

Shi Zhecun's "The Inn": A Translation and Analysis

by

Olivia Negus

Presented to the faculty of the Department
of East Asian Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in the Distinguished Majors Program
of Chinese Language and Literature

Charles A. Laughlin, Advisor

University of Virginia
April 30th, 2017

Table of Contents:

“The Inn”: Translation	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	3
“The Inn”: Analysis	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	14
Introduction	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	14
Part I	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	17
Part II	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	30
Conclusion	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	36
Bibliography	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	40

“The Inn”: Translation

Mr. Ding was at long last received into the only empty room in the town’s only inn by a short innkeeper with a dark complexion. He and the innkeeper walked past three houses and their respective courtyards, went through an alley separated off by a wooden partition, and then turned another bend. Thereupon, the innkeeper came to a stop in front of the narrow wooden door. The innkeeper then -- with one hand pushing open the door and at the same time bowing respectfully towards Mr. Ding -- using the amicable and respectful tone of a luxury hotel attendant, said: “Please come in.”

Mr. Ding craned his neck to look into the room and unconsciously furrowed his eyebrows. Despite the fact that he knew of the decrepit nature of inns in the countryside, this place where he was being cordially accommodated was completely outside the realm of his expectations. From the weak light of dusk leaking through the room’s four lattice windows made of oyster shell, Mr. Ding was able to roughly make out the furnishings of the room. It had a large wooden bed with a traditional-style indigo-and-white canopy hanging over it, western-style washing basin, and a traditional octagonal game table with a few playing stools. The room seemed relatively sizable, but only because there were so few pieces of furniture. This place really is quite squalid, Mr. Ding thought. It most certainly would not have any benefit to his health, and it was humiliating to his own status to be here, even if no one else knew he was here. However, Mr. Ding most adeptly recalled that this was in fact the only empty room in the only inn in town. Thus, upon this realization, the words that he was about to speak -- those that would have caused the innkeeper’s cordial smile to disappear -- retreated back down his throat. He instead replaced this sentence with a much simpler one: “Alright, I’ll take it.”

The innkeeper gave him a Mobil oil lamp, closed the door, and left. Mr. Ding took his pajamas and slippers out of his small leather suitcase and changed. He stood up from the bed and picked up his clothes, attempting as he was accustomed to doing to hang them up in a clothing rack or wardrobe. Unfortunately, though, this room didn't have a place, such as a wardrobe or clothing rack, to hang up his clothes. Right as he was hesitating about what to do with his clothes, he suddenly discovered a clothing trunk placed on top of a skirt trunk next to a traditional chamber pot behind the bed. "Oh, this!" Mr. Ding said to himself. He passed over the chamber pot and used his other hand to lift the lid of the trunk. As soon as he saw that the clothing trunk was indeed empty, he put his clothes inside the trunk and closed the lid.

When he was at home, every night after putting on his slippers and changing into his pajamas, Mr. Ding would always sit in his armchair and proceed to smoke a cigarette. So, he lit a cigarette preparing to smoke it as per usual, however much to his frustration, the inn did not have such a chair. He paced back and forth throughout the room on the rough and uneven floor, which caused his slippers to feel abnormally uncomfortable. Hatred for his French friend inevitably welled up as a result.

Mr. Ding was a businessman from Shanghai. He had inherited his father's position more than twenty-three years before. He was extremely busy every day, and even on Sunday he hardly had any free time. As a result, he gradually became ill with neurasthenia.¹ Everything he did was defined by a sense of complete disarray. For example, he would hurry to the stock exchange to hear the news of the bond market, only to remember that it was Sunday. After having some bouts of panic, he feared that he

¹ The second edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* published in 1968 by the American Psychiatric Association describes this condition as "characterized by complaints of chronic

would either go mad or die. This fear of madness or death began to take hold of his mind, making the illness even more difficult to deal with. He had a dear friend from France, though, who urged him to temporarily abandon his cosmopolitan life to travel in solitude to China's countryside. His French friend offered up his own experience as an example: while he had lived in Paris he suffered from a similar bout of neurasthenia. He went to a small village about fifty miles outside of Paris to rest for two weeks, and this experience proved that the countryside was the cure for his illness. The countryside's scenery and clean air, in addition to its solitude and tranquility, his French friend said, would be the only medicine to cure his illness. Thus, after a night of heavy consideration and study of a map, Mr. Ding was conveyed by means of a small steamship and then sampan to this place where he could avail himself of the inn's hospitality.

France's rural towns must not be as useless as this! He lightly tapped his cigarette and intently stared at the small pile of ash accumulating on the floor. After going through many circles of thought, he came to this conclusion: he would forgive his French friend. He very well knew that it wasn't that his friend had intentionally tricked him. It was instead the lousy and dilapidated nature of China's rural countryside that should be held accountable. He looked carefully at every piece of furniture in the room again, taking note of the various characteristics of these things: wood quality, style, and age. All of them were different in some way, and in the gloomy lighting, each piece of furniture seemed to display a mystical quality. He thought of the fact that as the guest of this room, he had become the temporary owner of these things for the night. Although it was already a matter of fact, for some reason he still felt it was oddly improbable. In the quiet

countryside, in this strange room, gazing at the wavering shadow on the wooden partition, he even began to question his own existence.

He yawned many times in a row and so thought he should go to sleep. He went to lie down on the big, clumsy bed. Although the thought that it was still too early to go to sleep wriggled through his mind, it did not stop the allure of climbing in bed as it would have in Shanghai. But with this thought all he could do was sit on the edge of the bed; he didn't simply lie down and burrow into the dirty quilt. With curious eyes, he started evaluate the traditional-style indigo-and-white canopy atop the bed. He looked around at all four of its corners and eventually his eyes stopped at the apex of the canopy. He thought that the canopy seemed very large. Thereupon, as if through much deliberation he suddenly discovered something new, he realized that the largeness of the canopy indicated that the bed must also be very large. As expected, the bed indeed was very large. He thought it was large enough for him to roll over three times while lying down in it.

Why did the inn have this kind of large bed? Mr. Ding's suspicions began to arise. Oh! And there was also the trunk behind the bed. He had never seen the room of an inn set up like this before. Surely not all the inns in the countryside were set up in this way? Oh, that's it! This room certainly is not used for guests. Perhaps... perhaps what? He thought that this room perhaps might be the bedroom of the innkeeper or one of his family members. From the setup of this room -- the big bed, the clothing trunk, the room being in the very back of the inn -- the fact that this was not a room meant for guests became clear. Thinking about the peculiarities of this inn, he was suddenly ambushed by fear. Mr. Ding had once read *Jottings from the Thatched Abode of Close Observations*

(*Yuewei caotang biji*) and *Writings Done in the Rainy Nights Under the Autumn Lamp* (*Yeyu qiudeng lu*)² and such short stories, and he remembered something about an innkeeper who had given a guest a room in which a woman had recently died. As a result, in the middle of the night the guest came across the terrifying ghost of the woman.

Once this story drifted into his consciousness, he started to reconsider the circumstances of the innkeeper renting him this room and began to have misgivings. Did the innkeeper not initially say that all of the inn's twenty or thirty rooms were full? Why then after much deliberation did he say: "there still is one empty room"? It was certainly obvious that this room was not meant for guests to stay in. In that case... perhaps someone died in here: the innkeeper's wife? Daughter-in-law? Daughter? Yes, that's right, since there was a woman in here that must be why the clothing and skirt trunks are still out. And this bed... as soon as Mr. Ding thought of the bed he had a fit of shivers. He thought of himself sitting on the bed, and he felt it was as if his body was pressing down upon the terrifying, cold corpse of a woman underneath. He shut his eyes, and he would not dare reach below him.

