis of Shen Congwen’s own loves, marriage, and extramarital romances, in view of the inadequacy of the urban/rural dichotomy, she finds the extremes of praise and criticism under the first two rubrics unimportant and thus reconstructs Shen’s images of women using theories about sexual fetishes, with focus on his depictions of female hairstyles. From such analysis one can see that Shen Congwen’s images of West Hunanese and urban women are by no means static, but instead evidence mutual correspondences. She aduces the “new-style curly coiffures” shown in the contemporary Beiyang huabao (Peiyang Pictorial News), the short hairstyle of the American film actress Marion Davies, Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s painting, The Annunciation, reproduced in China’s Crescent Moon magazine, and James McNeill Whistler’s painting, Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl. She also points out that urban women’s clipped hairstyles as depicted in Shen’s early works “Events to Be Filed under ‘A,’” “A Soiree,” and the foreword to The Diary of Master Huang, may have been inspired by images of models in the Beiyang huabao. Further, descriptions of the black snake-like pigtails of West Hunanese female protagonists in “Xiaoxiao,” “After Rain,” and The Story of Ahei symbolize the serpent that lures the Biblical Adam and Eve into their awakening to “sex”; the luxuriant brown hair or hair coiled up like a nest on top of the head of the heroines of “Xiaoxiao” and “The Inn,” along
with their facial expressions when they gaze at the male body, evidence an awakening to sex among the West Hunanese female characters. The heroines of “Meijin, Baozi, and the White Kid,” “Under Moonlight,” and “The Zither Player’s Love” let their long hair hang down behind them, which Tsu-mori feels distantly resonates with the Whistler painting. These descriptions of three kinds of hairdo for West Hunanese women are images of urban women’s hairstyles and the fin-de-siècle imaginings of European and American painters. Conversely, the festishistic representations of West Hunanese women lead back to urban women, and thus to the creation of Shen’s heroines in “Portrait of Eight Steeds” and “Gazing at Rainbows.” In the end, she turns to Shen Congwen’s technique of creating empty spaces in which “the narrator or main protagonist is silent, without loquacious interior monologues”; the silent “smiles” the characters show amid silence, the “meaningful glances” they share at dusk, or as they gaze at waters lit by bonfires, portray the inner worlds of the West Hunanese. Tsu-mori assures us that this “reverse image” descriptive method is the greatest achievement born of Shen Congwen’s festishistic psychology. Tsu-mori Aki’s line of argument is rich and colorful, her focus new and original; I look forward to her forthcoming monograph.

3. Distinctive features of research on Shen Congwen outside of China

A Emphasizing Shen Congwen’s national minority ethnicity is Jeffrey C. Kinkley’s comparison of Shen and William Faulkner, Shiroya Takeo’s study of Shen’s similarities and differences with Nakagami Kenji, who also came from an unprestigious region, and my own “Alice’s Adventures in China: A Pastiche” (1996). I point out that Shen’s novel is a deeply satirical work in which Shen, standing on the side of the Miao, points out that the relations between Miao and Han are like those between China and the imperialists. It is by no means children’s literature. Nakamura Midori’s “Shen Congwen: The Choice between Narrative and Identity” (2000) discusses Shen Congwen’s sense of identity in regard to the national minorities and West Hunan, pointing out that “the attractive power of Shen Congwen lies in his suspension between Han and national minority, and intellectual and country fellow, choices that seem opposite but are really closely related; he does his utmost to preserve his own equilibrium between ‘modernity’ and the flow of time,” to the point of “pursuing his own identity and enduring personal suffering.” My own “Research on Under Moonlight” compares that volume of Shen’s with Buddhist stories, analyzing how Shen Congwen adapted them, while pointing out an aspect of Shen Congwen’s aesthetic viewpoint. I believe that a horizontal comparison of Shen Congwen’s works with others that describe minority peoples and those from unprestigious areas might be a fruitful research method.

B Regarding different editions and versions of Shen’s works, Shiroya Takeo has studied editions of Shen’s works in Comparing Editions of Shen Congwen’s Border Town (2005) and Research into Different Editions of Shen Congwen’s “Xiaoxiao,” “Ajin,” and “Ox” (2006). And there is a fact that cannot be ignored; due to political apprehensions, there were many changes in the 1957 edition of Shen’s works. Shiroya has carefully compared 25 different editions of Shen’s works. The Chinese themselves are not too interested in these matters, but I believe that such things must be taken seriously in order to understand Shen Congwen’s position and to analyze his works in their time. I hope that researchers in China, when discussing the debates between Shen Congwen and Lu Xun, will consult the original texts. Only by consulting them [and not
subsequently edited versions) can one clarify what Shen Congwen and Lu Xun were debating. This is a fundamental qualification for proper research. The Shen Congwen wenji (The works of Shen Congwen) contain essays that have been censored and revised according to later political considerations. The Shen Congwen quanji (The complete works of Shen Congwen) clarifies which texts are being reprinted. Items from the “Beijing Types” vs. “Shanghai Types” debate are the original documents as they were written, without changes. I truly admire the labors and skills expended by the editors of the Complete Works in the 20 years since publication of the earlier collection, so I would like to give them special recognition here.

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Notes

1 Beijing zhoubao, nos. 203, 204 (April 4, 11, 1926).
2 Chūgoku bungaku shihō 1.3 (May 1935).
3 Shōsei, no. 4 (2002).
4 Sapporo dō shoten (2004).
5 Chūgoku bunko henshū seisaku (2007).
6 Yoshifumi shoten (2008).
8 Sapporo dō shoten (July 2012).
11 Hiuu, nos. 9, 10 (March, September 2001).
12 Shōsei, nos. 7, 8 (2005, 2006).
13 Shōsei, no. 5 (October 2003).
14 Shōsei, no. 9 (October 2007).
15 Mina, no. 26 (March 2008).
16 Yasō, no. 82, (August 2008).
17 Tōyō bunka, no. 65 (March 1985).
18 Hokkai Gakuen Daigaku gakuen ronshū, no. 52 (December 1985).
20 Kyūko shoin (June 1997).
21 He Naiying, tr., Moluo shilishuo caiyuan kao (Beijing: Beijing Shifan Daxue chubanshe, 1983).
22 Meikai Daigaku gakokugo gakubu ronshū, no. 8 (1996).
24 Hiuu, no. 6 (March 1999).
25 Hiuu, no. 11 (March 2002).
26 Nihon Chūgoku gakkaihō, no. 53 (October 2001).
27 Kansai Daigaku Chūgoku bungaku kyōyō, no. 13 (March 1992).
28 Tōhōgaku, no. 113 (2007).
29 Gendai Chūgoku, no. 81 (September 2007).
30 Beijing Shifan Daxue chubanshe (2005).
31 Hamada Maya, Tōhōgaku 131 (January 2016).
32 Chūgoku kenkyūgeppo 67.12 (December 2013).
33 Shin Jihun kenkyū (Sapporo dō shoten, November 2008).
34 Jinbun gakuhō, no. 311 (March 2000).
35 Sapporo dō shoten (December 2005).