Shen Ya-chih’s Literary Reputation in the Ninth Century

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What's any artist, but the dregs of his work—
William Gaddis

Although scarcely a well-known figure today, in the preface to the biographies of the literati in the Hsin T'ang shu 新唐書 (New T'ang History; Peking: Chung-hua shu-chih, 1975, 201-5725-26), Shen Ya-chih (781-832), a poet and sometimes author of tales, was one of the T'ang writers who seemed prominent enough to be selected for especial mention. There we read:

Now we have merely selected from those who made their names through literature to make a “Section on Literary Arts,” [men] such as Wei Ying-wu (ca. 737-ca. 791), Shen Ya-chih, Yen P'ang (fl. 740), Tsu Yung (fl. 740-750), Hsüeh Neng (ca. 825-880), Cheng Ku (fl. 890-900), and others; though their type was especially numerous, all [authors]

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[1] I would like to thank Irving Yu-cheng Lo 郭郁正, my teacher, and three of my students for their excellent comments on a draft of this paper: Cao Weiguo 曹衛國, Huang Shuyuan 黃淑媛, and Shang Cheng 尚程. Remaining errors in style, judgment and translation are attributable only to the author.

who had refined literary writing in the world, the historians have neglected the events of their lives and for this reason not obtained [information] to write about them.

今但取以文自名者為 [文藝篇], 若韋應物, 沈亞之, 閻防, 祖詠, 王能, 鄭谷等, 其號尚多, 皆姓名有文在人間, 史寥寥其行事, 故弗得而述云。

Shen has left us scarcely two dozen poems and about eighty prose pieces \(^{[1]}\), but there are indications that his work was appreciated long before Ou-yang Hsiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) and Sung Ch'i 宋祁 (998-1062) compiled the New T'ang History in the mid-eleventh century. A number of contemporaries left poems to him, including the three major poets of the period, Li Ho 李贄 (790-816), Tu Mu 杜牧 (803-852), and Li Shang-yin 李商隱 (812-858) \(^{[2]}\). Having studied his life and stories recently \(^{[3]}\), I would like to examine here these poems in an attempt to understand better the claims by the New T'ang History that he "was a man who made his name through literature," and at the same time to explore indications of his reputation in the ninth century.


\(^{[2]}\) There are also poems by Chang Hu 张祜 (fl. 850) and Chia Tao 賈島 (779-843) sending Shen off after failing the examinations (see Ch'üan T'ang shih, 8.500:5798 and 9.571:6622, respectively; on the title of Chang's poem see also Chou Hsi-fu 周锡褆, commentator, Liu I-sheng 劉逸生, ed., Tu Mu shih-hsuan 杜牧詩選 [Hong Kong: San-lien shu-tien, 1980], p. 162, n. 3). Yin Yao-fan 殷堯藩 (fl. 815-835) wrote a poem seeing Shen off into exile at Nan-k'ang 南康 (modern Nan-k'ang in southern Kiangsi, see T'an Ch'i-hsiang 譚其骧, Chung-kuo li-shih ti-t'u chi 中國歷史地圖集 [Shanghai: Ti-t'u ch'ú-p'an she地圖出版社, 1982], 5.57) in 829 (Ch'üan T'ang shih, 8.492:5565) and Hsü Ning 徐凝 (fl. 825-830) composed a four-line verse send-off (Ch'üan T'ang shih, 7.474:5386) upon Shen's transfer to Ying-chou 郧州 (modern Chung-hsiang 京山 in Hupeh, see T'an Ch'i-hsiang, 5.53) in 831, shortly before Shen's death (see also Nienhauser, "Shen Yu-chih," p. 145).

The earliest of the poems concerning Shen Ya-chih by this famous trio was Li Ho’s “A Song to See Shen Ya-chih Off, with a Preface” (Sung Shen Ya-chih ko [ping hsü] 送沈亞之歌，並序) written in 812 [8]:

The literatus Shen Ya-chih, having failed the Calligraphy Examination [7] in the seventh year of the Yüan-ho era (812), was returning home to the Wu-sung River [8]. I was saddened by Shen’s trip, but without money or wine to console him, and moreover moved by his repeated requests, I wrote a song to see him off:

The talented man from Wu-hsing resents the spring breeze:
Peach blossoms fill the paddy paths, a thousand miles of red.
His purple-silk bridle and bamboo crop broken, his piebald horse small—
And his family lives in Ch‘ien-t‘ang: cast, then cast again.

In his white-cane crisscross woven book-bag,
Were short slips of equal size like palm-leaf scriptures. [9]


[7] On the Calligraphy Examination (Shu k‘o 書科, also known as Ming-shu k‘o 明書科) see Liu Hung 劉紅, Chung-kuo hsüan-shih chih-tu shih 中國選士制度史 (Changsha: Hu-nan chiao-yü ch‘u-pan she, 1992), pp. 149-150.

[8] Although Shen Ya-chih had been born in the north (see Nienhauser, “Shen Ya-chih,” p. 141), his family returned to the Hangchow region (their ancestral home) shortly after the death of his father in the early 780s.

Wu Chiang 吳江, the modern Wu-sung River 吳淞江 in the northeast part of modern Kiangsu flowing from Lake T‘ai-hu south of modern Soochow into Shanghai (T’an Ch‘i-hsiang 554 and 55 and Li Ssu-han 李詠瀚 n. 3, in Li Ho shih hsüan 李霍詩選, Liu I-sheng, ed., Li Ssu-han annotator (Hong Kong: San-lien shu-tien, 1980) p. 10). As this paper unfolds, Shen’s home will be located rather precisely.

[9] See Li Ssu-han, Li Ho shih hsüan, pp. 10-11, n. 12. Li Ho compares the writings Shen brought to the capital to the Buddhist scriptures.
Gleaming precious ores were offered to the spring officials —
Beneath the mists they plowed the waves, riding a leaf-like boat.

The spring officials selected talents under a bright sun,
But (with him) they discarded gold, let go a dragon steed.
Satebeli in hand he will return home and again enter his gate.
Though you have labored so hard, who will be there to console you?

I have heard that though hearty men value mettle and character;
In ancient times some ran three times without losing heart.
I ask that you await a future dawn to use your long whip;
On that day, at the time of the autumn scales, turn your carriage back.

吳興才人怨春風，桃花滿陌千里紅。
紫絲竹斷駱馬小，家住錢塘東復東。
白藤交織書笈，短策齊裁如梵矢。
雄光寶礦獻春卿，煙底驚波乘一葉。
春卿拾箋白日下，撫箋黃金解龍馬。
撫箋歸家重入門，勞勞誰是憐君者。
吾聞壯夫重心骨，古人三走無摧挫。
請君持且事長鞭，他日還轍及秋律。

This poem is divided into four quatrains by the rhymes: AAXA (東), BBXB (葉), CCXC (馬), DDXD (月). The first stanza, which ends in the rhyme character tung 東, is about “east” and its associations, but more significantly it echoes the account in the preface of Shen’s need to return to his home in the east. The subject

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[i] I.e., the Bureau of Ritual 榮部, who were in charge of the civil-service examinations which took place in spring.

[ii] The “long whip” is that with which Li urges Shen to use on his return to Ch’ang-an in the fall. It contrasts with the broken crop that Shen has to return home and symbolizes a better preparation for the next examinations.

[iii] Li Ssu-han, *Li Ho shih hsüan*, p. 11, n. 21, notes that in ancient China there was a separate musical scale for each month of the year. The autumn scales here refer metonymically to the autumn season. Shen would need to leave the Hangchow region at that time to assure his arrival in time for the spring examinations.
of the poem, Shen Ya-chih, was viewed by his contemporaries as a fine young writer. He was a native of Wu-k'ang 武康 County in Wu-hsing 吳興 [13], a little over twenty miles northwest of modern Hangchow as the crow flies, the descendant of a family that traced its line back through the poet Shen Yüeh 沈約 (441-513) [14]. Unlike most young men in that spring of 812, however, he was resentful of the breeze, since he had failed the examinations and must have been reminded, so Li Ho imagines, of the T'ang commonplace which linked “fallen blossoms” and “failed talents” (the verb is lo 落 in each phrase) each time he saw the wind cause a blossom to fall [15]. In the second line Li Ho might be depicting the scene that faced Shen near Ch'ang-an following his failure. But it is more likely that this line projects the journey home to the east, where each of the thousand miles will remind him of his failure through the fallen peach blossoms, and where the trip will be further humbling, often leading his nag (see the following couplet) as they pick their way through the paddy paths, rather than traveling with the ease and honor success in the examinations would have brought; his progress is further hampered by his broken reins and riding crop. Li Ho was fond of comparing horses to humans—see his “Ma shih, erh-shih-san shou” 马诗二十三首 (Twenty-three Poems on Horses) [16] in which he portrays himself as a galloping horseman on his approach to the examinations in 810 [17].

[13] Hu-chou 湖州, with its prefectural seat on the south shore of T'ai-hu about fifty miles north of modern Hangchow (T' an Ch'i-hsiang, 5.54), was designated Wu-hsing chün 吳興郡 (Wu-hsing Commandery) from 742-758 (see Fu Hsüan-tʻung 傅璇琮, ed., Tʻang tʻai-tsu chuan chiao-chien 唐才子傳校箋 [Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1990], 3.6:87).


