

# [The good person of szechwan essay](https://assignbuster.com/the-good-person-of-szechwan-essay/)

In The Good Person of Szechwan, Bertolt Brecht portrays his Marxist ideals through the actions of his characters and their reactions to their poor social conditions. The major theme of his work emphasizes that those who survive are the ones who rule not by goodness but by the evil and corruption in the society. Shu Fu, a wealthy barber, reinforces this notion that good deeds are taken advantage of in the evil and capitalistic world. As the Gods quest for a good person, they come across a man named Wang, who directs them to Shen Teh.

Although she does not live by the commandments, Shen Teh convinces the Gods that it is hard to live a good life without money. To maintain her “ good” reputation, Shen Teh creates an alter ego cousin, Shui Ta. While Shu Fu is very generous towards Shen Teh financially, he is not perceived as a “ good” person. Shu Fu is a significant minor character in The Good Person of Szechwan as he serves to illustrate the difference in Shen Teh and Shui Ta and portrays Brecht’s perspective on goodness. Although Shen Teh and Shu Fu lived in the same town of Szechwan, Shu Fu first notices her after she is the owner of a store.

This is evident when he says, “ the beauty of Miss Shen Teh, the owner of the tobacconist’s opposite, whom I have never previously noticed. I have watched her for three minutes, and I believe I am already in love…” (45-46). Although he takes great interest in her, the audience perceives that he many not have ever noticed her if she had not been the owner of her store. Shu Fu thinks of himself as a good man, especially because he offers some of his building to Shen Teh for the homeless. However, making it known that it was his doing shows that he cares more about appearing “ good” rather than actually being good.

Would he have done the same good deeds anonymously? He even says, “ could one be more unselfish? ” (61). In addition, he says “ no profiting from a disappointment…by a gland alone will they acknowledged, a glance that can also signify rather more,” showing that he has self-seeking reasons instead of selfless reasons. The primary purpose of doing the good deed is selfish in nature. Since Shu Fu is infatuated with Shen Teh, he desires for her to think that he is a good person. However, his reason to be “ good” is egotistical in itself. He made sure that Shui Ta told Shen Teh that he was the one to onate his buildings to her for the homeless. The act of helping the homeless was secondary to impressing Shen Teh. When Shen Teh was having financial problems, Shu Fu offered her a blank check. When leaving, he says, “ now I shall go, quietly and modestly, demanding nothing in return, on tiptoe, full of respectful admiration, not a thought for myself” (77). He emphasizes his qualities of which he portrays. He must declare himself as modest and unselfish, rather than letting his actions speak for themselves. These actions contradict the very characteristics he is bragging about because he is the one mentioning them about himself.

This furthers the readers’ impression of his self-centered personality. Indeed, Shu Fu’s generous actions towards Shen Teh were for his ulterior motives, but the role of his character shows that there is a struggle between Shen Teh and Shui Ta. Throughout the play, it is revealed that Shui Ta favors Shu Fu because he can provide Shen Teh with the financial stability that she needs for her future. However, when Shu Fu offers to marry her to salvage her store, Shen Teh declines. The reader learns that Shen Teh cannot overcome her passion for Yang Sun or her emotions.

Shen Teh addresses this dilemma when she says, “ I would go with the man whom I love. I would reckon what it costs me. I would not consider what is wiser. I would not know whether he loves me. I would go with the man that I love. ” Shen Teh prefers to marry the unemployed pilot, who does not even love her. While talking to Shui Ta, Yang Sun discusses his plan to leave her after he takes her money. In this instance, the character of Shu Fu serves the purpose of underscoring the mindset of Shen Teh and Shui Ta in driving their actions. This dilemma leads Shen Teh and Shui Ta to possess vastly different goals.

Shen Teh lives for self-fulfillment versus Shui Ta working for self-preservation. Shu Fu offered Shen Teh buildings for the homeless, but Shui Ta used them to set up a factory. Despite Shu Fu’s selfish motives, his charitable act was turned into something that hurt those that it was intended to help. Then, he gives Shen Teh a blank check. Shen Teh responds by saying, “ I can pay for the washing without that check,” when Mrs. Shin tells her to write in 1, 000 to cash in (77). Rejecting Mrs. Shin’s idea, Shen Teh exudes modesty. However, Shui Ta takes advantage of Shu Fu’s money y cashing the check in, not for 1, 000, but 10, 000 silver dollars. Once again, the check was used in a way that was not intended. Since his actions do not win over Shen Teh’s heart, his “ goodness” overall hurt him. Shui Ta is Shen Teh’s outlet for being able to be as inhumane as the world is and establish her survival. Despite his deeds being taken advantage of, he maintains his persistence in winning over Shen Teh. He makes it known that “ if Miss Shen Teh really comes back it will be most undesirable that this young man [Shui Ta] should be here.