He felt scared for a moment. Finally realizing that at least at this moment the ghost had not yet appeared, he felt comfortable opening his eyes slightly. He then lifted up the canopy and reached his hand out towards the table to turn up the kerosene lamp so that the flame was brighter. However, he still did not dare stretch his head outside the canopy because he was scared of seeing something strange in the dim corner of the room.

² *Jottings from the Thatched Abode of Close Observations* by Ji Yun and *Writings Done in the Rainy Nights Under the Autumn Lamp* by Xuan Ding are two collections of short stories from the Qing Dynasty period. Both collections are known for their presentation of ghosts, spirits, and other aspects of the supernatural (Ma 247-249; "Yeh-yü chi'iu-teng lu." 584-585).

It was not until his head was already on the pillow and he was preparing to fall asleep that he suddenly began to feel unsure about the Mobil oil lamp on the table. He always slept with an electric lamp on at home. The electric lamp would always be brightly shining, from when he went to sleep up until when he would wake at seven o'clock the next day. However, considering this kind of oil lamp -- one he had never had experience with using before -- he had suspicions that it may end up causing a fire. Perhaps a rat would come and overturn it and in the silent moments of the night it would explode into raging flames. Mr. Ding once again sat up on the bed and reached his hand out through the canopy to turn down the flame of the lamp.

Right then, Mr. Ding became convinced that he saw a flash of light outside the window, despite being separated from outside by both the canopy and the window. He thought that there must be someone outside looking around with a flashlight. But who could it be? Why would someone be looking around the inn with a flashlight in the middle of the night? Oh! Perhaps this is one of those "black inns."³ He thought that this conclusion was much more logical than thinking there was a corpse in the room, the idea he had come up with just a moment ago. He remembered that the innkeeper shut the door behind him when he left the room. It was clear that he bolted and locked the door from the outside. But should he go try the door to see if it was locked? "No, no I shouldn't!" Mr. Ding said to himself. "If the person outside heard me trying the door, they would know that I was already onto their plan to rob and kill me. In that case, they would think they might as well cut to the chase and finish me off. So wouldn't trying the door just be

³ *Heidian* (黑店) in Chinese literally translates to "black inn" and is meant to describe an inn that robs and kills its guests. These types of establishments are especially common in traditional Chinese literature. Tales of such inns are also found in Western culture, specifically in American frontier culture. For example, the "Bloody Benders" were a family of serial killers who owned a general store and inn in Kansas in the late 1800s. Different iterations of this anecdote have been found in various short stories and film (Hallowell).

hastening my own death? But if I don't try and leave the room, what will they do then?" In regards to this question, Mr. Ding certainly did not lack the ability to conjure up a multitude of answers.

He thought that the person lurking outside the window would most certainly wait until he was sound asleep to pry open the window and come into the room. Thinking of this and the fact that he was already in bed, he deeply regretted that he did not sturdily bolt the locks on the door and windows before getting in bed. However, even if he had done this and the locks were sturdily bolted, what use would it have? Don't all black inns have underground tunnels? In a room there would often be an old cauldron with the exit to an underground tunnel right underneath it. Thinking about this, Mr. Ding couldn't help but to quietly sit up to peer out of the canopy.

Why hadn't he looked around carefully before climbing into bed? Using a slight peephole he made, he used one eye to peer underneath the table and the washing basin. He didn't see anything underneath these two objects, so he then shifted his focus to the skirt trunk and the area below the window. Even if he didn't discover a cauldron covering the exit to a hidden tunnel, perhaps he would discover a fresh and motionless corpse. It could be that of the innkeeper's wife, daughter-in-law, or daughter! That's right, inside a crooked inn such as this, this kind of thing often occurred. It was this skirt trunk, though, that caused him to be skeptical most of all. What kind of room was set up like this anyway? Yes, that's for sure, they definitely use this skirt trunk for something. It most certainly has a false bottom. At the very least it had a sliding bottom that could be pushed, with the exit to the hidden tunnel underneath the bottom. Why didn't he open the lid of the trunk to inspect it and then securely shut it? Mr. Ding was feeling both

frightened and distressed. He felt that the fact that he forgot to do many of these crucial things before he got in the bed was indeed because of his own carelessness.

Mr. Ding then placed all of his attention on listening through his ear and held his breath so that he could hear better. He listened attentively to the sounds outside of the window, and it seemed that he could hear everything outside, even the very breath of the person lurking outside the window. He then turned his attention to listening to the sounds below him. It seemed that there was indeed a tunnel below the floor with one or two people stealthily creeping up it. Mr. Ding had such acute senses that not only did he hear these people, he was actually able to see the expression of the man wielding the knife outside the window as well as the malevolent and fiendish expressions of those people in the tunnel. Mr. Ding felt that now might be his last chance to act, and a most clever thought came to his mind: “they will most definitely wait until I’m sound asleep to put their plan into action”. Wanting to delay the impending attack, Mr. Ding felt he should make it clear that he had not yet fallen asleep. Thus, he let out a timid cough.

This cough, however, only allowed him a few minutes of calm. After a short time passed, he thought it might have been long enough for the lurking rouses to mistakenly think he had already fallen asleep. When he felt the time was appropriate, he let a second cough emerge out of his dry throat. He kept up like this for seven coughs, and then he suddenly saw that there was another even brighter flash outside the window. At the same time as this, there was a scratching sound that came from the skirt trunk behind the bed. These two occurrences made it seem that his strategy had failed, and Mr. Ding collapsed down on the bed dejectedly. Indifferent to how dirty it was, he pulled the quilt up to

cover both his head and face in one quick gesture. He did this because he suddenly felt very panicked and didn't know what else he could possibly do.

Nevertheless, he again came to perceive a couple new ideas. For one, he knew that wrapping oneself up in a quilt was no way to evade mortal danger. Secondly, he also knew that the lurking rogue still had not yet entered the room. This was perhaps because when he carelessly flopped down on the bed just a moment ago it made a trembling noise. Wanting to take advantage of this last opportunity, Mr. Ding churned out from his brain a most ingenious way to avoid death. He would shout loudly for the inn steward, feigning need for a cup of hot water. However, he feared that the lurking rogue outside of the window was in fact the inn's steward. Thus, he lost the courage to put this plan into action.

Because of this, he thought the only remaining option was to quickly go and tie down the lid of the skirt trunk so that the people inside the tunnel would not be able to come up. Yes, sure, this would be easy enough to do, and even if he still had to stay up all night to keep watch over the trunk, as long as he was able to avoid death it would no doubt be worth it. Mr. Ding leaned his body towards the side of the bed closest to the wall, lifted up the canopy slightly, and carefully looked out. At present, there was nothing else that was frightening apart from the eerily quiet chamber pot and skirt trunk. Finally mustering up the courage to get off the bed, he leaped down and came out through the canopy. The canopy in front of the bed had not moved and hung down the same way as before, so he was convinced that the person outside the window had no way of knowing that he was no longer in bed. What was unexpected, though, was that upon looking at the skirt trunk, he found that it was already locked. He carefully investigated the hinge and

lock, and it did not seem like they could be moved. But again, why was this? Why would they want to lock the trunk? Clearly there was something inside that they did not want guests to see. At this moment, an utterly different but equally as frightening fear replaced his idea that there was an underground tunnel hidden below the trunk. Inside the trunk there must be a dead corpse, or at the least some bloody garments and other such things. Mr. Ding felt his hair stand up and because he was frightened again, he used the most nimble movements possible to stealthily slip back into the bed.

Mr. Ding couldn't help exhaling, but this time it wasn't with the purpose of trying to scare off some person or ghost. He seemed to have a premonition that that night even if the lurking rogue didn't kill him, a ghost certainly would. He was so paralyzed with fear that as he was lying down on the bed it was as if he had become a corpse himself. The four corners of the room remained quiet, and he determined that this murder would remain a secret. No one else knew he was here, so who would be able to publicly report it? His thoughts became foggy and muddled, much unlike the endless stream of ideas and workings of his imagination from just a moment ago. His sense of time and space completely faded away.

