
On the Genesis of Zhongshu Qian's *Fortress Besieged*¹

◎ Hongxin Jiang

Hunan Normal University

Abstract: Significant portions of Zhongshu Qian's classic twentieth century novel, *Fortress Besieged*, are closely correlated with Hunan. This article explores the connections between the novel and Qian's experiences in National Hunan Normal College (NHNC), later to become Hunan Normal University (HNNU). More than one third of *Fortress Besieged* describes the experiences of its main character, Hongjang Fang, at the fictional Sanlü University. This article argues that Qian's time at NHNC had formative impact on *Fortress Besieged*, in which four pivotal chapters are fictionalized versions of his actual encounters in Hunan. Drawing on archival documents, this article analyzes the novel to determine the relative levels of historical veracity versus imaginative recreations. The ultimate goal is to demonstrate where depictions are realistic or fantastic, and the ways in which *Fortress Besieged* and NHNC become mutually constitutive reflections of each other.

Keywords: Zhongshu Qian, *Fortress Besieged*, National Hunan Normal College

CLC: G09 **Document code:** A **Article ID:** 2096-4374(2017)01-0001-10

Background and Introduction

Zhongshu Qian (1910-1998) is an internationally renowned modern Chinese writer and scholar who has been compared in his erudition, sophistication, and creativity to figures such as Stendhal, Gustave Flaubert, Alexandre Dumas, R. K. Narayan, Saul Bellow, Thomas Mann, Italo Svevo, and Jane Austen. Born into an educated and successful family in Wuxi, Jiangsu, he received the finest early education from local schools, and Tsinghua University, where he graduated in 1933. From 1935 to 1938, he expanded his education and cultural exposure internationally when he studied in Paris, and earned his B-Litt degree from Oxford University, where he wrote his dissertation on *China in English Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. After returning to China in 1938, he worked at Tsinghua University (a member of Southwest Associated University²), NHNC, National Jinan University, and Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. His major works include *Fortress Besieged*, *Notes on Literature and Art*, *Writings on the Edge of Life*, *The Annotation to the Anthology of Song Dynasty*, *Limited Views: Essays on Ideas and Letters*, and *Patchwork: Seven Essays on Art and Literature*. He was well-read in modern and classical languages, including Greek, Latin, English, Spanish, German and more. In 1976, he participated in the English translation of *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*. Qian's remarkable achievements in literary creation, studies, and translation brought him fame and respect in China and internationally.

When Qian visited the United States in 1979 as part of a delegation from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, he was described by Yale History Professor Jonathan D. Spence as "sardonic, erudite, elegant, purveying a sense of slightly world-weary charm" (web). As a comparatist and cultural critic, Qian systematically contemplated and applied Chinese and Western culture to his writing and thought. It has been said that readers cannot fully appreciate *Fortress Besieged* without a keen understanding of both European and Chinese society and values. According to Spence, "All one can really say is that without knowledge of Western culture one will

miss the parody in Ch'ien's [Qian] story, and be unable to tell when the characters are genuinely erudite and when they are being merely pretentious. Western culture, in Ch'ien's view, must be thoroughly absorbed if one is to understand the false uses to which it can be put" (web).

Fortress Besieged is generally regarded as Qian's masterpiece and one of the greatest novels of the twentieth century. First published in China in 1947, it was set in 1937, and written before and after World War II. It was immediately popular after its initial publication, and aroused a strong response among the youth. It has been translated into multiple languages, and distributed throughout the world in numerous reprintings, including a Penguin edition in the United Kingdom. In China, its popularity increased with a 1980 reprinting, which was followed by a 1990 television serial presentation, and a film version on Chinese TV. In a review of the 1980 edition published by Indiana University Press, Spence described the novel as "a vastly intelligent, skillful, and entertaining novel, urbane in tone, profoundly pessimistic in its conclusions. Its appearance in a vigorous and clear-headed (and on occasion truly lyrical) translation by Jeanne Kelly and Nathan Mao will immediately change the way Westerners think about modern Chinese literature."