The horseman with a whip was the kind of dashing figure that Li Ho played off in his poem (cf., for example, the dashing hero of “Li Wa chuan” 李娃傳 [The Story of Li Wu] who halts his mount and drops his whip upon first catching sight of Li Wu—cf. Wang Pi-chiang 王辟疆, ed., Tʻang-jen hsiao-shuo 唐人小說 [Shanghai: Shang-hai Kʻueh chʻu-pan she, 1978], p.100, and Glen Dudbridge’s translation, The Tale of Li Wa [London: Ithaca Press, 1983], pp. 111-112). This swashbuckling image is contrasted with Shen Ya-chih’s situation here.
Here the diminution of Shen’s horse is intended to reflect Shen’s own self-assessment following his failure. This third line also recalls, so a number of commentators claim, the *yueh-fu* entitled “Chi’ing-ts’ung pai-ma  青銅白馬 (A Black Piebald and a White Horse)” which begins:

A black piebald and a white horse with purple-silk bridles,
What a shame the stone bridge is braced by a cypress span!
Unpredictably you have gone off a thousand miles,
I hope in the end you will be able to return to your hometown . . . .

青銅白馬紫絲繒，可憐石橋栱柏梁。
汝忽千里去無常，願得到頭還故鄉。••••

The resonance here turns about Li Ho’s relationship to Shen Ya-chih. Although the *yueh-fu* is a love song of a female persona abandoned by her lover (she is the stone bridge who is reliable and will not change, he the unsteady cypress “support”), who may well be off to the capital to seek his fortune. Shen Ya-chih is returning, having failed, thus his reins and cap are broken, his horse a miniature nag. Each poem expresses the sentiments of wanting someone to return; those of the neglected wife are similar to those Li Ho felt for his departing friend. Not only are the reins of a similar purple silk in both pieces, but the distance of separation—a thousand miles—is similar.

Another possible source of the imagery of Li Ho’s line is a *yueh-fu* poem entitled “Hsing-lu nan” 行路難 (The Difficulties of Traveling) by Wu Chün 吳均 (469-520). The poem narrates how a young, talented knight-errant went to the capital to achieve a name, but failed when the influential officials at court disregarded him. One couplet reads:

A black horse of purest ebony with a white dapple,
A golden halter and green reins with a purple-silk haversack.

By asking Shen Ya-chih to recall this possible precedent to his poem, Li Ho would be, on the one hand, reinforcing the idea that failure is not always related to talent, and, on the other, reminding Shen, through the title of the poem, of the rigors of travel: he might do better to return to Ch’ang-an and remain there until he is successful in the examinations.

In a rhetorical transition, the second stanza reverses the motion—here we are traveling west, then west again from Shen’s home to the capital. The first couplet compares Shen’s writings, which were conventionally circulated among various people connected with the process before the candidate actually sat for the examinations, to Buddhist scriptures in high praise from the devout Li Ho. The second distich could refer either to the poet’s writings or to Shen himself. In any case, both were presented to the officials of the Board of Rituals which oversaw the examinations. The leaf-like boat is that Li Ho imagined Shen rode on his long journey to the capital; it emphasizes Shen’s straightened circumstances, while also echoing the imagery of the riverine South that Li Ho admired. Based on a citation in Po Chü-i’s (772-846) lexicon, Po-shih lu-t’ieh shih-lei chi, which reads “Fallen-leaf boat: When the ancients saw a fallen leaf, they took the opportunity to make it into a boat.”

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[20] Translations of Buddhist scriptures were first copied onto pei-yeh 貝葉, pattra or palm leaves, which were then connected together and called fan chia 梵抏, Buddhist pressed works, because they were pressed together between two pieces of wood (see Li Ssu-han, pp. 10-11, n. 12).

[21] We have a record of Chiao Shen Ya-chih’s admiration for Li Ho’s writings as well in Shen’s “Hsü shih sung Li Chiao hsiu-ts’ai” 序詩送李秀才 (Preface to a Poem Seeing off the Hsiu-ts’ai Graduate Li Chiao), Shen Hsia-hsien chi, 9:7a-8a (see also the discussion of this piece in Fu Hsüan-ts’ung, ed., T’ang ts’ai-tzu chuan chiao-chien, 3:6:87.

The modern scholar Yang Wen-hsiung 楊文雄, following the lead of Harada Norio 原田尚雄, speculates that one of Li Ho’s lovers, a young woman named Shen, may have been related to Shen Ya-chih, thereby strengthening their relationship (Li Ho shih yen-chiu 李穎詩研究 [Taipei: Wen-shih-che ch’u-pan she, 1980], p. 62).
this trope may also be an indirect manner of complementing Shen Ya-chih as a man "similar to the ancients" [21]. But basically, this line is intended to metaphorically picture the hardships Shen had undergone in coming to the capital from his family home in Wu-k'ang as well as his talents in ruddering his tiny boat—which was fragile as a leaf because Shen himself is a "fragile" candidate with no contacts in the capital—all the way to the imperial examinations [22].

The third stanza is critical of the spring officials. Hsü Meng-jung 許孟容 (743-818), then in the twilight of his career, was the chief examiner [23]. But those behind the examinations remained largely unchanged [24] since a technicality had prevented Li Ho from participating in the competition two years earlier [25]. Since it took place under the "bright sun," Li Ho suggests that this examination was without the sort of indiscretions that marred the examinations of 808 [26]. Despite this, and notwithstanding Shen's talents, he failed. The comparison of Shen to a "dragon steed" here—indicating a horse of great size—underlines the unfairness of Shen's


Chi'eu Hung-chih 陳弘治 argues that this gloss is relevant in his Li Chi'ang-chi ku-shih chiao-shih 李長吉歌詩校釋 (Taipei: Chia-hsin shui-ni kung-ssu wen-hua chi-chin-hui 嘉新水泥公司文化基金會, 1969), p. 23. There may be another expression cited by Po Chi-i which is also relevant, however: "Boat which carries a single leaf: a 'cassia-leaf boat'" 持載一葉[舟], 桂葉舟 (Po-shih liu-t'ieh shih-lei chi, 1,3:157).

[22] The image of a fallen leaf, if in the back of Li Ho's mind when he composed this work, may also recall the fallen blossoms of line 2 above.

[23] The image of a leaf-like boat may also suggest the distance Shen has come as in the line from a poem entitled "Yen-ko hising" 燕歌行 (A Song of Yen) by Emperor Yüan 元 of the Liang Dynasty (r. 552-554, i.e., Hsiao I 蕭詠, 508-554): "I only see the distant boat as if it were a fallen leaf" 唯見遠舟如落葉 (Lu Ch'in-li, Hsien-Ch' in Han Wei Chin Nan-pen ch'ao shih, 3.2035).


[26] On the various accounts for why Li Ho was denied access to the chin-shih examinations, see Tu Kuo-ch'ing, Li Ho, pp. 21-22.

[27] In this examination Li Chi-fu 李吉甫 (758-814), a chief minister and favorite of Emperor Hsien-tsung at the time, was able to have the decision by the examiners to pass three successful candidates because their criticism of the current regime (and indirectly of Li himself) was too severe (see Chiu Ming Chan, "Between the World and the Self: Orientations of Pai Chi'i's [772-846] Life and Writings," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1991, pp. 236ff.).
return on a “small piebald” while also corresponding to the stanzaic rhyme, ma 马.

The final stanza is intended to respond to the query that ended the third— who will console you when you get home? The rhyme here, chih 資 “substance,” dictates the content, as Li Ho urges Shen to look within himself for the courage to follow the example of Kuan Chung 管仲 who fled battle three times because he wanted to keep himself alive to care for his aging mother. This allusion to Kuan Chung’s biography in the Shih chi 史記 is part of a paragraph in which Kuan points out that he was able to keep his pride after committing a series of “mistakes” (such as fleeing from battle), which would have been judged by society in general as cowardly, only because his friend Pao Shu-ya was able to understand the reasons for Kuan’s actions, thereby proving himself a true friend, a kindred soul (chih chh 知已) [29]. This fits the context of Li Ho’s attempt to console Shen Ya-chih; Li argues that Shen has no reason to feel embarrassed about his failure, since his lack of success was the fault of the examiners.

Every failed candidate must have gone home wondering whether he would be able return to Ch’ang-an the following year. Li Ho’s admonition in the closing lines of this poem is intended to give Shen the courage to try again, to set forth from Hangchow in the fall, so that he would be in the capital in time for the spring examinations of 813. As it turned out, Shen returned to Ch’ang-an after only a short stay with relatives in Wu-k’ang, but he did not participate in the examinations again until 815, when he was successful in the chin-shih 进士 (presented scholar) competition [31], thereby validating Li Ho’s praise for his writing.


[30] Li Sun-hun (among others) believe that sin tsou refers to Shen Ya-chih being driven from the capital and hoping to return (Li Ho shih hsüan, p. 11, n. 19). San tsou in their opinion refers more likely to men like the fifth-sixth century B.C. minister of the state of Ch’u, Sun Shu-ao 孙叔敖, who were appointed prime minister without displaying any joy, later dismissed three times without showing any displeasure or incurring disgrace (on Sun Shu-ao see Shih chi, 119: 3100: 于，……三去而不已). This situation seems to have been a topoc for depicting a “man unmoved by political fate” (see William H. Nienhauser, Jr., “A Reexamination of ‘The Biographies of the Reasonable Officials’ in the Records of the Grand Historian,” Early China, 16 [1991], p.222 and n. 31).

But the point of Li Ho’s poem is to stress his close feelings for Shen Ya-chih, his ability to forgive Shen’s faults or mistakes, thus the Kuan Chung story seems more apt.

The second poem I want to consider is Tu Mu’s “Shen Hsia-hsien” 沈下賢. The title, Shen’s name alone, suggests the sort of respect that would be paid one of the classical greats, for example, Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju 司馬相如 (179-117 B.C.-cf. Chang Hu’s 張祜 [fl. 850] poem “Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju ch’în-ko 司馬相如琴歌” [Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju’s Lute Song]). Indeed, it is likely Tu Mu wrote this poem in 846, a dozen or so years after Shen Ya-chih’s death, since late in that year he passed through Hangchow on his way from Ch’i-h-chou 池州, where he had been prefect, to take up the same position at Mu-chou 滁州[32]. The poem reads [33]:

Who could match this man’s pure songs?
Along a grassy path, all moss and weeds, he is nowhere to be found.
The whole night I dreamt of him beneath Little Fu Mount—
The waters like his girdle pendant, the moon his lapel.