His eyes stayed in a fixed stare. The first thing they saw was a white spot the size of a copper coin in between two big flowers on the top of the canopy. The white spot gradually moved back and halted on the window. From the window, the white spot gradually expanded outward and slightly blue-ish white began to encompass the four corners of the room. The area encompassed in white continued getting bigger. Mr. Ding's mouth was ajar, with a weary drool flowing out. His upper eyelids hung down heavily as

if he was in some sort of trance. He thought that there was a ghost and the lurking rogue standing on either side of him and it was clear he had been suffocated.

At the same time, all the other guests in the inn were getting up and all around there was continual clamor. The steward was outside the door and looking for clues as to whether or not Mr. Ding was awake. He quietly retreated after hearing his thunderous snoring.

Introduction

Following the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911 and with the impetus of the May Fourth protests of 1919, modern Chinese literature began to flourish. As a result of the New Culture Movement, which was headed by figures such as Hu Shi, Chen Duxiu, and Lu Xun, the use of vernacular language blossomed and led to one of the most prolific periods of modern fiction writing in China. However, at the start of the Japanese aggression and the second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, many authors from this time period had to end their literary activities. Stability in China was restored after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, but Communist party policies towards the arts were not supportive of all types of literature that was being published in the 1920s and 1930s. These policies were favorable towards literature with political or revolutionary overtones and not supportive of the literature they believed to be antithetical to their purposes. Mao Zedong formally established this stance in his "Talks at the Yanan Forum on Art and Literature." He specified that literature should be used solely for the advancement of political agendas. Thus, the creativity and proliferation of modern Chinese literature was largely stifled until the death of Mao and the fall of the "Gang of Four" in 1976. Following these events, many writers were inspired to begin publishing again due to increased creative freedom and desire to comment on many of the events of past several decades. It was in this context that Shi Zhecun's fiction and larger contributions to the literary field in the 1920s and 1930s began to be reexamined and garner renewed literary attention (Shi, 2007a 8).

Shi Zhecun had myriad occupations in the field of literature over his lifetime. In addition to publishing fiction, he was a journal editor, translator, accomplished essayist,

and scholar of Tang dynasty poetry. In fact, his time as a novelist lasted a mere ten years. However, in the years from 1928 to 1937 he published eight complete short story collections and nearly sixty short stories total (Ge 156). In interviews following his writing career, Shi himself consistently condemns the first three collections of short stories he published: *Rivers (Jiangan ji)*, *The Girl Juanzi (Juanzi guniang)*, and *Pursuit (Zhui)*. He alleges these stories to be unrefined and naive, often refusing to acknowledge them as representative works (Ge 157). As a result, he thus claims *The Lantern Festival (Shangyuandeng)* to be his first legitimate collection of stories. There are ten stories in the collection and “most are expressive of a sort of pale melancholy which manifests itself through the nostalgic feelings of the adults of the past” and have “a lyrical atmosphere permeating throughout” (Ge 157). The three collections following this, *The General’s Head (Jiangjun de tou)*, *One Evening in the Rainy Season (Meiyu zhixi)*,⁴ and *Virtues of Kind-Hearted Women (Shan nüren xingpin)*,⁵ are his most well known. *Little Treasures (Xiao zhen ji)* in 1936 was Shi’s last publication and stands in stark contrast to the rest of his works. At this point, Shi had largely abandoned his use of psychoanalytic techniques as a response to pressure from literary societies such as the League of Left-Wing Writers. Eventually, the combination of the tensions of the literary world and the unfavorable environment at the start of Sino-Japanese War in 1937 forced his exodus from writing (Shih 366). During the war years, he continued to publish critical essays and began teaching at universities, however even after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 Shi did not return to writing fiction. It is difficult to say what

⁴ Shi Zhecun’s collection and short story by the same name *Meiyu zhixi* is most commonly translated as *One Evening in the Rainy Season* but has also been translated as *An Evening of Spring Rain* and *One Rainy Evening*.

⁵ The title of this collection has also been translated as *Exemplary Conduct of Virtuous Women*.

prevented his return to fiction, but many authors postulate that implicit political pressure and disdain for the calls for revolutionary literature increased the appeal of a permanent retreat into the secure world of pre-modern Chinese literature (Lee 188).

In beginning to analyze “The Inn” specifically, I will first consider the findings of others who have written on Shi Zhecun. I will do this in Part I of my analysis. I will structure this based on a particular observation I made when reading academic works on Shi Zhecun. Though Shi’s short story collections often have a larger thematic cohesion, certain characteristics of stories within a collection usually separate in dual distinctions, with each tale within the collection portraying a particular distinction. This is especially true of *One Evening in the Rainy Season*, the story collection in which “The Inn” (*Lüshe*)⁶ is published. While doing a literature review, I noticed this is the mode of analysis generally chosen by scholars when writing about Shi Zhecun and the stories of *One Evening in the Rainy Season*. Though “The Inn” is mentioned in few scholarly commentaries on Shi, this method can be effectively applied to analysis of “The Inn.” Thus, in Part I I will identify modes of classification that bisect the content of stories in *One Evening in the Rainy Season* and propose how “The Inn” fits into these dualities. Though I will assert that “The Inn” shares many commonalities with other stories in the collection, perhaps most importantly I also intend to explore how “The Inn” is unique. In Part II of my analysis, I will distinguish the innovative qualities of the piece and attempt to provide an answer as to why it does not appear in many scholarly commentaries and is often condemned by Shi Zhecun himself.

⁶ Shi Zhecun, “Lüshe,” in *Shi Zhecun: Zhongguo xiandai zuojia xuanji* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1988), 139-145.

Part I

Setting as a Mode of Classification

One basic mode often used to classify Shi's stories in *One Evening in the Rainy Season* is setting. Stories within the collection can be organized into dual designations based on where they take place and the progression of action in that location. As Leo Lee states in his book chapter "The Erotic, The Fantastic, and the Uncanny: Shi Zhecun's Experimental Stories," this is the classic Shi Zhecun dichotomy: "city and country, westernized metropolis and a traditional Chinese landscape of evocative pastoralism form a spatial matrix for the protagonist's journeys: either he or she arrives in the city already stimulated by a heightened libido or he or she takes a brief trip to the countryside and back and goes through an erotic demonic experience of terror and dread" (182). For example, the latter component of this dichotomy can be seen in "Sorcery" (*Modao*)⁷ ⁸ and "Yaksha" (*Yecha*). In "Sorcery," "an urban man who suffers from neurasthenia and insomnia and has to take medication regularly takes a weekend journey from Shanghai to the suburbs in order to calm his nerves, but ends up experiencing a series of hallucinatory visions" while in the rural environment (Shih 355). Similarly, "Yaksha" tells the story of a man traveling to Hangzhou for his grandmother's burial and once there begins to see visions of a terrifying yet enticing yaksha as a result of his new surroundings (Shih 358).

"The Inn" fits precisely into this latter classification. The story describes the main character Mr. Ding as a Shanghai businessman stricken with neurasthenia, a trait typical of Shi's urban male protagonists. Taking the advice of a French friend, Mr. Ding travels to the countryside, hoping its "scenery and clean air, in addition to its solitude and

⁷ This short story is also often translated as "Devil's Way."

⁸ Shi Zhecun, "Modao," in *One Rainy Evening* (Beijing: Chinese Literature Press, 2007), 56-80.

tranquility... [will] be the only medicine to cure his illness” (5).⁹ However, upon arriving in the countryside his compromised mental state causes him to experience bizarre and grotesque visions. His heightened anxiety specifically stems from the unfamiliarity of the objects in his room and workers at the inn. Mr. Ding’s unease continues in this fashion for the rest of the night. He only achieves respite once he falls asleep, effectively transporting himself from the oppressive environment of the inn. Thus, the setting of this story and its resulting progression of events delineate “The Inn” as definitively encompassed in the duality of setting and constitute one of the aspects of the story that shares commonalities with Shi’s other works in *One Evening in the Rainy Season*.