In 2004, the novel was published in its Classics series by the legendary American press, New Directions. It was a momentous event for *Fortress Besieged* to be published by New Directions. This prestigious literary press, founded and run by James Laughlin until his death, is revered for its dedication to publishing important and cutting-edge literary works rather than attend to the financial pressures of the book-buying market. Famed for the unerring excellence of taste in its list, New Directions has always been uniquely respected for its willingness to publish writers and works that are ahead of their time. In the June 12, 2008 issue of *New York Review of Books*, Pankaj Mishra reviewed the edition with the Kelly and Mao translation that was published in 2004 as a New Directions Classic with a foreword by Spence. Mishra's review described the New Directions Classic edition of *Fortress Besieged* as "a novel widely regarded as one of the masterworks of twentieth-century Chinese literature." The editorial advertemet by New Directions called the novel "its own unique feasts of delights," and "the greatest Chinese novel of the twentieth century," and compared it to Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* and *Flaubert's Madame Bovary*. Qian is extolled as "Possibly the last in a line of Chinese thinkers that began with Confucius" (*New Directions* web).

In praise of its special contribution to world literature, Mishra wrote, "Remarkably for a comic, picaresque novel, *Fortress Besieged* contains much psychological drama." Mishra, like Spence and others, locates the modern themes of Qian, and his stature as a literary stylist, in an international context during the first half of the twentieth century:

He may seem an early instance of a type familiar to us from other works of twentieth-century literature. Thomas Mann, Italo Svevo, and Saul Bellow, among others, described how the modern Western intellectual, the product of a rich, bourgeois society, struggled to apply the lessons of his vast learning to his private life... Far from being private, his dilemmas belong to a wider world in which large political, economic, and moral questions have yet to be settled. (web)

For a novel of such widespread impact and relevance, Qian drew materials for its characters and situations autobiographically and based it on his familiar experiences as well as the social strata of the era. The protagonist, Hongjian Fang, was based on two relatives: one was an ambitious complainer, and the other a vain braggart. But neither had the experiences attributed to Fang. It is Qian's own experiences, such as studying abroad and working as a university professor, that had mutual correspondences with Fang's life. The novel takes place between 1920 and 1940. Based upon Fang's experiences of studying in Europe, teaching in a university, and working in bank and newspaper offices, Qian displays his social and cultural criticism, and philosophical thinking about life and the fate of modern people. The problems raised in *Fortress Besieged*, as several critics have noted, were Chinese and global: they involved the crises and predicaments of modern civilization and life. For a long time, Chinese critics explored this novel from one of two vantage points: either the creative motive in its grand historical background, such as Wenjun Qu, or the perspective of Western literature's influence, such as Weiping Wang. Few researchers focused on Qian's own experiences, especially on his experiences in Hunan. This article, with relevant historical documents, implements a strategic analysis based on close reading to explore the correlations between *Fortress Besieged* and Qian's experiences in NHNC. Qian's reasons for working in Hunan, and his

long journey to that province, are also elaborated. If Qian had not had relevant experiences in NHNC, *Fortress Besieged* would not be the novel that it is, and in fact, it might never have been written at all.

The Reasons for Qian to Work in National Hunan Normal College

In the first half of 1938, Youlan Feng, who headed the College of Arts of the Southwest Associated University, wrote to Qian, who was studying at the University of Paris, and invited him to return to China to teach in the Foreign Languages Department at Tsinghua University. Because of his exceptional brilliance, an exception was made to hire Qian as a professor. In Southwest Associated University, Qian taught courses in the European Renaissance, Contemporary Literature, and English. He was respectful to his colleagues and teachers, Gongchao Ye, Mi Wu, and Futian Chen, but stood his ground in academic debates. There are various suspicions in academia about why Qian left Tsinghua University and chose to work at NHNC. Jiang Yang, Qian's wife, explains this enigma:

In the summer vacation of 1939, Zhongshu returned from Southwest Associated University in Kunming to Shanghai, meaning to return to school after the summer vacation. However, not long after the summer vacation, he received a letter from his father, saying that he himself was old, susceptible to diseases, far away from hometown and longing for meeting his son, but couldn't return to Shanghai. At that time, his father's old friend, Maoru Liao, set up a normal college in Lantian, Hunan, and asked his father for help. His father was working in that college, and arranged for Zhongshu to be head of the English department. He could look after his father and return to Shanghai with his father by the next summer vacation. Zhongshu's mother, brother and sister, along with his uncle, all thought it was great... But Tsinghua University hired him as a professor, and he was hoping to keep up with the expectations of the teachers in his Alma Mater. He only worked in Tsinghua for one year and had just received the letter of appointment for the next year. How could he 'hopped' to Lantian to become head of the English department of Hunan Normal College? He actually did not want to be the head. (Selections 200)