斯人清唱何人和？草徑苔蘚不可尋。
一夕小散山下夢，水如環佩月如幃。

The theme here is purity—the ch’ìng 清 of line one—in both Shen Ya-chih’s character and works. Line one suggests both Shen’s skill in poetry as well as his failure to find an understanding patron or friend, someone to match songs with him and help him in his career [34]. The second line suggests Tu Mu has been shown where Shen had lived, a place that when Tu Mu visited, scarcely more than a decade


Ch’i-h-chou is today Kuei-ch’i Shih 黃池市 in Anhwei (T’an Ch’i-hsiang, 5:38) and Mu-chou was located on what is today the Fu-ch’un 傳秦 River about sixty air miles southwest of modern Han-chow, some fifteen miles east of modern Chien-te 建德 County in Chekiang (T’an Ch’i-hsiang, 5:55). Both land and water routes could have taken Tu Mu through Wu-k’ang and thus by Shen Ya-chih’s home.


[34] In contrast to the portrayal of Shen as a recluse in Tu Mu’s poem, we know he wandered about North China in search of a patron for more than twenty years after first taking the chih-shih examination (see Nienhauser, “Shen Ya-chih,” pp. 141-144).
after Shen’s passing, yields little trace of him. The imagery here is also that of the reclusel—where moss and grasses grow, there is no one vainly pursuing a career. In his commentary, Feng Chi-wu (Shih chi 1781) cites the following passage depicting the home of K’ung Ch’un-chih’s孔澤之 (368-426) reclusive home as relevant:

A thatched house and a bramble-woven door, the courtyard high in grasses, the path obstructed by weeds—only on his couch are there several fascicles of books.

茅室蓬戶，庭草蘚徑，唯床上有數卷書。

The final couplet again stresses Shen’s isolation, living beneath Little Fu Mount by a stream. To Tu Mu the scene evokes a synaesthetic metaphor: the waters sound clear and clean, like the jade girdle-pendants Shen may have worn during his days as an official, the moon bright and crescent-shaped, like the labels of his robe. 環佩（jade girdle-pendants）may also suggest a passage from the “Ching-chi” 經解 chapter of the Li chi (Book of Ritual):

That which is called the “Son of Heaven” together with Heaven and Earth form a trio. For this reason his virtue is matched to that of Heaven and Earth, all joining to benefit the myriad things. He is equally as bright as sun or moon, illuminating all within the Four Seas, not

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[36] Also known as Fu-shan 福山, see Chou Hsi-fu, Tu Mu shih-hsien, p. 162, n. 3. The land immediately to the west of Wu-k’ang ascents into the T’ien-mu 天目 Mountains and Little Fu Mount must be part of the foothills. The stream here may be Ch’ien hai 前漢 which flowed just north of Wu-k’ang during the T’ang (Frontal Creek; see T’an Ch’i- hsiang, 5:55).

[37] This usage of huan-p’ei may also be incidental. But the comparison of the major figure to the moon in both Tu Mu’s poem and the Li chi strengthens the possibility that this is an allusion.

neglecting any crook or cranny. When he is at court, he guides through humanity and sagacity, social propriety and righteousness. When he is at ease, he listens to the music of the elegantiae and the laudes. When he is in motion, there are the sounds of jade girdle- pendants; when he ascends his carriage, there is the music of the luan 軒 and ho 和 bells. In this way, wherever he sits there is propriety, whatever he moves towards or moves from has standards.

If Tu Mu intended the reader to recall this passage, his implication is clear: like this ideal ruler, wherever Shen Ya-chih sat, there was propriety, whatever he pursued or abandoned, he did so with moderation (if a person wearing a girdle pendant moved too quickly, without moderation, the pendants would clash causing a sound—thus they were a reminder to behave with propriety).

The final line may also refer to Shen’s poetry. Like the “Son of Heaven” in the Li chi reference, Shen certainly “listened” to the music of the ya 雅 (elegantiae) and sung 頌 (laudes) verses of the Shih ching in his leisure. His own verse was more in keeping with the “water and moon” romantic quality suggested by Tu Mu’s metaphor, especially those poems which grace his tales, as the following passage from “Ch’in-meng chi” 秦夢記 (Record of a Dream of Ch’in) illustrates. Here Shen is lamenting the loss of Nung Yü 弄玉, the daughter of Duke Mu 穆 of Ch’in, whom he married in his dream:

In the spring of the next year, when the Duke of Ch’in went to Shih-p’ing 始平, the princess suddenly died without having been ill. The Duke was devastated and couldn’t get over it. When they were about to bury her in the plains above Hsien-yang, the Duke ordered Ya-chih to compose a dirge; so instructed, he wrote:

With tears I bury a sprig of crimson,
In life we were together, upon (your) death we parted.

[39] About 15 miles northeast of Hsien-yang; Shih-p’ing was located near a former capital of Ch’in, but the place-name itself is the name of a T’ang county and was not used in pre-T’ang times.
Golden filigree fallen into sweet-smelling grasses,
A scent from your embroidery swells with the spring breeze.
In days of old, where one heard the pan-pipes—
In the high tower just now lit by the moon.
Pear blossoms on the night of the Cold Food Festival,
Shut tight within the Palace of Jasper Infinitesimal.

He presented it to the duke and, when the duke had read the lyrics, he judged it excellent.\[105\]

What makes the imagery of the final line so striking, however, is the reversal of tenor and vehicle in the metaphor 水如環佩月如襟. Normally, the girdle-pendants would sound like water flowing, the lapels resemble the moon. But here, with Shen Ya-chih already deceased, Tu Mu reverses the imagery with striking effect\[106\].

Tu Mu’s poem, in summation, seems an excellent example of how to combine the natural scene and the poet’s feelings. Tu Mu’s feelings may have been enhanced by his ties to Shen’s family—Tu had served over five years (828-833) on the staff of Shen Ya-chih’s uncle, Shen Ch’uan-shih 沈傳師 (769-827), when the latter was Civilian Governor of Chiang-hsi 江西. Although Tu Mu echoes Li Ho in his praise for Shen Ya-chih as a talented poet, his view of Shen as a man is more ethereal, perhaps because Li Ho and Shen were actually friends, whereas Tu Mu knew him only by reputation.

The final poem to be considered here is Li Shang-yin’s “Ni Shen-hsia-hsien” 楠沈下賢 (Imitating Shen Ya-chih)\[107\], written in 845 more than a decade after Shen’s death:


\[106\] Yet another reading of the final line could interpret the tinkling jade-pendants as those of a woman. Tu Mu would quite naturally dream of her, since he was spending the night near Shen’s old home, causing him to conjure up images of one of the airy feminine creatures that populate Shen’s tales.

\[107\] Text as in Yeh Ts’ung-ch’i 杨仲奇, commentator, *Li Shang-yin shih chi shu-chu* 李商隱詩集箋注 (Peking: Jen-min wen-hsüeh ch’u-pan she, 1985), 1.196. I have not located a translation of this poem.
Among twelve-hundred nimble simurghs,
One so slender, the spring blouse she is wearing hangs loose;
Dancing faster and faster, seemingly carried by the wind;
A snow-filled mouth, what she says should be cold.
Her fire-red belt causes the golden dipper to fall.
With her joined-pearl [hairpin], she breaks the jade platter.
Though he passed by Ho-yang to view the flowers,
She has not even asked if he is P’an An!

千二百輕鸞，春衫瘦著無。
簡風行稍急，含霧語離慟。
帶火遭金斗，兼珠碎玉盤。
河陽看花過，曾不聞潘安。

This poem is obviously more difficult than the previous two. There are two basic interpretations. The first, advocated by commentators such as Feng Hao 馮浩 (1719-1801), believe this is an romantic poem, couched in mythological tropes \[43]\.
In this scheme, the subject of this poem is a favorite consort of the then current emperor, Wu-tsung 武宗 (r. 840-846), and its intent to indirectly criticize the emperor’s fondness for beautiful women. In line one she is compared to one of the palace women of the Yellow Emperor who, according to legend, ascended to heaven with twelve-hundred women \[44]\.
These women are compared to the lian-birds or simurghs, a fowl related to the phoenix, the most ethereal and noble of winged creatures. In this reading \[45]\, line two depicts her delicate beauty and line three


\[45]\ My interpretation here follows the traditional idea that the poem is an allegory attacking Emperor Wu-tsung, but varies from commentators like the modern scholar Yeh Ts’ung-ch’i 葉廷機 who sees the allegory as follows: the first couplet attacks the two qualities Wu-tsung was noted for—lasciviousness and superstition; the second criticizes his fondness for the hunt; the third couplet, containing a reference Yeh believes refers to the tortures devised
describes her lithe dancing. In another poem entitled “Feng” 蜂 (Bees), Li Shang-yin uses the lightness of these insects in a metaphor which compares them to the empress of the Han Emperor Ch‘eng 成 (r. 33-7 B.C.), Chao Fei-yen 趙飛燕, as follows: “Empress Chao’s body so light, she is about to be carried off by the wind” 趙后輕欲飄飄風. Since Chao Fei-yen was also known for her dancing (as well as for palace intrigue), it seems Li Shang-yin intended the poetic figure in “Imitating Shen Ya-chih” to be Chao Fei-yen or someone like her. Line four refers the beauty of this woman’s teeth that seem as white as snow. Once again another line by Li Shang-yin may help to clarify the poet’s attempt here. In “Tseng Ko-chi, erh-shou (ti i)” 聲歌ovi, 二首 (第一) (Two Songs Presented to a Singing Girl, Number One) the third line metaphorically describes this girl’s mouth as follows: “A red rent in a cherry containing white snow” 紅綾櫻含白雪. Besides indicating her lovely smile on the surface level, “White Snow” also alludes to the song “Yang-ch’un pai-hšüeh” 阳春白雪 (White Snow in Spring), a piece that the ancient poet Sung Yü 申玉 (ca. 290-ca. 223 B.C.) claimed was so beautiful it could only be matched by a few birds in his entire state of Ch‘u 楚. Thus this fourth line in “Imitating Shen Ya-chih” could be read “As she sings ‘[White] Snow,’ the words of the song should be cold.” Line five continues the description of a court favorite, alluding to the crown prince in the Chin dynasty who gave golden dippers to his court women. Here continuing the dancing that began in line three, the woman knocks a golden dipper to the ground with her whirling red belt (or red streamers). Similarly, line six returns to the singing begun in line 4; as she taps the beat to the

by the last Shang ruler, Chou Hsin 續辛, refer to the Wu-tsung’s inability to control his anger or happiness. And the final two lines allude to his arrogant and unstraitened nature (see Yeh Ts‘ung-ch‘i, Li Shang-yin shih chi shu-chu, 1.196-197).