Subjective Interiority as a Mode of Classification

One of the hallmark characteristics of Shi Zhecun’s writing is his construction of subjective interiority through the use of Freudian psychoanalytic schema. This aspect is often cited as the common thread between many of his stories and is mentioned in almost every academic work that discusses Shi’s writing. Shi was a devoted follower of Sigmund Freud and Havelock Ellis as well as reader of Arthur Schnitzler. The work of these men focuses on the unconscious psyche and human sexuality. Shi often incorporates these ideas to more adeptly portray the internality of his urban protagonists. The manifestations of this influence in his work, though, are quite distinctive. These techniques are most easily observed in his stories from the collection *One Evening in the Rainy Season*. These stories typically depict 1930s Shanghai, which facilitates the creation of “urban male characters [that] are often suffering from neurasthenia-related

⁹ All English language quotes from “The Inn” are from my translation included at the beginning of this document.

anxieties, fears, and visual complexes which drive them into deep psychological turmoil” (Shih 341). The city serves as the background into which these characters are deposited, however the oppressive nature of the modern city and “the world of semi colonial capitalism leads to a weakened and heightened state of nerves for the urban man whose vision is confused, whose desire is frustrated, and whose masculinity is compromised.” Thus, Shi’s stories often show the characters’ world turned inside out: a threatening external environment causes a disturbed interiority, which re-manifests itself in the outside world as fantastic hallucinations and anxiety-induced distortion (Shih 340).

In this way, Shi grants the reader comprehension of the concrete background of his stories but only for the sake of undermining and replacing it with a sense of pseudo-reality throughout the course of his narrative. On this subject, Lee comments that “in this new urban mode he attempts to strike a delicate balancing act between verisimilitude and fantasy by placing his stories superficially in the realistic setting of Shanghai only to use the urban milieu as a framework to probe the inner thoughts and fantasies of his urban character” (163). As a result, in his fiction Shi seems to be “groping towards something not usually found in the typical works of... realism at the time – an abnormal psychology, a bizarre happening, a strange encounter with a mysterious figure, through which he could lead his reader into an ‘extraordinary’ world” (Lee 155). Thus, subversion of normalcy becomes a hallmark of the works within *One Evening in the Rainy Season*.

Because of this, though many of the collection’s stories describe trivial events, “the real interest of the story narrative lies not in the exterior events but rather in the story’s narrative form itself and the subjectivity that it evokes” (McGrath 1). Jason McGrath fleshes out this point in his work using the example of “At the Paris Cinema”

(*Zai Bali daxiyuan*).¹⁰ In this story, a young urban man takes a woman on a date to the cinema. The actual events of the story consist of commonalities, but the narrative construction facilitates the story's intrigue. In style, "the narrative consists entirely of an interior monologue in which the man's first-person stream-of-consciousness reveals a rich and edgy combination of lust, fear, exhilaration, and insecurity" (McGrath 1). As a result, normal actions such as buying tickets or discussing actors in the film become extremely drawn out and take on a nervous quality. In one instance, the man asks to borrow the woman's handkerchief to wipe his mouth after eating ice cream in the intermission:

Hold on! I want to know what it smells like. I can pretend to be wiping my mouth; that way no one will see that I'm taking a sniff. Mmm! Very nice. This is her fragrance right enough. Perfume mixed with her perspiration. I feel an urge to lick it, to find out what it tastes like. It must be an interesting taste. I think. I can wipe the handkerchief across my mouth from the left to the right, and as I do so I can stick my tongue out and lick it. I could even suck it and no one would know. Wouldn't that be nice? Ah, good! The lights have all been dimmed, and the film's continuing. This is just the right time to give it a really good suck. It's really salty here. Must be the sweat, I suppose. What's this here, the part with the pungent smell? That must be mucus and saliva. No wonder it's so sticky. This really is a new delight. I can feel a delicious tingling sensation on the tip of my tongue. Strange, it feels as though I'm holding her naked body! I couldn't keep this handkerchief, could I? What would she say if I suddenly put it in my pocket? Even if she didn't say anything she would still think it a bit improper. I couldn't do such a base thing. I must hand it back to her. And I'd better hand it back right now. (Shi, 2007a 36)

From this passage the anxiety of the man is very palpable. This could be perceived as casual gesture, but he is inappropriately nervous about how his action is being perceived by the woman. His hyper-acute senses also become apparent in the passage, given how much attention he places on the physical qualities of the handkerchief. Lastly, this passage prominently displays how remedial tasks are often drawn out in literary time and thus add to the sense of the protagonist's temporal warping. The discrepancy between the time spent describing a task and amount of time normally spent on the task contributes to

¹⁰ Shi Zhecun, "Zai Bali daxiyuan" in *One Rainy Evening* (Beijing: Chinese Literature Press, 2007), 25-40.

the sense the protagonist is in a muddled state of mind. Simply reading the passage endows within the reader a sense of restlessness, but it also provides a glimpse into the way that interiority is constructed within Shi's work. Just as these characteristics can be found in "At The Paris Cinema," they are also present in "The Inn."

The display of interiority and the subjectivity of the protagonist's experience in "The Inn" comply with the foundation typically constructed in Shi's short stories. The reader is first introduced to the story as Mr. Ding is arriving at the inn but later learns that he has travelled to the countryside because the chaos of urban life had stricken him with neurasthenia. As seen in many of Shi's stories, his "weakened state of consciousness cannot function as a protective shield against stimuli so that the unconsciousness begins to leak and trouble conscious thoughts and behavior" (Shih 351). As a result, the disturbed nature of his inner mind is reflected back out into his current environment, and he begins to be plagued by visions while at the inn. During the course of the night, he imagines not only that "perhaps a rat would come and overturn [his oil lamp] or in the silent moments of the night it would explode into raging flames" (8), but more disturbingly that there was a "fresh and motionless corpse... of the innkeeper's wife, daughter-in-law, or daughter" (9) as well as a knife-wielding rogue lurking outside his window, ready to suffocate him. Though it is obvious to the reader that these are merely disturbed fantasies of the imagination, they nonetheless continue to haunt Mr. Ding until he unknowingly falls into a troubled sleep early in the morning. Thus, the emblematic manifestation of interiority is established. It is when "fantasy takes flight, so to speak, that [the reader sees] how the interior landscape unveils the darkest recesses of the unconscious where repressed desires seek to break out and take over conscious lives" and

create “an explicitly textual trajectory via the evocation of interiority and desire, at the intersection between fiction and psychoanalysis” (Shih 354).

Intertextuality, as It Pertains to Subjective Interiority

There is another interesting component of interiority that warrants discussion before leaving the topic altogether: intertextuality. This idea is primarily discussed in “Capitalism and Interiority: Shi Zhecun’s Tales of the Erotic-Grotesque” from Shumei Shih’s *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937*. The typical formation of interiority in Shi’s works is discussed in previous paragraphs, but one particular section in this chapter gives insight into the origin of the resulting hallucinations’ content.