We all know that in his time he has had a most pernicious influence on her” (101). Like most of the people in Szechwan, he thinks highly of Shen Teh, but does not like Shui Ta. This is ironic because Shu Fu and Shui Ta are very similar in the fact that they are both businessmen. Shen Teh realizes that Shui Ta is more like Shu Fu than she would have wanted. Despite his undertakings, Shu Fu is not accepted as a “ good” person. Hence, if he were not in love with Shen Teh, he would not have been as nice as he was to her.

Shu Fu portrays Brecht’s Marxist bias. Based on the Capitalist Manifesto, Marx believes that “ the laborer lives merely to increase capital, and is allowed to live only in so far as the interest of the ruling class requires it” (Marx 26). Like Marx, Brecht rejects the ideals of Capitalism, believing that “ living labor is but a means to increase accumulated labor” (Marx 26). By acting solely out of his feelings and emotions, Shu Fu demonstrates the actions of the bourgeoisie, the conformist class, of which Marx and Brecht both frown upon.

Shu Fu can be portrayed as the typical bourgeoisie because some of his actions are perceived as “ good,” but he acted selfishly rather than acting for the sake of being good. For example, while talking fondly of Shen Teh, he screams at Wang saying “ Get to hell, you lout. ” In addition to screaming, he breaks Wang’s hand, further showing that he is not genuinely a good person. The good only manifests when it is convenient and self-serving. Throughout the play, the Gods are in search of a good person. They believe that “ the world can go on as it is if (they) find enough good people, able to lead a decent human existence” (6).

They nominate Shen Teh as this good person, but the reader witnesses that it is difficult to be good without being taken advantage of, resulting in the creation of Shen Teh’s alter ego, Shui Ta, to keep self-preservation. Although the Gods determine the goodness of characters, they admit that “(they) cannot meddle in the sphere of economics” (11). After Shen Teh reveals that she is Shui Ta, the Gods leave Shen Teh with the same problems she possessed before talking with them. Without offering a direct solution to her struggles, the Gods advise her to “…manage.

Only be good, and all will be well! ” (113). This is surprising because even when the Gods themselves are victims with broken bones and sickness, they still seem indifferent. Since Shu Fu’s actions are taken advantage of, he is still better off than other members of the community. For example, he is not poor like Wang, nor does he lose his business like the carpet dealer. Out of all the townspeople, the Gods nominate Shen Teh as the “ good” person. While most take advantage of Shen Teh, the character of Wang seems to be the only “ good” person to Shen Teh without expecting anything in return.

He wants to achieve goodness, but he is also afraid of the Gods wrath. Wang has a living, stays out of trouble, and helps Shen Teh whenever he can. Through Brecht’s perspective, trying to possess goodness while protecting one’s self is the best way to obtain goodness. While Wang is seen as the only “ good” person, it is symbolic that Shu Fu breaks the hand of Wang. By not doing anything to help, Shu Fu’s treatment of Wang further contrasts his charity to help the homeless emphasizing the convenience of his good deeds.

In addition, he believes he is charitable because of his offer to Shen Teh, but when the carpet dealer and his wife go bankrupt, he does nothing to help them. This further shows the suitability of Shu Fu’s generosity. While Shu Fu is a minor character, Brecht uses his character to reinforce the theme by showing that goodness is not rewarded. In trying to good, his actions lead characters to more suffering economically. This confirms Brecht Marxist bias by showing that people do take advantage of the good, driven to this by the capitalist economy.

All in all, the Gods generally seems indifferent to how poverty drives desperation, which affects both good and bad citizens. Shu Fu’s role is to show that goodness really can be self-serving, while highlighting the difference between the self-fulfilling Shen Teh and the self-preserving Shui Ta. Their behavior toward Shu Fu and their response to his propositions give insight into the motivating forces behind each of their characters. Finally, Shu Fu’s action of breaking Wang’s hand and ignorance to help the carpet dealer depict his acts of “ goodness” to be self-interested.