ABSTRACT

Lu Xun (鲁迅) and Shen Congwen (沈从文) are two great authors of modern Chinese Literature, although the latter, due to political reasons, has not been as well-known, until the 1980s.

"Execution Stories", by definition, means those short stories in which there are beheading (砍头) scenes. The definition also covers those stories which only imply such a scene would happen or has already happened.

The objective of this dissertation aims to analyse why Lu Xun and Shen Congwen present their works of such a nature in totally different styles—one writes with a heavy pen, while the other seems indifferent to such bloody scenes in his works.

It has been found that their different backgrounds affect their writings as well as the way they present the "execution". Lu Xun gave up his medical studies in Japan after watching a film in which a Chinese spy working for the Russians against the Japanese was executed, in a crowd of anticipating and unfeeling Chinese onlookers. He was deeply affected. This scene from the film then became a prototype in Lu Xun’s short stories after he switched to literature. He used it to criticize the Chinese’s deep-rooted shortcomings. On the other hand, before Shen Congwen went to Beijing to start a new life, he had been a soldier for 6 years and had seen far too many killings, many of which were not justified. Someone with such a background naturally presents his works differently, though not unfeelingly. He just hides behind his stories and leads his readers to discover the objectives he
hopes to achieve—the combination of power and foolishness is the root of the people’s suffering.

Lu Xun wants his readers to question themselves after reading his works and hopefully mend their ways. It is with this objective in mind that he penned his words, so they appear laden with his grief and indignation. Shen Congwen just wants his readers to share his awakening in life and since he believes that the greatest tragedies need not be bloody and tearful, his words are therefore more subtle.