In postulating about the disturbed interiority of Shi Zhecun’s characters, Shih proposes that the delusional protagonists are often avid readers whose reading list has informed the content of their visions. Shih also notes “this shaping most prominently displayed in several of Shi’s stories of neurasthenia-stricken urban men encountering some kind of supernatural event” (355). She cites “Sorcery” and “Yaksha” as two examples. In the story “Sorcery,” a Shanghai man travels to the countryside for a weekend to escape the oppressive environment. Despite hoping for his trip to be a source of refuge, he immediately begins to be haunted by what he believes to be an old witch following him around. He first encounters her on the train out of Shanghai, which is where the story begins. The woman seems to appear magically in the seat across from him, immediately causing the protagonist to feel uncomfortable. He notes that “a most peculiar creature she was too -- a decrepit old crone with a hunched back and a face

covered with repulsive wrinkles, a flat nose and mouth permanently twisted and trembling” (Shi 2007a, 57). He jumps to the conclusion that she is a witch rather quickly after noticing that she denies the tea that the attendant offers. He deduces that this must be because “witches don’t drink tea... because tea dissipates their evil powers” (Shi, 2007a 57). He consciously recognizes the origin of this inference, saying that “[he] thinks [he] must have read that somewhere” (Shi, 2007a 57). He continues to draw from ideas about sorcery and witchcraft latent in his mind, indicating the woman’s visage reminded him of “the image of the yellow-faced old woman who spouted water under the moon outside the lattice work in an old book called *Strange Stories from Make-Do Studio* (*Liaozhai zhiyi*)” (Shi, 2007a 58).^{11 12} Furthermore, to get his mind off the old woman, he decides to read a book from his briefcase. Books in his possession include *The Romance of Sorcery*, *Religious Verses*, Sheridan Le Fanu’s strange tales, and *Files on Sex Crimes*. Most of these are tales of the supernatural and sexual debauchery. This makes it no surprise that the protagonist wonders if he’s envisioning the woman as a witch because “[he’s] been reading a bit too much about occultism these past few days that it’s beginning to affect [his] imagination” (Shi, 2007a 59). Thus, the root of the hallucinatory content is aptly revealed: “the narrator’s visual hallucinations, and the psychological trepidations that accompany them, are products of an imagination made hyperactive from reading foreign books, books which are now internalized as [the character’s] mental landscape” (Shih 355). As discussed earlier, the mental disorders suffered by Shi’s urban

¹¹ *Strange Stories from Make-Do Studio*, also known alternatively as *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, is a collection of nearly five hundred tales from the Qing Dynasty author Pu Songling. The collection contain “works belonging to both *zhiguai* (brief accounts of anomalies) and *chuanqi* (tales of the marvelous)” (Zeitlin 4). These two genres focused on recording accounts of the supernatural, ghosts, and spirits (Idema and Haft 112). *Strange Stories from Make-Do Studio* has been of particular influence to both premodern and modern Chinese authors interested in the strange and uncanny.

¹² Pu Songling, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, Tr. John Minford (London: Penguin Classics, 2006).

men break down the barriers between conscious and unconscious, allowing the unconscious to leak out and manifest itself in the exterior of the mind. As a result, “reading about ghosts, legends, and erotic escapades produces an interior landscape filled with textually facilitated motifs, images, and psychological conditions,” effectively spawning the supernatural content of the character’s delusions (Shih 355).

Just as the reading list of the protagonist in “Sorcery” furnishes the content of his hallucinatory experience, the literature of Mr. Ding in “The Inn” also explains the content of his visions. As mentioned previously, Mr. Ding’s visions while at the inn revolve primarily around a few different images: the conceived supernatural quality of the furniture, the corpse of the woman in the room, the rogue lurking outside the window, and the men in the underground tunnel. Insight to from where these visions come, however, is revealed when Mr. Ding explains why he is suspicious about the peculiarities of the furniture in the room. Because the furniture is arranged in such an idiosyncratic fashion, he concludes there must be something wrong with the room. He recalls having read *Jottings from the Thatched Abode of Close Observations* (*Yuewei caotang biji*) and *Writings Done in the Rainy Nights Under the Autumn Lamp* (*Yeyu qiudeng lu*). He remembers from these a story of an innkeeper that had given to a guest a room in which a woman had recently died. From this reference, it is made obvious why the image of a dead woman continues to resurface throughout the story: concepts from Mr. Ding’s reading have permeated his subconscious and have thus orchestrated the content of his imaginings.

Though these are the only two books mentioned by name, as an urban man Mr. Ding is most likely well-read and it can be assumed that literature is the source of the

content of his other illusions. For example, Mr. Ding conjectures that the inn at which he is staying is actually a *heidian* or “black inn.”¹³ This term is often found in traditional Chinese literature and those stories likely serve to inform Mr. Ding’s later assumptions about the inn. In reference to a “black inn,” he mentions that “in a room there would often be an old cauldron with the exit to an underground tunnel right underneath it” (9). This background makes clear why Mr. Ding would suspect that the inn has an underground tunnel that robbers are using to penetrate his room. In addition, this is also probably where the idea that there was someone lurking outside with a knife hoping to break in and kill him originates. Thus, in this way “The Inn” fits into Shih’s idea that “the combined reading lists of the [protagonist] and the author [Shi Zhecun] conjures up an imagined realm populated by phantasms and illusions, sometimes supernatural beings, that are sexually charged” and serves as another defining characteristics that definitively aligns the “The Inn” with Shi’s works within *One Evening in the Rainy Season* (Shih 355-356).

The Other as a Mode of Classification

In his paper titled “Patching the Void: Subjectivity and Anamorphic Bewitchment in Shi Zhecun’s Fiction,” Jason McGrath describes a third classification that could be used to categorize Shi’s work: the Other as it pertains to the mode of subjectivity. McGrath specifically chooses to focus on the collection *One Evening in the Rainy Season* and describes Shi’s stories as “modernist explorations of the ambiguities of intersubjectivity that arise along with the modern bourgeois subject” (McGrath 3). He delineates the central dichotomy as “a progression from the anxious titillation of the

¹³ Information on this topic is already detailed in Footnote 3 on page 8.

desiring subjects in [some stories] to a heightened neurosis that erupts into a psychotic episode in [others]” (McGrath 3). McGrath says this of the dual classifications:

In each case, a protagonist is both aroused and afflicted by his own desires while at the same time he is confronted, in increasingly traumatic fashion, with the question of the desire of the Other, who recedes progressively from the empirically existing Other *subject* of urban social life into a more primordial Other, the Other as object, the traumatic Thing that resists intersubjective symbolic communication and threatens to destroy the narrating subject. (McGrath 3-4)

“One Evening in the Rainy Season”¹⁴ is one of the stories that McGrath uses to illustrate the subjective mode of the anxious narrator as desiring subject. Perhaps Shi Zhecun’s most renowned work, “One Evening in the Rainy Season” details the encounter of a man sharing his umbrella with a woman on his way home from work one evening. The protagonist is a married working professional in Shanghai and often enjoys walking home in the rain. On this particular evening, the protagonist first sees the woman as she gets off the tram nearby. Upon seeing her, he recalls his criteria for absolute beauty and declares “this woman in the rain, [he] felt, would meet such criteria completely” (Shi, 2007b 118). The appearance of such an alluring woman makes the narrator extremely nervous, as adeptly displayed through Shi’s documentation of the tedious circulations of his mind over what to do next. These long passages of internal monologue reflect the nature of anxiety he is feeling over his object of desire. Only after the man realizes that “she seemed to be waiting for [him] to present her with [his] umbrella and see her home” (Shi, 2007b 120), he finally begins to accompany her. Throughout the course of this walk, though, the man likens her to many other images he has seen in the past such as a famous Japanese painting of a woman and a former childhood girlfriend. These serve as alternative projections of his desire. The story ends as the man finishes escorting the

¹⁴ Shi Zhecun, “Meiyi zhuxi” in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature* New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, 116-124.

woman, just as his fantasy does when the rain ceases and he must return home to his demanding wife. Though the actual content of “One Evening in the Rainy Season” is relatively mundane, it is truly the subjectivity brought on by the entrance of the female object of desire that brings the story to life.