It's clear that Qian knew the disparity between Tsinghua University and NHNC in Lantian. Whether moral or utilitarian, there was no reason for him to abandon Tsinghua and choose NHNC. But everyone in his family agreed that he should go to Lantian. Moreover, he dared not defy his father's wishes, despite his academic objections. In her book *Mi Wu and Yinque Chen*, Xuezhao Wu, Mi Wu's daughter, wrote:

Father had trouble, and uncle Yinque also timely offered persuasion and guidance. Father and uncle both thought that Zhongshu Qian was a "talent of rarity." In the autumn of 1939, Qian resigned... In the spring of 1940, Futian Chen, head of Foreign Languages Department of Tsinghua, did not employ Zhongshu Qian, so father showed resentment and condemned Chen's deed as "concubine's way." He ran about, demonstrated his appeal but reaped nothing. Father also complained that Gongchao Ye and Futian Chen showed dissatisfaction against Qian to President Mei. Uncle Yinque agreed with father, but urged him to take it calmly. (103)

On November 4, 1940, Chen Futian organized a dinner party and discussed with the guests whether to ask Qian to come back to Tsinghua. Though they reached an affirmative agreement, Qian was unwilling to return. Jiang Yang further recalled that by mid-September, Qian wrote to Gongchao Ye, head of the Foreign Languages Department at Southwest Associated University, saying that he had to work with his father and could not go back to Tsinghua. In October 1939, Qian and other colleagues hired by NHNC left Shanghai for Lantian.

After Qian left Shanghai, Zhai Shen, Secretary-general, and President Mei of Southwest Associated University, telegraphed to ask why he chose to work elsewhere. Qian immediately wrote to Zhai Shen and President Mei respectively to account for the reasons: "I've done a villain's deed to work in Yunnan with a beginning but no end... It is difficult to tell the hidden reasons why I came to Hunan. My father, far away from hometown, is susceptible to diseases and is longing for meeting me. I soon entered Hunan so that we could go together back to Shanghai next year. Otherwise, it's a common sense to choose between fish and bear's paw, and there would be no other reasons for me not to come back to Yunnan" (Yang, *Selections* 201). In this way, Qian came to Hunan, not only because of acrimony with some colleagues at Southwest Associated University, but mainly for two people: Jibo Qian, Qian's father, and Shicheng Liao, President of NHNC.

Fang in *Fortress Besieged* could not, of course, be equated with Qian. Fang came to the university in the novel after breaking up with his lover which led to his unemployment. In *Fortress Besieged*, Qian wrote:

In the West in ancient times, whenever someone disappeared, people would say, either died or he's gone to teach. While Hongjian did not fear teaching as much as he did death itself, he did feel this teaching job was all a part of his bad luck and was dispirited and out of sorts for days on end, feeling an inexpressible dread at the thought of the long journey. The longer he could put the trip off the better. (259)

Judging from these comparative circumstances, one from life and one fictional, we might say that Fang and Qian relocated for work for different reasons but with similarly unwilling emotions.

The Journey of Qian to National Hunan Normal College

In 1939, Qian did not return to Southwest Associated University in Kunming; rather, he went to Hunan. Later, he wrote about the journey from Shanghai to Xiangxi, West Hunan, in the fifth chapter of *Fortress Besieged*. The novel is related to the actual situation, but not identical. Jiang Yang said:

A wise reader admits that the author cannot be equated with the character in the novel. However, they say, the author's characters and stories cannot be separated from his personal experience and ideological feelings... The story of creation often transcends the author's own experience in many ways. It is upside down to ask for the author's experience from the story of creation. The author's thoughts and feelings are created in the similar way wine is fermented; it is not easy to identify the raw materials from wine. I have the opportunity to know the author's experience, also to know what kind of raw material is fermented into wine. I am willing to let the reader know the connections between the reality and the fiction, and to know how they are connected. (*Records 2-4*)

Inspired by Jiang Yang, the author of this paper makes a rational connection between "the reality and the fiction." In October 1939, a group including Qian, Yanmou Xu, Zhenyong Zhang, and Wenhai Zou booked tickets from Shanghai to Ningbo and went together to Hunan. As far as Jiang Yang is concerned, these people are totally different from the characters Fang, Xinmei Zhao, Roujia Sun, Meiting Li, and Erqian Gu in *Fortress Besieged*, but their journey supplied the materials for fictional creation. Due to the Japanese blockade, they didn't set out until November. Wenhai Zou later recalled: "Then the Japanese blockaded the seaport, so the sea was not navigable until the beginning of November when the ship company notified ship's regular departure" (81). This is similar to the so-called "postponing it for two days" in *Fortress Besieged*.

