

# A Study of Streams Flow and Mountains Stand from the Perspective of New Historicism

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## Abstract

**Streams Flow and Mountains Stand is a historical novel written by Chin Shunshin, a famous Japanese Chinese writer. In this novel, Wen Shihang, the hero, embodies the author's own times and self-experience, and witnessed and experienced a series of changes in modern Chinese history. From the perspective of new historicism, this paper tries to interpret the novel by analyzing its historicity and historical textuality, so as to explore the uniqueness of Streams Flow and Mountains Stand embodied in new historicism and Chin Shunshin's view of history.**

## Keywords

**Chin Shunshin, Streams Flow and Mountains Stand, New historicism.**

## 1. Introduction

Chin Shunshin is a master of contemporary Japanese literature and the most influential Chinese-Japanese writer. *Streams Flow and Mountains Stand* is one of Chin Shunshin's trilogy with the theme of modern Chinese history and modern Sino-Japanese relations history, which occupies an important position in Chin Shunshin's literary works and connects historical novels with modern novels. *Streams Flow and Mountains Stand* are a masterpiece with a time span of ten years. Its background is from the Great Kanto Earthquake in Japan in 1923 to the Shanghai Incident when the Japanese army attacked Shanghai in January 1932. For the Japanese, this period is the last chance to avoid the "Fifteen Years War". This trilogy is different from Chin Shunshin's works on modern Chinese history, but shows the life of that troubled era with the fictional hero's experience. In *Streams Flow and Mountains Stand*, the hero is Wen Shihang, the son of an overseas Chinese businessman born in Shanghai and raised in Japan. Just like the meaning of the name "Shihang", Wen Shihang cruises in East Asia and meets real or fictional characters. With the ups and downs of Sino-Japanese relations, the fate of young Wen Shihang is like a ship, which is upside down in the rough waves. He looked forward to the improvement of Sino-Japanese relations, but the outbreak of one incident disappointed him. In order to inquire about the whereabouts of his friend Wang Xitian, A real person and social activist in history. Also known as Wang Xijing, he was born in Qianqianbaotun, Changchun, Jilin Province on September 11, 1896 (22nd year of Guangxu in Qing Dynasty). In 1915, he went to Japan to study abroad. He was killed in the Great Kanto Earthquake in Japan in 1923. Wen Shihang set foot on the motherland again, traveled in Hong Kong and Shanghai, witnessed and experienced a series of changes in modern Chinese history, and experienced the anti-Japanese national salvation movement that spread throughout the country.

This paper attempts to analyze this novel with the theory of new historicism in order to reflect the interaction between history and text. Shan He Zai has the dual identities of historical text and literary text at the same time. Through text design and imaginative reasoning, Chin Shunshin described the society at that time by interweaving fictional characters with real historical figures, which made the textual features of history vividly displayed. At the same time,

by setting a series of time coordinates, the text constantly points to history, showing the historicity of the text.

## 2. Overview of New Historicism Theory

The term "New Historicism" was clearly put forward by *Stephen Greenblatt* in the early 1980s. As one of the important representatives of New Historicism, *Louis Montros* made the following detailed explanations on the historicity of texts and the textuality of history: "I use 'historicity of texts' to refer to the historical concreteness and social materiality of all writing forms, including the texts studied by critics and the texts in which we study other texts; Therefore, I also refer to the historical, social and material content of all forms of reading. The textuality of history first means that we have no way to approach a complete and real past and a material existence without taking the textual trace of the society we study as a medium. Moreover, those traces cannot be regarded as merely accidental, but should be set as at least partly necessarily derived from the subtle process of selective preservation and smearing-just like those that produced the traditional humanities program. Secondly, when the text traces that won in the material and ideological struggle were transformed into archives and became the basis for people to claim the humanities position as their own descriptive and explanatory texts, they also served as the interpretation media for future generations. "

Drawing lessons from *Montros*' theory, "the textuality of history means that all texts have social historicity and are the products of history, culture, society, politics, system and class." Therefore, the interpreter should conduct a two-way study on the social existence of the literary text world and its influence on literature. The textuality of history has two meanings: first, only through the preserved text can people understand the past. "The text does not objectively reflect the external reality of history, but constructs the historical text through selective preservation and discrediting process". Secondly, when the text is transformed into literature and becomes the basis for historians to write history, it becomes a medium for interpretation.