Considering the second classification, McGrath notes that while the “former narrator [of ‘One Evening in the Rainy Season’] fixates on an anonymous young woman and posits, in a chain of metonymic substitution, the desirable female ideal, the narrator of ‘Sorcery’ is equally transfixed by ‘the bad object of fascination,’ the traumatic Other that threatens to destroy his ego” (McGrath 12). In this story, the old woman who the narrator believes is a witch serves as the terrifying Other. As discussed previously, the narrator first encounters her when riding the train out of Shanghai, when “his previously blasé contemplation of his fellow passengers and the passing scenery is shattered by the traumatic appearance of [her], by means of which a perfectly natural and familiar situation is denatured, becomes uncanny, loaded with horror and threatening possibilities” (McGrath 13). As the story progresses, the witch continues to haunt the narrator’s consciousness as she metamorphoses. She takes on the role of a mummy, a black speck on the window, a shadow in a bamboo grove, a village girl, his friend’s wife, and the coffee shop attendant when he finally returns to Shanghai out of fear. At this point the narrator has suffered an almost complete mental breakdown:

I was in a state of mental exhaustion: it felt just as if someone had unloosened the rope holding a bundle of flax together. Every nerve suddenly slackened and sagged. An evil fate had afflicted me. I wanted to curse it, to beat it. I walked and walked, I knew not where. I deliberately and savagely bumped into every suspicious stranger I encountered; they were all metamorphoses of that demonic old woman. (Shi, 2007a 77)

The frightening image of the Other has completely consumed his mind. He sees manifestations of the witch almost everywhere he goes, and appropriately the final image

of the story is of course a woman in black. Similar to “One Evening in the Rainy Season,” without the inclusion of the protagonist’s demonic illusions and the his anxious to reaction to them, the content would be relatively routine. The subjectivity and psychotic break furnished by the emergence of the terrifying Other, however, animates and invigorates the narrative.

The relationship with the Other and its relation to subjectivity can also be utilized as a third way to place “The Inn” within *One Evening in the Rainy Season*. Just as in “Sorcery,” subjectivity in “The Inn” is created through Mr. Ding’s encounters with various fearsome Others that exist throughout the narrative and infiltrate his weak consciousness. The structure of “The Inn” “repeats a by-now familiar staging situation, in which a well-to-do, educated city-dweller suddenly finds himself in an unfamiliar environment that opens up a time for leisurely reflection, away from the worries of daily life and from the bombardment of stimuli in the metropolis” (McGrath 20). Leisurely reflection, however, quickly becomes a lost hope for Mr. Ding, for as soon as he enters the rural countryside his weakened consciousness begins to project his own warped anxieties back out into the environment. In fact, Mr. Ding encounters the first “terrifying Other” in the very first sentence of the story in the form of the innkeeper. He does not start to question the innkeeper’s motivations immediately, but after considering the peculiar qualities of the room, he recalls their interactions with suspicion. He determines that the innkeeper purposefully deceived him in giving him this room and probably has locked him inside. Thus, from this very first interaction the reader “[enters] the realm of double meaning, [where] everything seems to contain some hidden meaning that is to be interpreted... [and] in which [the protagonist] suspiciously regards each person and

message he encounters as having a threatening, hidden meaning” (McGrath 13). As mentioned previously, he is very wary of the furniture in his room. He notes that “in the gloomy lighting, each piece of furniture seemed to display a mystical quality” (5). He is particularly skeptical of the skirt trunk behind the bed. It is this object that originally makes him think that this room must have belonged to a female family member that has since died, or that “at the least it had a sliding bottom that could be pushed, with the exit to the hidden tunnel underneath the bottom” (9). He also mentions that “inside the trunk there must be a dead corpse, or at the least some bloody garments and other such things” (12). Despite Mr. Ding’s apprehensiveness, the reader is obviously aware the furniture presents no legitimate threat. This is also true of other objects he misinterprets and assigns double meaning throughout the text. For instance, when Mr. Ding sees a flash of light outside the window, he immediately concludes “this is one of those ‘black inns’” (8). Whereas the rational reader assumes that the light most likely came from a groundskeeper using a flashlight, Mr. Ding instead reinterprets this occurrence as someone lurking outside his window waiting to break in and kill him. In this same way, he also interprets miscellaneous sounds as signs of the fiends lurking below in the underground tunnel. Thus, just as in “Sorcery,” Mr. Ding’s warped perspicacity facilitates a sense of subjectiveness in the narrative.

The prior discussion makes clear that in Shi Zhecun’s fiction, especially his *One Evening in the Rainy Season* collection, there are many consistent trends across stories. Though there are alternative delineations within these classifications, many of Shi’s works seem to echo one another in certain ways. However, though “The Inn” has many aspects in common with other works, it also has many unique aspects. The story is one of

the shortest in the collection and the text feels palpably different when read for the first time. Many of the differences exist as subtle nuances, but they are still important to address. The primary aspects that distinguish “The Inn” from other works by Shi are the role of the narrator and utilization of humor, and especially as it pertains to the lack of seriousness of the piece.

Part II

Narrative Structure as Distinctive Style

Of the stories included in Shi Zhecun’s collection *One Evening in the Rainy Season*, the majority feature a first-person narrator. First-person narration in literature typically allows a window into the mind of characters, given this form of narration provides full access to the thoughts of a character. As discussed above, much of the interest in his fiction comes not from the discussion of routine events but their psychological depth. Thus, access to the protagonist’s thoughts is obviously crucial in Shi’s writing. In these works, the narrators often lose track of what is real and what is not, and this “loss of confidence in [their] ability to unproblematically render reality through language is inseparable from the fact that objective reality itself seems to have dissolved into a series of ever-shifting subjective impressions” (McGrath 23). First person narration is seen in “Sorcery,” the story that is perhaps most similar to “The Inn.” It is also seen in “One Evening in the Rainy Season,” which is universally considered to be Shi’s most famous work. Considering this, “Yaksha” is the only notable exception to the first-person narration trend.

In “Yaksha,” the protagonist’s increasingly severe visions of the yaksha in the rural countryside surrounding Hangzhou are what initially cause him to be institutionalized in a mental hospital. It is at this hospital that the protagonist’s friend comes to visit him. It is also this friend who actually serves to narrate “Yaksha,” given the events of the story are being relayed to him via the mentally unstable protagonist. In the story, “this ‘sober’ framing narrator provides a unique function... in that it gives the reader some apparent access to ‘reality’, i.e., social truth, the stability of symbolic order” (McGrath 23). In this way, readers are able to more aptly parse through the hallucinations of the protagonist and determine what is real and what is not.

The narration in “The Inn” also serves this same function. However, the form of omniscient narration in “The Inn” is even more distinct given the narrator is not even a character in the story. Despite having no concrete presence within the story, the narrator sits in contrast to “the first-person narrators... [who] with their sometime delirious and disconnected stream-of-consciousness observations, leave the reader with no clear means of sorting out fantasy from reality, psychological case study from straightforward account of eroticism or horror” (McGrath 23). Instead, this narrator’s framing of the course of events gives the reader access to a perspective alternative to that of Mr. Ding’s. Though the stream-of-consciousness style of observation is not entirely eliminated from the narrative, the way in which it is conveyed and the comment the narrator chooses to provide assists the reader in their parsing of the story. Lee describes this type of narration as free indirect discourse. In this type of narration, the narrator has the ability to slip in and out of a character’s consciousness and the resulting effect is that the character’s thoughts and feelings are relayed through the third person narrator. Because the

subjective mental processes of the character are rendered through an objective third person narrator, the distinct narrative effect described above is created.