[98] Liu Hsüeh-k’ai and Yu Shu-ch‘eng, Li Shang-yin shih-ko chi-chieh, 3.1030. The story behind this line is that Chao Fei-yen, who was admired by the emperor because she was so light she could dance on a man’s palm, was blown from a boat into a lake by a light breeze before being rescued (see the various sources for these events in Li Shang-yin shih-ko chi-chieh, p. 1031, n. 2).

[99] Liu Hsüeh-k’ai and Yu Shu-ch‘eng, Li Shang-yin shih-ko chi-chieh, 4.1794. Sung Yu’s original, “Tui Ch‘u wang wen” 對楚王問 (Responding to the King of Ch‘u’s Questions), can be found in Wen hsüan 文選 (Taipei: Hua-cheng Shu-chü, 1982), 45:1a-2b (pp. 627-628).

[100] See n. 5 in Liu Hsüeh-k’ai and Yu Shu-ch‘eng, Li Shang-yin shih-ko chi-chieh, 4.1748.
music of her song with her inlaid-pearl hairpin, she breaks a valuable plate [39]. Or this sixth line may refer rather to her playing some instrument, as a couplet describing the moving music of the lutist in Po Chü-i’s “P’i-p’a hsing” 琵琶行 (Song of the Lute) suggests: “When she strums hard, the sound swells like a driving rain, / When she strums softly, the sound is pressing like whispered words; / Swelling and pressing she blends together the strokes, / Like large pearls, then small pearls, falling onto a jade platter” 大弦嘈嘈如急雨，小弦切切如私语，嘈嘈切切錯雜彈，大珠小珠落玉盤 [39]. The final couplet of Li Shang-yin’s poem implies the loyalty of the woman to her lover, on one level the emperor, as she seems to ignore even the notoriously good-looking P’an An[-jen] 潘安仁 or P’an Yüeh 潘岳 (247-300) [31]. When he was prefect of Ilo yang 河陽 [30], P’an was said to have planted peach and plum trees everywhere. The literary relationship between real flowers and their feminine cousins is especially appropriate in P’an’s case. Li Shang-yin makes this point in a line to another of his poems, “Shih ch’eng” 石城 (Stone City): “In the flowery county life is even more romantic” 花縣更風流 [33].

The problem with this sort of allegorical reading is that it does not fit with the tone or mode any of Shen Ya-chih’s other extant works. In other words, it does not seem to be in concert with Li Shang-yin’s claim that he is “imitating” Shen Ya-chih. Although P’an Yüeh obviously represents a contemporary of Li Shang-yin, the final couplet leaves open his identity. Since P’an left an essentially positive reputation, reference to Emperor Wu-tsung is less likely. A reading inserting Li Shang-yin as the P’an Yüeh of the final lines seems more likely. The poem would then be read as a depiction of a singing girl or other object of Li’s affections who, despite his talent and good looks, ignores him. In this sense Li Shang-yin is matching the many romantic poems Shen Ya-chih left us in his tales (such as that seen above).

[39] The description of this practice can be found in lines 49-50 of Po Chü-i’s “P’i-p’a hsing” 琵琶行 (Hsiao Sung-ên 稀少仲, Po Chü-i shih i-hsi 白居易詩評 [Taipei: Wei-chung Chiang Jen-min ch’u-pan she, 1981], p. 349).


[31] P’an was also noted for his relations with women (especially as a youth), and his skill in composition. See, for example, the final lines of P’an’s biography in the Chin shu 聖書 (Rpt. Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1982 [1974]), 5.55:1506.

[32] Slightly west of modern Meng County in Honan; T’an Ch’i-hsiang, 3.35-36.

[33] Yeh Ts’ung-ch’i, Li Shang-yin shih ci shu-chü, 1.63.
There may be yet a third level of meaning for this couplet. P'an Yüeh may also be a persona for Shen Ya-chih, attempting to win the favors of an influential patron or the emperor himself. This imagery derives from the Ch’u tz’u (The Songs of the South), a collection of poems which clearly had considerable influence on Shen—his “Hsiang-chung yuan’ chieh” (An Explication of “The Plaint from the ‘Hsiang’”) fashions a number of poems in the style of The Songs of the South and the female protagonist in the story claims that she both reads these ancient poems and composes her own imitations. Following this interpretation of the final couplet, line one would then become a hyperbolic depiction of Shen Ya-chih’s relationship with women, most probably the courtesans of the capital in addition to the women of his tales. The type of bird mentioned here, the luan 鳳 or “simurgh” is often used to suggest beautiful women. It also figures allegorically in the “She chiang” 沙江 (Crossing the river), the second of the “Chiu chang” 仇章 (Nine Declarations) in the Ch’u tz’u. David Hawkes translates the relevant six lines, which comprise the envoi (luan 亂) to the poem, as follows:

The phoenix [our “simurgh’] and the phoenix’s mate are daily more and more remote,
And swallows, sparrows, crows and pies next in the chambers and the high halls.
The daphne and lily-magnolia die in the wild wood’s tangle;
Stinking weeds find a position: fragrant flowers may not come near.
For the Dark and Light have changed places: the times are out of joint.
With true heart long I pondered; then suddenly I set forth.

亂曰鸞鳳皇日以遠兮，燕雀鶴鶏巢堂壇兮，露申辛夷死林薄兮，陸離並御芳不得薄兮，陰陽易位時不當兮，懐侶偽眷忽乎吾將何兮。

[54] See the translation and discussion of this story in Nienhauser, “Shen Ya-chih’s T’ang Tales,” pp. 50-54.
[57] Ch’u tz’u pu-chu 楚辭補正, Szu-pu pei-yao (hereafter SPPY), 4:10b-11a.
There seems to be relevance between these lines and Li Ho’s poem, which also compares Shen Ya-chih to a (fallen) flower, that is to say someone fallen through failure in the examinations. It further implies clearly that the times are out of joint by attacking the examiners. Wang I’s 王逸 (ca. 89-ca. 159) commentary on the luan ‘significance in “Crossing the River” is also of interest:

The simurgh is an outstanding bird. If there is a sagely lord, then it approaches, and if there is one without virtue, it departs; [the simurgh is employed here to] arouse (the image) of a worthy ministers facing difficulty in approaching (the ruler) and finding it easy to withdraw (from him).

鴟鳥，俊鳥也，有聖君則來，無德則去，以興賢臣難進易退也。[38]

Lines 2-4 would have similar interpretations as those in the reading that posits Li Shang-yin as the subject of the final couplet. Parallels between Chao Fei-yen, who was successful at court for a time, but fell from favor when her emperor died and was eventually led to commit suicide, and the vagaries of Shen Ya-chih’s career under several T’ang emperors might also be established[39]. The allusion to Sung Yü’s claim that few poets in Ch’u would have been able to match the “White Snow” song would then turn from implying Li’s high opinion of his own work, to praise for Shen’s verse. The word kuo 迩 in the final couplet would take on added meaning in this reading: “His viewing flowers in Ho-yang has passed (because Shen has already died), / No need to ask if he was P’an Yüeh?”

Aside from the possible identification of Shen and P’an in Li Shang-yin’s poem, further evidence for Shen’s reputation as a poet of “sensual verse” (yen-t’i 色體), a style that Li Shang-yin advocated against the more didactic efforts of Po Chü-i and his associates, can be found in a poem of their contemporary, Hsü Ning 徐凝 (fl. 825-830), wrote in 831, “Sung Shen Ya-chih fu Ying yüan” 送沈亞之赴郢源

[38] Ch’u tz’u pu-chu, SPPY, 4:10b; my translation.

The idea of the simurgh as a symbol of the chün-tzu 君子 is discussed in detail by James Hargett in his “Playing Second Fiddle,” esp. pp. 255ff.

Shen Ya-chih’s Literary Reputation in the Ninth Century

(Seeing off Shen Ya-chih who Was Heading to Ying[-chou] as Administrator):

For tens of thousands of miles Administrator Shen rides his piebald—
No need to feel disappointment on the journey to Ying;
For several years there has been no one to sing “White Snow.”
Today only you can ascend the cloudy belvedere.

千萬乘騏沈司戩，不須惆悵邸中遊。
幾年白雪無人唱，今日唯君上雲樓。

Although it is impossible to tell whether Hsü’s reference to “White Snow” was
influenced by Li Shang-yin’s poem, the repetition of this allusion is striking.
Moreover, Hsü expands the allusion to include mention of Ying, which was both the
city to which Shen was traveling as well as the place that Sung Yü first heard the
song (the mention of the piebald horse trekking thousands of miles in line one also
recalls Li Ho’s poem on Shen).\(^{[90]}\) Hsü Ning is praising Shen Ya-chih by claiming
that although he has been transferred to a remote post (Ying), he is now in the place
where Sung Yü heard “White Snow,” and with his poetic talents will have a chance
to match that famous verse\(^{[81]}\). The “cloudy belvedere,” a haunt of immortals, will
possibly afford Shen as distant view, one from which he can perhaps see his
predecessors who could sing “White Snow” long ago\(^{[82]}\).