## 3. The Historical Embodiment of the Text

*Zhang Jin* pointed out that "the historicity of texts" has two meanings: First, both small texts and large social texts have specific social historicity, which is the product of specific historical, cultural, social, political, institutional and class positions. Therefore, the interpreter should explore "the social existence around the literary text and the social existence in the literary text". In his novels, *Chin Shunshin* makes the text point to history constantly by setting a series of time coordinates, thus showing the historicity of the text.

### 3.1. Chin Shunshin's Times and Self-experience

When *Chin Shunshin*'s father was born in Taiwan, Taiwan had become a Japanese colony, so he had no choice but to hold Japanese nationality. *Chin*'s father traveled to the East alone in his early years. In 1919, he went to Japan to work in a trading company in Kobe. In 1923, the year before *Chin Shunshin* was born, his family moved to Kobe to settle down. *Chin Shunshin* is the second generation of Chinese born in Japan. He attended primary and secondary schools in Kobe and university in Osaka, where he worked as a teaching assistant after graduation. He has the experience of sharpening, collision and compatibility between Chinese and Japanese cultures. At the beginning of the novel, *Chin Shunshin* described *Wen Shihang*'s overlapping experience with himself:

This scene is deeply imprinted in his mind, but it can't form a complete painting in any way, because the bright green island is incompatible with the world of ink painting. Unconsciously, *Wen Shihang* has regarded these two incompatible worlds as alienated and adjacent worlds.

Chin Shunshin, translated by Tong Fan, "*Streams Flow and Mountains Stand: Burning Chinese Soul*" Double Smoke Hall 1.

Two distant and adjacent worlds are talking about China and Japan. Wen Shihang, the hero, was born in Shanghai and grew up in Japan. He lived with his mother since childhood and never forgot his motherland. Although Chin Shunshin was born and raised in Japan, he also lived with his mother who couldn't speak Japanese since childhood. With his grandfather's influence on him, Chin Shunshin always yearned for his motherland China. There are subtle and real similarities and overlaps between the identity and experience of the hero of the novel and Chin Shunshin himself, that is, the special life experience between China and Japan in the war years, which has both the authentication crisis of cultural identity and the painful chewing of national feelings. This coincidence just shows the historicity of the novel text.

### 3.2. A Strong Description of the War Years

The profound description is that New Historicism refers to Gertz's "Content of Cultural Anthropology", and "the colorful description is to touch the traces of people's real life in this way". Chin Shunshin once made the following remarks on the relationship between Japan and China in a newspaper interview: "There is no prescription for limiting the focus to Japan-China relations. Japan-China relations must be extended to the whole of Asia, as well as the vision of Russia and US-China relations. Moreover, when considering dealing with Asian issues, the Japanese themselves must re-straighten out history, especially the summary of war is necessary." Chin Shunshin is aware of the cruelty of war, so the theme of war runs through his literature. In the novel, Chin Shunshin constructs the war scenes of September 18th Incident and January 28th Incident in his own language, which once again evokes readers' memory of that period of history.

It was late autumn in nineteen thirty-one. In September, Japan launched an attack after it blew up railroad tracks in Wicker Lake and planted them on Chinese troops. China called this "September 18th Incident", while Japan called it "Manchuria Incident"..... Wu Che always talks about the mantra of "finished, finished". Originally, he pinned a glimmer of hope on young Zhang Xueliang. After the Wicker Lake incident, the Northeast was occupied by Japan, and he lost interest in everything.....Although the Japanese government has repeatedly indicated that it will not expand the scope of influence of the September 18th Incident, the war is still gradually expanding. The Kwantung Army flight team attacked Jinzhou, an important city in western Liaoning, and the war gradually approached Beijing in Hebei Province, and the central China immediately fell into a tense atmosphere. Chin Shunshin's translation by Tong Fan, "*Streams Flow and Mountains Stand: Burning Chinese Soul*" War Spread to Shanghai. On January 28th, 1932, an incident broke out in Shanghai.....A few minutes later, there was a deafening sound of bombing, and Japanese naval bombers dropped bombs. The Japanese army launched a general attack under the cover of mountain artillery and wild artillery.....The dead were constantly removed, but the stench of the body still floated on the scene. The seriously wounded shouted in a heartbreaking way. Strangely, the groans of the wounded were mixed with sighs of relief from time to time, as if they were relieved to know that they could leave the battlefield.