As established previously, “The Inn” describes the trivial act of an urban man staying the night at a countryside inn but with its primary interest being drawn from the description of his hallucinations and warped cognition of that night. Though Shi’s works consistently involves the uncanny and anxious distress, often it is hard to distinguish objective reality and the character’s subjective experience. In “The Inn,” however, because of the third person narrator and the use of free indirect discourse the reader can more easily distinguish between the objective and subjective. The way that the third person narrator interjects subtle commentary on Mr. Ding’s experience facilitates this. The narrator is bemused by the antics of Mr. Ding, and this attitudinal difference opens to the door to an alternative perspective. This often occurs through simple phrases placed within the narrative. For example, Mr. Ding’s consideration of the furniture is what first spawns his anxious illusions. He is quite skeptical of the furniture’s various qualities. The narrator though, allows the reader to realize that this apprehension is quite unfounded by adding his own comments. When Mr. Ding is confronted with the oddity of the bed’s size, the narrator describes his conundrum “as if through much deliberation he suddenly discovered something new” (6). Just this small interjection by the narrator allows the reader to see that Mr. Ding is being ludicrous. There are many other insinuations like this that alter the reader’s perception of the story’s events. When questioning the motive of the person outside the window, the narrator comments “in regards to this question, Mr. Ding certainly did not lack the ability to conjure up a multitude of answers” (9). This intrusion by the narrator again allows the reader to understand that the revolutions of Mr.

Ding's imagination are quite gratuitous. This continues until the very end of the story. At this point, the narrator further pulls up and allows the reader to see that after the restless fabrications of his mind Mr. Ding has finally exhausted himself and fallen asleep. It concludes with the steward checking to see if Mr. Ding is awake and retreating after hearing his loud snoring. The inclusion of this image as a cap to the story is the narrator's final provision of a frame of reference, once again relaying the ridiculousness of Mr. Ding.

Humor as Distinctive Style

The narrative style of "The Inn" also helps facilitate a quality lacking from most Shi Zhecun's other works: humor. As described in previous paragraph, the narrator's comments throughout the story often help frame and convey the ridiculousness of Mr. Ding's antics. In this same way, they also give the events of the story a comedic element. For instance, when Mr. Ding is attempting to come up with solutions to avoid an encounter with some of the malicious figures he imagines, the narrator often quite subtly provides his opinion on these. In one instance the narrator notes that Mr. Ding "churned out from his brain a most ingenious way to avoid death" (11). This both implies that the narrator thinks Mr. Ding is being foolish as well as presents the concept in a humorous manner. The comical nature of the piece is also helped by the inclusion of absurd descriptions of the events within the story. In one instance, when Mr. Ding first enters his room, he is thwarted when he realizes there is no place to hang up his clothes. The image created is quite descriptive and drawn out, allowing the reader conjure the laughable image of Mr. Ding's arm suspended in the air as he stumbles through what to do with his

clothes before finally discovering the skirt trunk. There are many other occurrences similar to this throughout the text. The narrator also uses this same style to describe the action of Mr. Ding climbing out of his bed to check that the skirt trunk is locked:

Mr. Ding leaned his body towards the side of the bed closest to the wall, lifted up the canopy slightly, and carefully looked out. At present, there was nothing else in the room that was frightening apart from the eerily quiet chamber pot and skirt trunk. Finally mustering up the courage to get off the bed, he leaped down and came out through the canopy. The canopy in front of the bed had not moved and hung down the same way as before, so he was convinced that the person outside the window had no way of knowing that he was no longer in bed. What was unexpected, though, was that upon looking at the skirt trunk, he found that it was already locked. He carefully investigated the hinge and lock, and it did not seem like they could be moved. But again, why was this? Why would they want to lock the trunk? Clearly there was something inside that they did not want guests to see. At this moment, an utterly different but equally as frightening fear replaced his idea that there was an underground tunnel hidden below the trunk. Inside the trunk there must be a dead corpse, or at the least some bloody garments and other such things. Mr. Ding felt his hair stand up and because he was frightened again, he used the most nimble movements possible to stealthily slip back into the bed. (11-12)

As with the description of Mr. Ding hanging up his clothes, the drawn-out nature of the description adds to its absurdity and makes it quite silly. The way in which his movements are relayed also adds to this effect. Because the description of him curled up in the bed, jumping courageously from it, and fearfully sliding back in described in such detail, they begin to seem almost cartoonish and take on an even more comic quality. Thus, as a result of both these narrative descriptions as well as the snide comments provided by the narrator, “The Inn” takes on a humorous quality not seen in many of Shi’s other works.

The comedic nature of “The Inn” is also especially important as it pertains to the lack of seriousness of the piece. As mentioned previously, as compared to other works in *One Evening in the Rainy Season*, the narration of this piece is much more humorous. The inclusion of intentional humor makes the mood of the piece much lighter and in effect less serious. This same effect is also facilitated by the content included in certain

stories. In earlier discussions, “The Inn” has been likened to “Sorcery” and “Yaksha” most specifically based on the geographical location, basic storyline, and form of subjectivity created. While all of these stories involve the supernatural and bizarre, their conclusions are remarkably different. In “Sorcery,” even though the protagonist hopes that his retreat to Shanghai will mark the end of his terrifying visions, he still encounters the image of the black witch many times upon his return. His last encounter, though, is the most disturbing. Upon his return from the coffee shop he receives a telegram that his three-year-old daughter has died. Right after this he sees “a lone figure slip into an alley... an old woman dressed in black” (Shi, 2007a 80). The rendering of these dual images is intended to cause the reader to think there is a connection between the death of the protagonist’s daughter and the haunting image of the black witch. Up until this point, the visions of the man seemed laughable and silly, but this intrusion of such a grievous event causes the reader to question this notion. Though the story provides no further comment on whether these events are related by causation, it immediately makes the story’s overall tone much more somber. The story content of “Yaksha” also follows a similar trajectory. After traveling to Hangzhou and reading about legends of yakshas, the protagonist begins to be plagued by visions of the yaksha. On his last encounter, he follows the yaksha back to her supposed lair. The yaksha appears as a beautiful woman, and he is overwhelmed by desire for her. The protagonist then, however, “imagines that [the yaksha] is waiting for him inside [the cottage], perhaps ready to tear him to pieces with her sharp talons... and at this point, he loses his ‘romantic’ inclinations, breaks into the cottage, and strangles her to death” (McGrath 22). It is only after he strangles her that the protagonist realizes she was not a yaksha but a mere country girl. Though the protagonist’s visions of

the yaksha were the elements of fantasy, they drove him to commit murder. The story ends with a homicide, and as a result can no longer be taken lightly.

In contrast to “Sorcery” and “Yaksha,” “The Inn” retains its more benign nature throughout the whole of the story. Despite the story being filled with images of corpses, rogues, and other demonic visions, because of its narrative style and humor the reader never truly believes any of this is true. This belief is carried through to the end and affirmed by the conclusion of the story. At the inn the next morning, the hotel steward comes to Mr. Ding’s room but only to find him sound asleep snoring. The intended effect of this image is that Mr. Ding has completely exhausted himself from his ridiculous imaginings of the night before. Thus, “The Inn” remains rather lighthearted.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction of this analysis, the increased cultural freedom of the years following Mao Zedong’s death is often cited as the impetus of the renewed attention focused on Shi Zhecun’s work. As a result of this revival, many authors and literary scholars conducted with interviews with him towards the end of his life. He was also often asked to write prefaces to books republishing his work. At the time of these interviews and writings, several decades had passed since the last original publication of his fiction. When discussing his work, Shi was often quite self-deprecating. In one preface, he said “[he] knows [he] did not write well” and that “[his] works do not occupy an important position in China’s new literature; at most [they are] a literary experiment of a young Chinese writer who was inclined towards modern Western literature sixty years ago and who was neglected before he had the opportunity to develop” (Shi, 2007a 8-9).