\(^{[90]}\) See “Tui Ch’u wang wen,” Wen hsüan, 45:1a-2b (pp. 627-628).

\(^{[81]}\) Actually, the Ying 郢 where Sung Yü heard “White Snow” and the Ying to which Shen
has been assigned are not the same place; but the graph is the same and Hsü Ning is no
doubt playing on this coincidence.

\(^{[82]}\) The Yün-lou, Cloudy Belvedere, could simply refer to a tall tower affording not only a
view of the surrounding area, but of the past (see Hans H. Frankel, “The Contemplation
of the Past in ˇâng poetry,” in Perspectives on the ˇâng, edited by Arthur P. Wright
玄, the Second Emperor of the Ch’in (r. 212-210), built a Yün-ko 雲閣 (Cloudy Pavilion)
which was also known as the Yün-t’ai 雲臺 and was supposed to be as high as the
Southern Mountain 南山 (San-fu huang-t’u 三輔黃圖 as cited in Morohashi Tetsuji 諸橋
敏次, Daikanwa jiten 大漢和辭典 [Tokyo: Daishihan shoten 大修館書店, 1955-1960],
12.12614, gloss 42235.76], but if this reference has an extended meaning it is too a
building high enough it was fit for immortals, like the poet Shen Ya-chih.

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Even if the P’an Yüeh/Shen Ya-chih equation can be accepted, the question for modern readers remains: what aspects of Shen Ya-chih was Li Shang-yin imitating in this poem? Was he arguing, as Feng Hao intimates, that Shen was a romantic fellow who could easily have played the roles of various lotharios in traditional China? Was he writing a piece of “sensual verse” such as Shen employed in his tales? Or was he imitating Shen Ya-chih’s own allegories? The question is not easily resolved. Indeed, there are few of Shen’s poems in the Complete T’ang Poems that offer the possibility of an allegorical reading. However, a number of the poems in Shen’s ch’ian-ch’i tales might be seen as similar to Li Shang-yin’s in tone. The following “Ch’un-tz’u ch’ou Yuan Wei-chih [Yuan Chen 无稹]” 春詞酬元微之 (A Spring Tune Matching that by Yuan Wei-chih) is typical:

When the yellow oriole calls, the spring sun is on high;
Red blossoms completely open, peach trees about the well.
As the beauty’s hands warm, cutting patterns becomes easy,
Blossom by blossom the light flowers drop as if cut by her scissors.  

黃鶯啼時春日高，紅芳發盡井邊桃。
美人手暖裁衣易，片片輕花落剪刀。

The mei-jen 美人 in line two is clearly a beautiful woman on the surface level. Yet in a subtext, the literal meaning of “beautiful person” could also refer to Yuan Chen, who in his fine verse was able to chien-tsai fu-tz’u 畸貴浮辭 “cut out insubstantial

[60] Ch’iian T’ang shih, 8.493:5581 (the poem has also been attributed to Shih Chien-wu 施肩吾 [ft. 820]).

[64] The spring breeze has been compared variously to scissors elsewhere in T’ang poetry, cf. the following lines from Ho Chih-chang’s 費知章 (659-744) “Yung liu” 楊柳 (Singing of the Willow; Ch’iian T’ang shih, 2.1147): “I don’t know who has cut out the delicate leaves, / But the spring winds of the Second Month are like a pair of scissors” 不知細葉誰裁出，二月春風似剪刀。

Another possible reading would be that this beauty was cutting out a flower pattern herself (fitting well the extended meaning praising Yuan Chen’s verse), as in Pao Ch’iian’s 穆昶 (d. 551) “Yung chien ts’ai-hua shih” 楊罷彩花詩 (A Song of Cutting Colorful Flowers; Lü Ch’in-li, Hsien-Ch’iin Han Wei Chin Nan-p’ei ch’’i’o shih, 3.2026).
diction”; thus the poem depicts a beautiful girl in a spring scene while also praising the addressee, Yüan Chen.

For extended metaphors—t.e., allegory—however, the reader must turn to Shen’s tales, among which at least “Ch’i-in-meng chi” 契夢記 (Record of a Dream of Ch’in) has been so interpreted by some critics [63]. It seems possible that Li Shang-yin in “Imitating Shen Hsia-hsien” was able to suggest that Shen was a romantic rogue like himself, on one level of the poem, while also empathizing with Shen’s mercurial career. Li did so in language borrowed from the Ch’u tz’u, referring to Shen as an unappreciated minister unable to turn the head of a mei-jen 美人 “beautiful person” to support him [66].

With the evidence among works by Shen which have already been critically examined scant, perhaps it merits our efforts to examine more closely a work which has only recently been attributed to Shen [67], a tale known by the titles “Kan-i chi” 感異記 (Record of Someone Moved by the Strange) and “Shen Ching chuan” 沈警傅 (An Account of Shen Ching), in the effort to further understand what it was that Li Shang-yin was trying to imitate [68]. Although there is no way to date this tale, it resembles works Shen wrote in the late 820s such as “Record of the Dream of Ch’in”:

Shen Ching 沈警 [69], style-name Hsüan-chi 玄機 [70], was a native of Wu-k’ang 武康 [County] in Wu-hsing 烏興 [Commandery]. Combining good looks with an elegant demeanor, and skilled in composing verse,

[66] At the same time, of course, Li Shang-yin would be allying himself to Shen Ya-chih and Sung Yü in an appeal to his own ruler for recognition.
[67] Li Chien-kuo 李劍國, T’ang Wu-tai chih-kuai ch’uan-ch’i hsü-ku 胡五代志怪傳奇敘錄 (2v.; Tientsin: Nan-k’ai ta-hsieh ch’u-pan she, 1933), 1.410-411, gives six reasons why he believes the tale was written by Shen Ya-chih.
[68] There are two basic texts, that titled “Shen Ching chuan” in the T’ai-p’ing kuang-chi 太平廣記 (Rpt. Taipei: Wen-shih-che ch’u-pan she, 1981). 326:2589-2591, and an abridged version titled “Kan-i chi” 感異記 (A Record of Someone Moved by the Strange) in Tseng Ts’aiou 曹植 (fl. 1136), Lei-shuo 類說 (Pi-chi hsiao-shuo ta-kuan 筆記小說大觀 edition. [Taipei: Hsin-hsing Shu-chu 新興書局, 1975], Section 31, 3.28:14b-15a [pp. 1842-1843]. Both of these versions are based on the text that originally appeared in the I-wen lu 異聞錄 (the Lei-shuo actually cites the I-wen chi 異聞集, but this has been shown to be the same work as I-wen lu by Wang Meng-ou 王夢鴻 and others).
[69] As Li Chien-kuo, Hsü-ku, p. 410, points out, this is not the same Shen Ching that Shen
he served as aide\(^{(70)}\) in the eastern palace of the Liang dynasty\(^{(70)}\), his name well known to contemporaries. Every time a high official hosted a party he would surely send a rider to invite him. There was a saying: “If Hsiüan-chi sits at your party mat, the mood of the guests will never be flat!” His importance was extended like this.

Later when the Ching-Ch’u region fell\(^{(73)}\), he entered the Chou court, became Supreme Pillar of State, and was ordered to go as envoy to Lung in Ch’in\(^{(74)}\).

His journey passed the Chang Nü-lang Temple\(^{(75)}\) where most travelers worshipped (the goddess) with wine and delicacies. Ching alone poured a cup of water and completed a sacrificial invocation which read:

I pour that cold spring water,
in a mountain valley pluck red blossoms.
Though to reach them was not far.

Yüeh lists as one of his (and Shen Ya-chhi’s) ancestors in his “Tzu-hshi” 自序 [Postface] to the Sung shu, 8.100:2445.

\(^{(70)}\) This tsu 字 or “style-name” literally means “Mysterious Reasoning” and is part of the Taoist trappings of this tale (along with the use of the sacred Taoist Marchmount Heng, the cavern flutes, etc.). It may also suggest the means that Shen Ya-chhi used to create his fictional protagonist.

\(^{(73)}\) Ch’ang-shih 常侍: this title and the others which follow are translated according to Charles Hucker, A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985).

\(^{(74)}\) The eastern palace was that of the heir apparent, then probably Hsiao Yuan-liang 蕭元良, the fourth son of Hsiao I 蕭德, Emperor Yuan 元 of the Liang Dynasty (r. 532-553). When the capital was destroyed by an army of Western Wei in 555, he and his father were killed (Nan shih 南史 [Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1975], 54:1346).

\(^{(75)}\) The Liang Dynasty occupied roughly the same territory as Ch’u (also known as Ching or Ching-Ch’u) had in the Warring States era (see T’an Ch’i-hsiang, 4.21-22).

\(^{(76)}\) Another clue that the author was Shen Ya-chhi can be found in this location, which could be equated with the T’ang-Dynasty Lung-chou 隆州 in the area traditionally referred to as Ch’in 秦 (T’an Ch’i-hsiang, 5.62), which was Shen Ya-chhi’s birthplace (see Nienhauser, “Shen Ya-chhi,” p. 141).

\(^{(77)}\) According to Li Chien-kuo, Hsi-lu, p. 412, there was a temple to Chang Nü-lang at P’ing-yang Chun 洛陽郡, i.e., Lung-chou.
yet I present them following the local custom.
The sincere [the pure water] and genuine [the red blossoms] are here,
may the goddess be moved to accept them.