A dying soldier opened his mouth and wanted to say something. The reporter squatting beside him shook his head and shouted, "Hey, can anyone understand Cantonese? Come and listen to what he said!" Wen Shihang can understand some Cantonese. Just about to pass, he saw two reporters dressed up and a man in an officer's uniform rushing past. A cry came from the feet of Shihang: "Auntie!" The voice came from a young soldier, who propped up his upper body and his feet were stained with blood. Shihang couldn't help bending down and asked, "What's wrong with you?" But the young soldier just kept crying. After a while, he finally made a sound: "I can't feel my feet..." Then he cried again, sobbing and not knowing what he said.....A gust of wind blew, and the wind smelled of blood, and then quickly froze in the cold air. From February 25th,

the war was extremely cruel. Chin Shunshin's translation by Tong Fan, "*Streams Flow and Mountains Stand: Burning Chinese Soul*" Bloody Battle.

The text is influenced by certain ideology, and the novel inevitably bears the brand of history. Through the detailed description of ordinary people outside the war and soldiers in the war, the excerpts of the above novels reproduce the pain of people losing hope in the war and the tragic situation of soldiers spilling blood on the battlefield, which profoundly reflects the cruelty of the war from the small to the big, and also writes the historicity of the novel *Streams Flow and Mountains Stand*.

## 4. The Textual Embodiment of History

Zhang Jin also concluded that "the textuality of history" also has two meanings: First, it means that only by virtue of the preserved text can people understand the past. Second, when the text is converted into literature and becomes the basis for historians to write history, it will once again act as a medium for interpretation. Through text design and imaginative reasoning, Chin Shunshin described the society at that time by interweaving fictional characters with real historical figures, which made the textual features of history vividly displayed.

### 4.1. Humanization of Writing Position

Chin Shunshin is called a "human school" writer. "Renjian" means "human" in Japanese, so "Renjian School" can be translated into "Humanized School" in Chinese. The reason why Chin Shunshin is called a "human school" writer is directly related to his writing position in his novels.

The brand-new perspective brought by the textual nature of the new historicism history also reflects the concern for the characteristic of "humanization". Under the new historicism theory, we can find many things obscured by the traditional historical view, and turn the capitalized history into lowercase. Behind some grand narratives, we began to pay attention to some descriptions reflecting the inner world or personal life. These narratives may not represent the spirit of the times, nor reflect historical inevitability, have no sense of mission, appear free, messy, or even some imagination and fiction, but they will appear more real and have greater value: "They belong to personal spiritual witness, psychological history, personal history, cultural history, natural history and stylistic history... Personal history that has been neglected for a long time in the past, because more private impressions and imprints, more flesh-and-blood ties in the life world, more cultural blood inheritance, often more vividly and profoundly reflect the history of human nature development and evolution, human nature repression and liberation, and therefore have more epistemological value for our cultural research, our national characteristics, national subconscious and social psychology."

History has become the material for Chin Shunshin to express his humanity to a great extent. China's modern history is a humiliating history full of disasters, backwardness and beating, an exploration history of the Chinese people exploring the road of saving the country and realizing freedom and , and a struggle history of the Chinese nation resisting aggression, overthrowing imperialism to achieve national liberation and feudalism to achieve people's prosperity. *Streams Flow and Mountains Stand* Zai, a historical novel, vividly expresses the writer's profound reflection and criticism on the dark and inferior side of human nature. Chin Shunshin interprets the truest history with his characters. In the novel, Wang Xitian, a real character in history, is a friend of the hero Wen Shihang. He is the central figure in the movement against Japanese expulsion orders, organized the Freemasonry of Chinese Working Compatriots Studying in Japan, and is very famous among overseas students studying in Japan. However, he is a thorn in the side of Japanese politicians. After the Great Kanto Earthquake in Japan, he disappeared. Wen Shihang embarked on a difficult road to find Wang Xitian. However, the

deeper he explored, the more he realized the cruelty of the truth-Wang Xitian was killed by Japanese imperialists. The novel reads as follows: Even natural disasters such as unprecedented earthquakes and fires are an opportunity for the ruthless will of the country to rule. Socialists are the people most disgusted by Japan's ruling will, and some people will naturally take this opportunity to try to destroy them. Chin Shunshin's translation by Tong Fan, "*Streams Flow and Mountains Stand: Burning Chinese Soul*" Xitian Missing 3.