The author here also provides some supporting materials. Zhongshu Qian walked for thirty-four days from Shanghai to Lantian. Zhenyong Zhang, who accompanied Qian, wrote:

In the autumn of 1939, under the invitation of Maoru Liao, President of NHNC in Lantian, I accepted the employment in NHNC... In autumn, I set out, traveled northward by sea to Yin County of Zhejiang, and then landed. From Fenghua, I traveled through Sheng County, Changle, Yongkang and Jinhua, then to Shangrao, Guixi, Yingtan, Linchuan, Nanfeng, Guangchang, Ningdu, Taihe, Ji'an, and finally came to Hunan. Passing through Leiyang, Hengyang and Baoqing, I arrived in Lantian. I passed through three provinces and toured for about 2500 kilometers. The journey cost a month and 4 days. What a long journey! (Liu 385)

The travel route of *Fortress Besieged* is roughly the same as that discussed by Zhenyong Zhang. In the novel, the ship left from the port of Shanghai to Ningbo:

After dinner the ship was pitching slightly. Hongjian and Xinmei sat in the lounge chairs, which were nailed to the deck. As Hongjian listened to the sounds of the wind and water and gazed out at the dark expanse of the sea and the sky. He recalled many scenes from last year's trip home, since they seemed almost identical with those of this evening. He was filled with sentimental thoughts. (265)

As for the journey to Hunan, Yanmou Xu, in *Records of Journey to Hunan*, a long poem with 1870 words, has true records. Yanmou Xu, Jibo Qian's brilliant disciple, was Qian's classmate in high school. Later, the two

taught in Guanghua University. This was their second time as co-workers in Hunan. It is beneficial to compare *Fortress Besieged* with Yanmou Xu's poem *Records of Journey to Hunan*. The next day they arrived in Ningbo, then to Xikou. The novel says:

They went from Ningbo to Xikou the next day, boarding a boat and then riding in rickshaws. On the boat, it began to drizzle, sometimes one or two drops at a time, drops which didn't seem to be coming from the patch of sky above their heads. Then, when one took a closer look, there was no more. A while later the raindrops became denser. The rain grew bolder as it fell, the drops linking together to form a thread. The surface of the river seemed to have broken out with smallpox, as countless pockmarked eddies continuously came and went. When the rain became denser, it seemed as though hair were growing from the smooth, glossy surface of the water. (289)

They rushed to a teahouse in the rain to rest, eat, and warm themselves. Then, again, they continued their journey:

It was already two o'clock in the afternoon. They urged the rickshaw boys to hurry. Less than half an hour later, they came to a steep, rocky incline. Encumbered by the heavy load and trying to make his way on the slippery road, the rickshaw boy pulling Li's huge metal trunk tripped on his way down the slope and fell, overturning the rickshaw. (289)

They got caught in heavy rain, and the novel says, "The rain came down harder and harder, as though the drops were scrambling to get to the ground first, too impatient to line up in rows. Pushing and shoving, they united in solid blocks of cold water, which splashed down in wild confusion" (293). Here we can see the difficulty of their journey. Next the novel says:

When they awoke, the sky was clear and bright as if nothing had ever happened. They all agreed that since they were tired out from walking so much the day before and their clothes were still damp, they should rest a day and continue on the next day. Erqian Gu, whose enthusiasm was like a cork floating on water that even a heavy downpour couldn't knock over, suggested they take a walk in the Xuedou Mountains in the afternoon. After they returned from their walk in the mountains, Xinmei inquired about the purchase of bus tickets. (295)

There is no description of their mountain wandering in the novel, but we can find similar accounts in Qian's poem *Visiting Xuedou Mountain* and in Yanmou Xu's poem.