Since darkness had already fallen, he spent the night at a relay
station [76]. Leaning on the balcony rail while watching the moon, he
wrote "The Phoenix Requests the Phoenix Chick to Utter Its Tender
Call" (Feng chuang ch’u han-chiao ch’u 凤将雏含娇曲) [77]; its text
read:

I order them to warble, but no one warbles;
The phoenix utters tender calls, but where can we hear tender?
I pace about, the moon just above the flowers,
In vain I pass this night in which there should be love.
Then he wrote a sequel song which went:
Softly so softly the spring wind arrives,
Finely so finely a light spring dew forms.
Isn’t it pitiful that the "Moon in the Frontier Mountains"
Takes form, its brightness remaining useless.[79]

[76] Postal-relay stations were often laid out with rooms for travelers, serving essentially as
inns.

[77] It seems that there was an old song, possibly dating to the Han Dynasty, known as "Feng
chuang ch’u" 凤将雏 (The Phoenix Asks the Phoenix Chick, see Ch’in shu, 23:716 and
Chiu T’ang shu 史唐書 [Peking: Chung-hua shu-chi, 1975], 29:1063) from which Shen
Ya-chih created this title. According to Wang Ju-t’ao 王汶鶴 (T’ai-p’ing kuang-chi
hsian 太平廣記選 [Tsinan: Ch’i Lu shu-she, 1980], p. 204, n. 2), Feng’s title later
became a fixed tz’u 詞 (lyric) tune.

Here there is an obvious parallel between the elder phoenix asking the younger to
sing and Elder Sister asking Little Sister to present her songs. Later in the tale Shen Ya-
chih reminds the reader of the associations between phoenixes and immortals when he
alludes to the story of Hsiao Shih 蕭史 and Nung Yu 弥玉 who flew off to become
immortals on the backs of phoenixes summoned with their beautiful music. This pair is
also featured in Shen’s tale "Ch’in-meng chi."

[78] Once again there is a song title meant to be read literally and figuratively. Shen Ya-chih
is viewing a frontier-pass moon in Lung-chou, but he is also alluding to the traditional
yüeh-fu poem titled “Kuan-shan yüeh” 開山月 which usually depicted the sorrows of
When he finished intoning them, he heard someone sigh in admiration outside the bamboo curtains of his doorway. The person further said: “How can you idle away such a night, how could the white moonlight not be bright?” The voice was clear and sweet, rather stranger than that of a normal woman. Suddenly a girl appeared, lifted the door curtains and slipped in. She bowed and said, “The ladies Chang have sent me to convey their compliments.”

Ching found this strange; as he was putting his clothing and cap in order, and before he could leave his seat, the two sisters entered. She said to Ching: “You have climbed mountains and forded streams thereby tiring yourself.”

Shen replied, “I am traveling on official business, but the spring night moved me so, I intoned a song so as to dispel somewhat the sorrows of being sent on this trip. How could I expect that you ladies would deign to descend in your immortal carriage? I wish to know who is the elder and who the younger?”

The two ladies looked at each other and smiled. Elder Sister [9] said to Ching: “I am the second sister. I was matched with the elder son of the Madame of Mount Lu [10]. Pointing to the younger lady, she said, soldiers garrisoned on the border far from their homes and families. The brightness of the moon in the final line is “useless,” since the soldiers are far from their wives with whom they might want to enjoy it. Of course, we can assume Shen Ching is away from his family, but perhaps Shen Yu-chih intended some more personal reference. He made several extended trips to what is now western Shansi in search of patronage after passing the chin-shih in 815 and this song may refer also to his personal experience (see Nienhauser, “Shen Ya-chih,” pp. 141ff.).

There seem to be three sisters, in addition to their maid. The eldest is called Lady Chang 蒋女郎, referred to here as Eldest Sister, the second is Elder Sister 大女郎, and the third Little Sister 小女郎. Throughout this narrative, Eldest Sister, the actual goddess of the temple, remains at the Storied Wall. The Storied Wall was also called T’ien t’ing 天庭 (The Court of Heaven) and was supposedly the residence of the supreme god, T’ai-ti 太帝 (see Morohashi, Daikanwa jiten, 4:3569, gloss 7798.28).

Although Mount Lu 盧山 is the eighth small grotto-heaven in the Taoist cosmology (Ti-pa Hsiao-tung-t’ien 第八小洞天; see Chang Chih-che 索志智, ed., Tao-chiao wen-hua tz’u-tien 道教文化辭典 [Nanking: Chiang-su ku-chi ch’u-pan she, 1994], p.1090). I have been unable to locate the Lady associated with the mount and assume Shen Ya-chih created her for this tale.
“She was matched with the youngest son of the Lord of the Mount Heng 山 居 余宅, Residence ”. Moreover, because it is my older sister’s birthday, we are going together to pay a call on her. It so happens that today Eldest Sister is paying her respects at the Storied Wall [32] and has not returned. In the mountains it is rather quiet and lonely and on a fine night can fill one with emotions. Would that you ascend my carriage without worrying about being too tired!”

Then she took his hand and they went out the door. Together they got into a curtained, doubled-axle carriage [33], pulled by six horses, and quickly moved off into the void. In a short while they reached a place with pearly belvederes and flying pavilions, all of unparalleled dazzling loveliness. They allowed Ching to stop at a pavilion on the water, where fraerant airs drifted in from outside. Many kingfisher feathers had been woven into the door curtains with golden thread and, in the middle, were strings of pearls which brightly illuminated the whole room. After a short while, the two ladies slowly came out from the rear of the pavilion, bowed to Ching, and then took their seats. They also provided him with wine and fine things to eat. Elder Sister began to strum a standing lute [41]. Then Little Sister accompanied her on the zither. They

[31] One of the five sacred Taoist mountaintops, catycombed with caverns in which immortals live (see Tao-chiao ta-tzu t’ien 迷藏大羅天, edited by Ming Chih-t’ing 閔智亭 and Li Yang-cheng 李義正 [Peking: Hua-hsia ch’u-pan she 華夏出版社, 1994], pp. 997-998).

[32] Ts’eng-ch’eng 剛城 is the highest peak of the K’un-lun Mountains which figured in earlier Taoist works such as Sun Chuo’s 孫绰 (314-371) “Yu T’ien-t’ai Shan fu” 遊天台山賦 (Rhapsody on Roaming the Celestial Terrace Mountains), Wen hsüan, 11:6a and Chang Heng’s 張衡 (78-139) “Su-t’i-hsüan fu” 思玄賦 (Rhapsody on Contemplating the Mystery), Wen hsüan, 15:14b. This city-wall like cliff was situated east of a tree of immortality (see Hsiu-nun Ts’u 淮南子, SPYY edition, 4.2b).

[33] Tsu-p’ing ch’ê 軟轡車 was a becurtained carriage designed for women. A p’ing-ch’ê 軟車 had only one axle, but the tsu-p’ing ch’ê had two, apparently allowing the passengers to lie down (see Hsiu Chia-ku 許嘉璐, ed., Chung-kuo ku-tai li-su tzu-wen ch’ê 古代中國禮俗語, 1991], pp. 181 and 183 as well as Huang Chin-kuei 黃金貴, Ku-tai wen-hua ts’u-i chi lei-pien k’ao 古代文化辭義集類辨考 (Shanghai: Shang-hai chiao-yü ch’u-pan she, 1995, pp. 1308-1309).

[41] K’ung-hou 基侯 was a stringed instrument which stood off the ground on legs much like a modern xylophone (Morohashi, 8.26151.1).
played several songs, none of which had ever been heard by human beings. Ching sighed in admiration for some time, and asked if he could write down the lute score. Little Sister laughed and said to Ching, “This was composed by the immortals who were [the daughter of] Duke Mu of Ch’in 秦穆公 (r. 659-621 B.C.) and the heir apparent of King Ling of Chou 周靈王 (r. 571-545) "[5]", and cannot be transmitted to mankind. Ching made rough notations on several of the tunes, but didn’t dare to inquire further. When they were tipsy from wine, Elder Sister sang a song:

> After man and spirit join together, it is difficult to meet again,
> We’ve come together unexpectedly and take our pleasure for a time;
> But the starry Milky Way is on the move, night is almost gone,
> And I’ve not yet enjoyed it to my heart’s content.

Little Sister sang a song:

> The cavern flute echoes—a distant wind set in motion,
> Deep in the clear night the flute and strings are vigorous.
> I will long for you to the “Tune of Mount Heng,”
> Since my heart was broken by the song “The Slopes of Mt. Lung in Ch’in.” [6]

[5] I.e., Nung Yu was the daughter of Duke Mu and her lover was the flutist Hsiao Shih 蕭史 (see, for example, Yüan K’o 袁珂, ed., Chung-kuo shen-hua ch’uan-shuo tz’u-tien 中國神話傳說詞典 [Shanghai: Shang-wu yin-shu kuan, 1986], p. 345). The heir apparent of King Ling of Chou, however, was another flutist, Wang Tzu-ch’iao 王子喬, whose legend does not involve any contact with Nung Yu (Yüan K’o, Chung-kuo shen-hua ch’uan-shuo tz’u-tien, pp. 56-57).

[6] Once again Shen T’ung is using song titles as both titles and the title as part of his poem. “Heng-shan ch’ü” 衛山曲, translated in the text as “Tune of Mount Heng,” can also mean “half way up the Mount Heng” which was identified above as Little Sister’s home.