Wang Xitian's experience is really sympathetic. Chin Shunshin did not write the historical facts of Wang Xitian's disappearance from the perspective of traditional historical narration, nor did he publicize his contribution to the whole Chinese nation. Instead, he described the experience of the fictional hero Wen Shihang, and rationally reasoned the ins and outs of historical events, so that readers could have a more real and profound understanding of the dark side of human nature behind the historical stage. Chin Shunshin reveals the laws of human nature behind these power games with historical stories.

#### 4.2. Shaping the Image of Strong Women

In a patriarchal society, women play the role of wife and mother. They should be gentle and considerate, and the most important job is to take care of their husbands and children. However, due to the influence of the women's liberation movement, the status of women has gradually improved, thus enhancing women's voice in social and political life. Historical narrative not only writes the past as history, but also reconstructs the context. Although there are only a few descriptions of women in *Streams Flow and Mountains Stand*, they are vivid. Both the description of Wen Shihang's mother as an important role and the description of the seemingly insignificant unknown female servant in the Shamian incident are vivid and interesting, each with its own characteristics, and are no longer the same image of a good wife and mother. After the Great Kanto Earthquake in Japan, in the face of the depression in Tokyo, the overseas students from "Wuyue Tongzhou" got together to discuss the future way out, whether to return to China for development or stay in Japan. Everyone hesitated. At this time, my mother's words were really exciting: "Personally, I hope that at least everyone in the same boat will not return home," said Shihang's mother. "This earthquake is very unfortunate. But because this is a once-in-a-century disaster, I think it is also a precious experience. In the future, Japan should seize the time to rebuild Tokyo, which was reduced to ashes in the earthquake. Nowadays, our motherland is devastated, and it is our mission to revive her, but we have no experience to refer to. The national conditions of the two countries are of course different, but doing anything is a kind of learning. I hope everyone can stay in this country as much as possible and learn as much as possible. ... .." Chin Shunshin, translated by Tong Fan, "*Streams Flow and Mountains Stand: Burning Chinese Soul*" Double Smoke Hall 7.

Wen Mu is a kind, gentle, tenacious and unyielding woman. After Wen's father died, she took Wen Shihang to Shuangyan Hall in Tokyo, Japan alone, which not only arranged her home in good order, but also provided strong backing for the World Airlines and the same boat club. When the disaster came, Wen Mu was not surrounded by the fear of death, but chose to live in such a war-torn world. She lives in Japan and encourages younger generations to realize their values for the motherland. Her actions prove that women can also make meaningful contributions to the country in war years.

#### 5. Conclusion

This paper analyzes and interprets Chin Shunshin's *Shan He Zai*, a literary work with the theme of modern Chinese history and the history of modern Sino-Japanese relations, from the perspectives of "the historicity of text" and "the textuality of history" under the new historicism. The identity and experience of Wen Shihang, the hero of the novel, have many similarities and overlaps with the author Chin Shunshin, which embodies Chin Shunshin's personal times and

self-experience, as well as a large number of descriptions of war in the novel, showing the historicity of the text; The writing style of "Human School" interweaves historical real characters with fictional characters, lowercase capitalized history, highlights the psychological track and worldly desires of the little people behind the historical stage, and restates the real historical stories with the new language system constructed by Chin Shunshin himself, thus writing the textual nature of history.

Critic Akiyama Jun said in his comments on Chin Shunshin's burning water column: "He is a writer created by the environment..... Deep down in his heart, 'Who are you? How to face life' This kind of self-questioning never stops.... He is a writer with a theme, and his life is his theme." As a writer with this dual role and special experience, Chin Shunshin's understanding of Sino-Japanese relations and his judgment on historical issues are commendable, profound and appropriate. The novel "*Streams Flow and Mountains Stand*" condenses the personal experience of Chin Shunshin and the Chinese in Japan at that time, and it is also a valuable experience of the times. It is precisely because of this kind of experience that this work is more subjective and experiential than the objective novels with ancient Chinese history and modern Chinese history as the theme, showing Chin Shunshin's "humanized view of history", giving people a refreshing feeling and providing more possibilities for historical interpretation.

## Acknowledgements

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