This disparaging viewpoint was not unique to his reflection late in life. Shi was still quite critical of his own work while actively publishing fiction. As mentioned previously, he rejected his first couple short story collections as immature, considering *The Lantern Festival* his legitimate collection of writings (Ge 157). This criticism was not limited merely to his early short story collections. When dictating to a friend which of his stories he wanted translated into French, he mentioned “One Evening in the Rainy Season,” “Sorcery,” and “Yaksha,” among others as worthy. The story he indicated as the exemplar of naivety and immaturity was none other than “The Inn” (Zhang 187).

This discrimination may be due to the particular literary climate in which Shi was publishing stories. Though he was most certainly not alone among authors such as Mu Shiying and Liu Na’ou in writing stories primarily focused on aesthetics and narrative style, there were many other competing forces in the literary scene at this time. More specifically, the League of Left Wing Writers was established with a distinct agenda. It was established via directives from leadership within the burgeoning Chinese Communist Party, and “by uniting the men of letters under their banner, they hoped to leverage control over the pen in order to put up a better fight against the GMD” (Wong 313-317). In this way, “literature per se was not their main concern -- politics was; and any literary movement promoted by the Left League was but a vehicle to assist the political movement” (Wong 318). Under this environment, anything seen as not intentionally promoting the Communist movement was subject to condemnation. For example, at this same time the writer Lin Yutang was also actively publishing a number of humor magazines. However, “once [his] magazines had met with a measure of success, they began to be attacked on charges of frivolity and amusement as if they were out of step

with the times” (Laughlin 109). In other words, it was deemed unacceptable to waste effort on publishing humor articles that did not advance any political agenda. Even Shi himself notes that “from the very beginning, left-wing Chinese literary critics pointed out that [he] had adopted an idealist creative method that as such was prohibited in socialist culture” (Shi, 2007a 9).

So how does this background inform why Shi Zhecun thought “The Inn” stood out as particularly childish among others? In the words that eerily echo much of the content of Shi Zhecun’s stories Lin Yutang said, “sometimes one wants to take off one’s false mask and let the repressed ‘natural person’ come out and enjoy himself, so as to avoid the withering of the nerves or the onset of mental illness” (Laughlin 109). In previous analysis, narrative style, humor, and lack of seriousness were identified as characteristics that distinguished “The Inn” from Shi’s other works. So perhaps these are also why “The Inn” had been condemned by the League of Left-Wing Writers and others sharing their viewpoints but also has been largely disregarded in scholarly research on his work.

Indeed these characteristics were not consistent with the type of writing promoted by organizations such as the League of Left-Wing Writers. Though this was probably a factor in Shi’s condemnation of “The Inn,” it still does not seem to explain the whole story. Stories such as “One Evening in the Rainy Season” and “Sorcery” appeared to be among Shi’s favorites, but despite their lack of humor and more serious conclusions, they still contain abnormal psychology and elements of the supernatural. In this way, these stories probably did not any more so meet the expectations of the League of Left-Wing Writers than the relative frivolity “The Inn” did. In an interview where he was discussing

the last of his published story collections “Small Treasures,” Shi brought up some interesting points regarding this matter. In reference to the reasoning behind the collection’s title, Shi said this:

By “small” I mean a minor writer, and “treasure” is meant as in the saying “even a shabby broom I can treasure myself.” While my works are never great, and never treasured by the “great masses,” still I imagine my right of “treasuring them myself has not been taken away. So I title them a collection of “small treasures” in order to register my feelings of forlorn decline. (Lee 187)

This passage again displays Shi’s self-deprecating nature, as he iterates that his works are not and will never be widely celebrated. He also reveals that much of the value he instills in his works comes from his own opinion of them. The distinctive characteristics of “The Inn” do not adhere to some of the literary standards promoted by the League of Left-Wing Writers and could explain for different reasons why it has been relatively absent from critical commentary on Shi’s larger works. However, perhaps it was simply Shi’s own view of his story that caused him to hold it in contempt.

Bibliography

- Ge Mai. "The Modern Writer Shi Zhecun." Tr. Chen Haiyan. *Chinese Literature* 4 (1991): 156-161.
- Hallowell, Wayne. "Bloody Bender Family 1871-1873: Keepers of the Devil's Inn." *Leatherock Hotel Bed and Breakfast*. 2008. Web. 9 Feb. 2017.
- Hidveghyova, Elena. "The Decadent Obsession: Eros versus Celibacy in the Work of Shi Zhecun and Anatole France." *Asian and African Studies* 4.1 (1995): 47-70.
- Idema, Wilt and Lloyd Haft. *A Guide to Chinese Literature*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1997. Print.
- Jones, Andrew F. "The Violence of the Text: Reading Yu Hua and Shi Zhicun." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 2.3 (1994): 570-602.
- Laughlin, Charles A. *The Literature of Leisure and Chinese Modernity*. University of Hawaii Press, 2008. Print.
- Lee, Leo Ou-fan. "The Erotic, The Fantastic, and the Uncanny: Shi Zhecun's Experimental Stories." Comp. Leo Ou-fan Lee. *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999. 153-189.
- Ma, Y.W. "Chi Yün." *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*. Ed. William H. Nienhauser, Jr. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986. Print.
- McGrath, Jason, "Patching the Void: Subjectivity and Anamorphic Bewitchment in Shi Zhecun's Fiction." *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese* 4.2 (2001): 1-30.
- Pu Songling, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. Tr. John Minford. London: Penguin Classics, 2006.
- Rosenmeier, Christopher. "Women Stereotypes in Shi Zhecun's Short Stories." *Modern China* 37.1 (2011): 44-68.
- Schaefer, William. "Kumarajiva's Foreign Tongue: Shi Zhecun's Modernist Historical Fiction." *Modern Chinese Literature* 10.1/2 (1998): 25-70.
- Shi Zhecun. *One Rainy Evening*. Beijing: Chinese Literature Press, 2007. Print.
- Shi Zhecun. "One Evening in the Rainy Season." Ed. Joseph S. M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt. Tr. Gregory B. Lee. *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. Print.

- Shi Zhecun 施蛰存. *Shi Xiu Zhi Lian 石秀之恋*. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社. 1991.
- Shi Zhecun 施蛰存. *Shi Zhecun: Zhongguo xiandai zuojia xuanji 施蛰存：中國現代作家選集*. Hongkong: Joint Publishing (H.K.) CO., LTD, 1988. 139-145.
- Shih, Shu-mei. "Capitalism and Interiority: Shi Zhecun's Tales of the Erotic-Grotesque." Comp. Shu-mei Shih. *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937*. Berkeley: UC Press, 2001. 339-370.
- The Committee on Nomenclature and Statistics of the American Psychiatric Association, "Neurasthenic neurosis." *DSM-II: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1968.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to Literary Genre*. Cornell UP, 1975. Print.
- Wong, Lawrence Wang-chi. "A Literary Organization with a Clear Political Agenda: The Chinese League of Left-Wing Writers, 1930-1936." Ed. Kirk A. Denton and Michael Hockx. Lexington Books, 2008. 313-338. Print.
- Xiao Ying. "Criticism of the Contemporary Irrational Novel." Tr. Qi Naizheng. Rev. Feng Shize and Bruce Doar. *Social Sciences in China* 3.4 (1992): 63-74.
- "Yeh-yü chi'iu-teng lu." *Traditional Chinese Stories: Themes and Variations*. Ed. Y.W. Ma and Joseph S. M. Lau. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978. Print.
- Zeitlin, Judith T. *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993. Print.
- Zhang Hongbing. "Writing 'the Strange' of the Chinese Modern: Sutured Body, Naturalized Beauty, and Shi Zhecun's 'Yaksha.'" *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese* 5.2 (2002): 29-54.
- Zhang Sheng. 张生. "Yan fen lingguai fen lanman——shi lun shi zhe cun xiaoshuo de yishu tezheng" "烟粉灵怪纷烂漫——试论施蛰存小说的艺术特征." In Zhang, *Keyan kesi 可言，可思*. Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chuban she 湖北教育出版社, 2004. 187-197.