They later experienced a series of hardships. In the hotel overnight in Jinhua, they suffered from flea bites and bedbugs. In Yingtan, they had half-cooked fat meat, cold and black, with flies overhead. The novel's depiction can also be found in Qian's *Notes on Literature and Art* when the author commented on Ziyin Zheng's poems which describe the disturbance of flies and relevant diseases. It is seen that Fang's suffering in the novel is comparable to that of Qian. In Ji'an, they only had ten yuan left after they were settled in the hotel. Fang was too hungry to fall asleep. He was almost stuck on his back like a flat bag without any papers in it. Xinmei laughed and groaned, "You shouldn't laugh when you're hungry. Laughing makes your stomach hurt even worse" (355). What's more ridiculous was that Meiting Li hid himself while eating a sweet potato:

Seeing a sweet potato stand and thinking this was much better than peanuts, Hongjian decided to get some for breakfast. He suddenly noticed someone near the stand who closely resembled Meiting Li in dress and build. After taking a closer look, he found that indeed it was Meiting Li had bought a sweet potato and was eating it, standing with his face toward the wall. Not wanting to surprise Li in the act, Hongjian quickly went into a small alley. (355)

During such a terrible journey, Qian still stayed calm and often spent time reading. In the eyes of Wenhai Zou, his companion, Qian even gained a lot of happiness when reading a boring English dictionary. In this way, the five people in the novel, setting out from Shanghai, traveled through Ningbo, Xikou, Jinhua, Yingtan, Nancheng, Ningdu, Xingguo, Ji'an, Shaoyang, and elsewhere, and finally got to their destination. In his letter to relatives, Qian mentioned: "In mid-October, I left Shanghai for Hunan. It was a long and difficult journey

with heavy baggage. I had thousands of hardships and spent 34 days in getting to NHNC. I felt so exhausted and suffered a lot from diseases” (qtd. Yang, *Complete Works* 97-98). Yanmou Xu in his poem also accounted in detail for the hardships they had. Strikingly, scholars led a vagrant life when the country was in a serious crisis.

Sanlü University and National Hunan Normal College

Sanlü University in *Fortress Besieged* got its name from Yuan Qu.³ During the period of anti-Japanese war, Shicheng Liao was in Lantian situated in middle Hunan, which originally belonged to Anhua County and is now in Lianyuan City. Lantian was about two-hundred kilometers southwest of the provincial capital, Changsha. At that time, the ancient town was beautiful, fascinating, and also in dangerous terrain. After the Japanese captured Wuhan in 1938, the people in Changsha were evacuated. Institutions, such as Changjun and Zhounan Women’s Middle School, were all forced to move to Lantian. Later, NHNC was located in the town. Sanlü University in *Fortress Besieged* is described as follows:

This country town was definitely not strategically important. The one thing that the Japanese were generous and unsparing with—bombs—bombs would be wasted there. Thus, the town, no more than half a *li* from the school, was prospering every day, featuring photo shops, restaurants, bathhouses, theaters, a police station, and high and grade schools. (379)

The novel says that Sanlü University was like a “cradle,” which had a good location: it’s in a local rich man’s garden, facing Xibei Mountain. Here the garden is related to “Li’s garden,” whose master was Zhuoran Li. Li went to Japan in his early years, following Sun Yatsen’s revolution, and served as the lieutenant general of the headquarters of Northern Expedition Army. When he told him that his garden was to be used as the site of NHNC, he readily agreed to offer it free of charge and asked his families to move out. Jibo Qian praised Zhuoran Li’s greatness in showing respect to education and described him as a model in the era of anti-Japanese war.

In the 1930s, there were four masters of Chinese culture in our country: Wenzhi Tang, Binglin Zhang, Songcen Jin, and Jibo Qian. Jibo Qian was teaching in NHNC. Among his many literary works, *History of Modern Chinese Literature* is best known. Under Shicheng Liao’s request, Jibo Qian came to NHNC. After arriving in Hunan, he was deeply touched by the Hunan people’s thoughts of independence and freedom, and quality of firmness. At NHNC, he produced the book *The Academic Atmosphere of Hunan in the Past Hundred Years*. He held that Hunan is a propitious place for giving birth to great men; people here have thoughts of independence and freedom, and are leaders of new fashions in all respects. This book, based on the techniques of Qian Sima’s *Records of the Grand History of China*, describes the life experiences of seventeen people from Hunan who have wide influence on Chinese history. Jibo Qian went back to Yuan Qu, Dunyi Zhou, Fuzi Wang, and others to explore the spiritual features of the people of Hunan in modern China and their ancestors’ intelligence, uniqueness, and greatness.