“Ch’iu Lung-thou” 濤頭 refers to an old yüeh-fu 嚈_fh song, “Lung-thou liu-shui” 隰頭流水 (The Flowing Waters on the Slopes of [Mount] Lung) of which three versions remain (Kuo Mao-ch’ien, Yüeh-fu shih-chi, 2.25:368). These songs are laments by
She also inscribed a verse which read:

Our cloudy carriage will not again sit atop the Mount Lung.\textsuperscript{[37]}
My tears more numerous than those which stained the Hsiang River bamboo.\textsuperscript{[38]}
Who would have thought that through the mists and fog of Mount Heng
In vain I'll look to see whether the geese are bearing me a letter?\textsuperscript{[39]}

Shen Ching sang a song:

From the I-t'ieh 女帝 (403–418) how many years have already passed!
How many times did Chang Shuo 楚懷 love (the goddess)?\textsuperscript{[40]}

\textsuperscript{[37]} I.e., the Top of [Mount] Lung. This is not only part of the allusion to the \textit{yüeh-fu} song (see note just above), but also the place where Shen Ching met these divine sisters.

\textsuperscript{[38]} The legendary emperor Yao 懷 married his two daughters, O-huang 干呂 and Nü Ying 女英, to his successor, Shun 禹. Later when Shun died while touring the wilds of Ts'ang-wu 蒼梧 Mountain, the two women wept so hard for Shun that their tears mottled the bamboo along the Hsiang 湘 River (Yuan K'o, \textit{Chiang-kuo shen-hua ch'i-an-shuo tz'utien}, p. 394).

\textsuperscript{[39]} The connection between geese and letters dates back to Su Wu 使武 of the Han Dynasty who was captured by the Hsiang-nu 匈奴. He was able to send a letter back to the Han court by tying it to the feet of a goose. Since that time those away from their home thought of letters from home when they saw flying geese (Wang Ju-t'ao, \textit{T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi hsüan}, p. 208, n. 13).

In addition, there is a Hui yen Ling 順雁嶺 (Geese Returning Ridge) on Mount Heng which legend says is the furthest south the geese will fly before returning north. Thus Little Sister fears that there can be no communication, even by letter, once she returns to Mount Heng.

\textsuperscript{[40]} Chang Shuo alludes to a story recorded in \textit{Sou-shen chi} 搜神記 (A Record of a Search
Why cannot men of today attain that those of antiquity did?  
We see each other a short time, clearly not destined for one other.

The two sisters looked at each other and began to weep. Ching also shed tears. Little Sister said to Ching: "Cousin (Tu) Lan-hsiang 杜蘭香 and elder sister (Ch'eng-kung) Chih-ch'üng 成公智璞 also often felt this regret." [91]

Ching saw that these two ladies who had exchanged poems with him were greatly delighted, but he still didn't know with which he had made a secret bond. Ching looked at Little Sister and said, "Jun-yü 潤玉, is this person here worth thinking about?" [92] After a long time, for Spirits) which parallels this one. In it a goddess named Tu Lan-hsiang 杜蘭香 has her maidservant appear to Chang and tell him that Tu was fated to be his consort. Tu and two other maids then appear and chant a verse before departing. Later they return with another poem and some yams which Chang eats. Only then will the goddess descend and live with him (Sou shen chi [Peking: Chung-hua shu-chih, 1979], pp. 15-16). In the Sou-shen chi account, however, these events take place in the second year of the Chih-yü 建業 era of the Chin Dynasty. However, there is no Chien-yeh period during the Chin. Commentators have assumed that yeh is an error for hsing 興, the Chien-hsing 建興 reign period extending from 313 to 316. Shen Ching mentions the I-hsi era, which, although still under the Eastern Chin, is about a century later. Perhaps Shen nods here in his chronology.

[91] The story of Ch'eng-kung Chih-ch'üng and a mortal named Hsiün Ch'ao 張超 follows immediately that of Tu Lan-hsiang in modern editions of the Sou-shen chi (pp. 16-19). This story, too, involves an immortal who first appears to Hsiüan in a dream and later descends in a carriage with a number of maidservants. She also offers him a poem. An etiological envoy claims these events (or at least the account of them) induced Chang Min 張敏 of the Qin Dynasty to write a "Shen-nü fu 神女賦 (Rhapsody on the Goddess; Sou-shen chi, p. 19, and n. 9).

[92] This seems to be Little Sister's name. But we are not told above how Shen Ching learned this. Jun-yü refers to a line the poem "Hui-chên shih" 會貞詩 (Poem on an Encounter with an Immortal), penned by Yuan Chen and included in the tale "Ying-yü chüan" 楊 yüan 興癲 (An Account of Ying-yung), which ends the following passage: "這夜把絳裳，鶯鶯交繚舞，翡翠合歡藤，眉黛盡堆聚，唇朱暖更融。氣清聞蕊馥，膚潤玉肌豐，無力倚香顔。Wang Pi-chiang, T'ang-chen hsiao-shuo, p. 139, II, 2-4. James Hightower translates this passage as follows: "As she climbs into bed, silk covers in her arms. / Love birds in a neck-entwining dance/ Kingfishers in a conjugal cage./ Eyebrows, out of shyness, contracted / Lig rouge, from the warmth, melted, / her breath is pure: fragrance.
Elder Sister got ready to go and started to leave together with Little Sister. When they reached the door, Elder Sister said to Little Sister, “Jun-yü you should accompany Master Shen to bed.”

Ching was so happy as he almost lost control. Then, when he took her hand and went in the door, he saw that the maid had spread their bed linen before them. Little Sister grasped Ching’s hand and said, “Long ago I followed the two Royal Consorts who traveled to the Hsiang River. I saw you, sir, in the Temple to Emperor Shun reading a stele inscription by King Hsiang 相.” At that time I was keenly longing for you. Who would have thought it would have been tonight before I could fulfill a long-cherished wish to spend the night with you.”

Ching also completely committed all these events to memory. He took her hand in his and he talked to her intimately, unable to stop himself.

The little maid, who was quite lovely, came forward and said, “The roads of men and spirits are separate, partings are swift, meetings far apart. Moreover, Heng-o is jealous of humankind and is not willing to let the moon tarry to shine down; the Weaving Girl cannot be relied

of orchid buds / her skin is smooth: richness of jade flesh. / No strength, too weak to lift a wrist” (“Yuan Chen and ‘The Story of Ying-ying,’” Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, 33 (1973), pp. 100-101). The passage continues to describe their making love. Thus by calling Little Sister “Sleek Jade” Shen Ching implies that Little Sister is as beautiful as Ying-ying and, moreover, suggests that the intimate relationship between them is similar to that between Scholar Chang and Ying-ying.

On the two Royal Consorts see n. 80 above.

Although Wang Ju-t’ao (T’ai-p’ing kuang-chi hsüan, pp. 208-209, n. 22) has taken this King Hsiang 相 to refer to Li Tan 孝坦 (662-716), the eighth son of the T’ang Emperor Kao-tsung 懷宗, and therefore sees it as an anachronistic error by Shen Ya-chih, the term Hsiang Wang 相王 could refer to anyone who is a king and simultaneously serving as prime minister (see, for example, Chin shu, 7.84:2184). I follow Wang Ju-t’ao in my translation, and note that Li Tan titled King Hsiang from 674 through 678. He later became Emperor Jui-tsung 襟宗 (r. 710-712; see Chiu T’ang shu, 1:151). The only extant inscription by Li Tan, unrelated to our tale, can be found in Ch’uan T’ang wen, 1.19:21b-22b (p. 269).

Heng-o 娉娥, also known as Ch’ang-o 嫔娥, stole the drug of immortality from her
on, as she once again has already tipped the River \[90]. How long does an inch of time last? Why bother with so much talk?"

Then they shut the door and went to bed, attaining the height of pleasure.

When dawn was about to break, Little Sister got up and said to Ching: "The affairs of men and spirits differ, it is not fitting that we make merry in the daytime." Elder Sister was already at the doorway. Ching then placed Little Sister on his lap, put his arms about her, and together they told each other of their love. After a little while Elder Sister then came forward. The lovers wept, unable to restrain themselves.

Wine was set out again. Ching once more intoned a poem:

Just let the traveler’s heart feel how unfair it is,
How could it be right for ten-thousand miles to obstruct our love?
I only fear from today on the flowing waters atop Mount Lung
Will enhance the sound of soft sobbing as they part."

Ching then presented Little Sister with a ring. Little Sister presented Ching with a golden shared-pleasure knot \[90]. His song went:

husband, the archer I 昇, and fled to the moon where she lives eternally, but in lonely exile—thus she is jealous of happy lovers (Yüan K’o, Chung-kuo shen-hua chi’uan-shuo tz’u-tien, p. 304).

\[90] The River which the Weaving Girl 織女 tips is the T’ien ho 天河 "Heavenly River" or Milky Way which rotates into the horizon as the night nears its end. The Weaving Girl and her lover the Herder Boy 牛郎 were made into stars in the heavens separated by the Milky Way when they can only cross over on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month to spend a single night together each year (Yüan K’o, Chung-kuo shen-hua chi’uan-shuo tz’u-tien, p. 82). Thus it is fitting in her eyes that Sheng Ching and Little Sister have only a single night together.

\[91] Wu-yeh 唱嘯 can mean either the soft sounds of a stream flowing or of crying, thus it fits the context perfectly here.

\[92] Knotting was an art form in traditional China and such knots are common even in modern times.
Knotted hearts bind a myriad threads,
Knotted threads—how many thousand stitches?
Though knotted resentments have no way to end,
Our knotted hearts will never untie.

Elder Sister presented Ching with a jade-rimmed mirror. Her song went:

To remember all this in the future, look into this jade-rimmed mirror;
When we want to see each other, we can look at the bright moon.
Each of them can reflect you and me—
So do not allow the gleam to fade.\(^{109}\)

They offered each other a great number of poem and responses, which cannot all be recalled. Ching could only roughly remember a few verses.

Then they went out the door together again, rode the curtained, double-axle carriage to return to the temple below. Holding hands, (the lovers) softly sobbed and then parted.

When he reached the inn, Shen felt in his robe and found the jade-rimmed mirror and the golden-threaded knot. After some time, he told (all this) to the innkeeper. When night had fallen, he could not locate (the mirror and the knot). Those companions who were accompanying him all marveled at the strange fragrance Shen Ching had about him that night.

Later Ching was sent back (to the Chou court). When he reached the temple, he found an azure note-card behind the dais on which the goddess sat. This was a letter that Little Sister had left him. In great detail she narrated her regret on parting. At the end of the letter there was a piece of verse which read:

This urgent letter\(^ {100}\) is to inform Master Shen

\(^{109}\) The gleam of the moon and their past, as well as the gleam of the mirror.

\(^{100}\) *Fei shu* 飛書, literally "flying letter," normally means a letter hastily or urgently
That I will soon reach Heng-yang.
If our bond like metal and stone endures,
Let us look toward each other through the moonlit breeze.

From this time on the relationship was ended.

Before attempting to relate this tale to Li Shang-yin’s poem (and those of his fellow poets), some commentary is necessary. What seems most apparent is that the piece is not as polished as Shen’s other tales. It ends abruptly. Although it is conventional for the narrators of ch’uan-ch’i to reveal their “sources”—often conversations with friends, sometimes personal experience—it is not clear how this tale came to be recorded. Given the allusions to the two stories from Sou shen chi in one of Shen Ching’s poems, it seems likely that these chih-kuai 志怪 narratives exerted some influence on the composition of “An Account of Shen Ching” (“Ch’in-meng chi” is similarly based on “Nan-k’o T’al-shou chuan” 南柯太守傳 [An Account of the Governor of Southern Branch]) (100). The story is told by a narrator whose way of seeing the world closely resembles the views of the main characters of Shen’s other tales—and those of Shen Ya-chih himself. Both Shen Ching and Shen Ya-chih are from Wu-k’ang. Both, we can assume, were handsome, elegant and skilled in poetry. Both were Southerners who came north to enter government service and then traveled to the northwest. When the parallels with earlier stories such as the appearance of Nung Yü and the frequent exchanges of poetry are factored in, there seems to be a clear invitation to read Shen Ching as a persona for the author, Shen Ya-chih. By inviting this comparison, Shen Ya-chih was praising an ancestor as a man worthy of the attention of a goddess, as well as reminding his reader that he is descended from an illustrious clan (100).

delivered. But here there is the added meaning that it may have been brought by geese—see n. 109 above—and thus truly a “flying letter.”

100 Feng-yíeh 風月 means, pars pro toto, a beautiful night. Since it was on such nights that love affairs were often consummated, it also signifies the love between a man and woman (see Chung-wen ta-tzu’u tien 中文大辭典 [Taipei: Chung-wen ta-tzu’u tien pien-tsun wei-yüan hui, 1990 (1973)], 10:16154-16155, gloss 44734.29c)

102 See Nienhauser. “Shen Ya-chih’s T’ang Tales,” p. 66.

103 See Li Chien-kuo, T’ang Wu-tai chih-kuai ch’i hsi-lu, p. 411.
Aside from lending his descendant status, Shen Ching is, moreover, similarly inquisitive as the protagonist of this story to Shen Ya-chih as the main character in his other tales. Shen Ching tries unsuccessfully to recall all the verses exchanged (he could only “roughly remember” a few of them), he completely commits to memory the events of a previous meeting with Little Sister at the Temple to Emperor Shun, and he asks to write down the score of the lute and zither songs “which had never been heard by humans.” But Shen Ching is not the narrator of this tale—it is told by an omniscient, third person. Moreover, in what seems to be a flaw in the composition of the tale, the reader is not told how the narrator learns what his major character has seen, memorized, and experienced. It is true that this narrator is close to the action, that he looks over Shen Ching’s shoulder as events transpire. But he remains an observer and has no way to “memorize” poems or events. A link seems to be missing, the kind of association which would normally be given in the conventional back-frame such as was attached to so many T’ang tales. Perhaps this back-frame or some other part of the text has been lost or perhaps the piece was unfinished (explaining in part the failure to attribute it to Shen Ya-chih in the T’ai-p’ing kuang-chi). There are other inconsistencies which support the idea that what we have here is only a draft version: (1) although there seem to be three sisters, only two appear, the goddess herself mysteriously absent, (2) the inconsistency of the appearance of a T’ang figure (King Hsiang) in a tale which supposedly took place in the Northern Chou dynasty, (3) Shen’s sudden use of Little Sister’s given name, Jun yu, without his previously having been told it (custom really calls for him to ask her name during introductions), and (4) the chronological inconsistency between the dates Shen Ching gives in his poem on Tu Lan-hsiang and those concerning her in the Sou-shen chi.

Similarly incomplete is the relationship between the story and its Taoist references—the style name Hsitan-chi, the use of sacred Taoist sites like Mount

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[106] The synoptic version of this tale, titled “Kan-i chi,” in Lei-shuo edited by Tseng Tsao (fl. 1136) (10v.; Taipei: Hsin-hsing Shu-chi, 1985 [Pi-chi hsiao-shuo ta-kuan edition]), 3.28:14b-15a (pp. 1842-1843), has a slightly different structure. Whereas in the T’ai-p’ing kuang-chi version, the maid enters to hurry Little Sister and Shen Ching to their lovemaking, in the Lei-shuo account the maid enters to her oft-cited lines about Heng-o’s jealousy and the Weaving Girl’s unreliability after the couple sleep together, her poem suggesting the imminence of the dawn.
Heng, and the cavern flutes. Such references are not found in abundance in other tales by Shen Ya-chih, to be sure, and here they seem superficial, designed more to defamiliarize the tale and its female characters than to present a consistent Taoist viewpoint. "An Account of Shen Ching" differs markedly, for example, from Taoist tales of the sort written by Tu Kuang-t'ing (850-933) in addition, the allusions here are primarily to mainstream literary works.

**Concluding Remarks**

Stephen Owen has recently defined what he terms "a Mid-Tang culture of romance" to be detected in the *ch'uan-ch'i* of that era. Owen argues that "Huo Hsiao-yü" 霍小玉, a story with "economic compulsion and financial dependency everywhere beneath the surface," is the typical Mid-T'ang romance.

It is obvious that what Shen Ya-chih wrote does not fit this mold. Most of the plots he used were given him by friends in storytelling sessions or co-opted from other existing narratives. The result is a reliance on stereotypical plots, many derivatives of "Yu-hsien k'u" 遊仙窟 (A Visit to a Cavern of the Immortals) or its Six Dynasty antecedents, each involving a young man who meets a strange woman (or women) in a remote location and the informal but intense love affair that results. This formula is repeated by Shen in such tales as "I-meng lu" 異夢錄 (Record of a Strange Dream, 815 A.D.), "Yen-chih chih" 煙中之志 (A Record of [the Girl] within the Mist), 818 A.D.), "Ch'in-meng chi" (827 A.D.), and "An Account of Shen Ching." Even the conventional details are recycled—after taking his leave of a beautiful woman in "Record of a Strange Dream," Shen Ya-chih awakens to find copies of her poems in the pockets of his robe, much as he discovers the love-tokens from Elder Sister and Little Sister in "An Account of Shen Ching." In terms of narrative structure and style, Shen's stories are at best "popular romances," unable to measure up to the major works of the *ch'uan-ch'i*

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genre such as “Huo Hsiao-yü.” Yet Shen’s focus was on using well known stories as a frame for the love poems he integrated to his narratives so well. Moreover, Shen uses himself as the major character for most of his tales, including, it would seem, “An Account of Shen Ching.” He was not a historian like his relative Shen Chi-chi 沈凱濟 (ca. 740 ca. 800), the author of “Jen-shih chuan” 任氏傳 (An Account of Ms. Jen) and “Chen-chung chi” 枕中記 (Record of What Was Inside the Pillow), and many other tale writers. His narratives, with their poorly reconstituted plots, would not have sustained allegory even if he had aimed at it. Thus much of the admiration for Shen Ya-chih among early ninth-century literati—men like Li Ho, Tu Mu and Li Shang-yin—came about from the purely romantic nature of Shen Ya-chih’s tales and the persona he created for himself as the main character in most of them. Through works like “Record of a Dream of Ch‘in” and “An Account of Shen Ching” Shen Ya-chih became a sort of T‘ang-Dynasty P’an Yüeh, a figure imbued in romance. Although we have few details of his life, his devotion to his concubine Lu Chin-lan 盧金蘭 (789-814) and his interest in female protagonists, suggest that this romantic figure was not limited to the literary world.

Li Shang-yin’s poem was, therefore, imitating Shen Ya-chih in several ways. First, he was writing the kind of “sensual verse” Shen preferred in his tales. Second, the male poetic persona in Li’s poem consorts with a goddess-like woman, reminiscent of the supernatural amour courtois of “An Account of Sheng Ching” as well as the affairs reported in “A Record of a Dream of Ch‘in” and “A Record of the Girl within the Mist.” This romantic persona also influenced the poems on Shen by Li Ho and Tu Mu. Third, by composing on allegorical poem with obscure allusions, Li Shang-yin was following (or perhaps surpassing) the unique style that Shen Ya-chih employed in integrating his best poems into his tales. Finally, by exploiting the

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traditional association of a male lover to his beloved with that of a subject to his ruler, Li may have been lamenting Shen Ya-chih's lack of success in his official career, while intimating that he himself deserved more recognition.

It was these "styles," those of both author and his works, that Li Shang-yin meant to imitate in his poem. This twofold reputation, as recorded in poems by three major ninth-century poets, is what justified the editors of the New T'ang History in their claim that Shen Ya-chih "was a man who made his name through literature." It also provides, perhaps, a starting point for further work into the extended meanings of Shen Ya-chih's writings.