During the Anti-Japanese War, Jibo Qian used the spirit of the people of Hunan to arouse the anger of the Chinese people. In 1939, at the request of General Mo’an Li, he went to Nanyue to give a lecture on Sun Zi’s *The Art of War*. His speech was so inspiring that all the attendants were motivated. In 1944, Changsha city fell. NHNC was forced to move to Xupu, a remote city in west Hunan. However, Jibo Qian chose to stay and meant to sacrifice himself. A general came and tried to persuade him to transport to Xupu, but he declined. He wanted to practice courage and would never regret it. This, obviously, reflects his long-fermenting intention to sacrifice himself for the country, rather than his impulse to stay (Fu 2-3).

Shicheng Liao (1892-1970), from Jiading District, Shanghai, was the founder of NHNC. In November 1938, he was appointed president of NHNC. President Liao was a man of great charm. Students described him as a thin and tall man wearing gold-rimmed glasses. He looked serious, but actually had a mild character. Songnian Gao, president of Sanlü University in *Fortress Besieged*, is quite different from President Liao. Gao was an old scientist whose exact expertise was entomology. He had a fat face with no wrinkles. President Liao demonstrated his philosophy of running the school in the NHNC anthem, which he wrote himself: “... We are to mold and educate people to build up good standards; ... we are to care and support the youth to establish foundation for peace...” He was not only an ambitious educator, but also an outstanding educator in pedagogical education. He

put forward many ideas about pedagogical education to date, which are still of guiding significance to us. For example, in his article *Pedagogical Education and Anti-Japanese War & Founding a State*, he said: “The most important thing in education is, of course, pedagogical education. Without good teachers, education at all levels will never get on track” (Tang 438). Shicheng Liao held that the mission of pedagogical education was first, to establish a common universal belief in education; second, to cultivate sympathy and pure love; third, to carry out special vocational training; fourth, to carry out academically specialized training; fifth, to initiate experiments; and sixth, to guide social education. He thought that the ideal professors of normal colleges must have broad knowledge, rich teaching experience, and teaching enthusiasm. This kind of goal was difficult to be achieved, but the existing teachers could be used according to their own talents. He proposed that those erudite teachers who devoted themselves to research should teach the senior grades; those who had considerable specialized knowledge and experience in teaching, and were familiar with various subjects in secondary schools, should be employed as practical tutors; those who were competent and responsible teachers should teach foundational subjects or the lower grades.

President Liao paid special attention to teaching by precept and example. He made himself an example to all members of the community, doing morning exercises every day together with students, coming here alone and living in poor rooms to encourage the whole college with his qualities of integrity and self-encouragement. He attached great importance to the selection of teachers in education, holding that the final success of running a school depends on teachers. No matter how clearly the purpose is defined, how systematically the curriculum is designed, how well-trained the students are, how good the academic atmosphere is, the success of education is still uncertain without enough fine teachers. Therefore, he invited and hired many erudite people to teach in NHNC, making NHNC remarkable for its staff at this time. We may find famous professors in the Chinese Language Department, such as Jibo Qian, Zonghuo Ma, Hongkai Luo, Ziwei Zong; Xiancheng Meng, Zitong Huang, Yicen Guo, Shilue Wang, Weichuan Dong, Fonian Liu, in the Education Department; Zhongshu Qian, Wufeng Wang, in the English Department; Da Li, Mengxian Ren, Xinmin Li, in the Mathematics Department; Gongwei Yuan, Anping Chu, Shifu Zhou, Xiuru Liu, in the Public Training Department; Mingju Pi, Jiannong Li, in the Department of History; Zhaojun Jin, Lianggui Jiang, in the Physical Department; Xueyong Tang, Chongshu Zhou, in the Music Department. During the terrible warfare environment, these outstanding professors held tight to the school motto “Be Humane, Caring, Excellent and Industrious,” strove for cultivating talents for the country, and made contributions to the development of the country. President Liao’s thoughts on running a school and the spirit of NHNC still have enlightening significance to us today.

Qian’s Experiences in National Hunan Normal College

From 1939 to 1941, Zhongshu Qian worked in NHNC for about two years. Consulting NHNC’s literature files, we get the following information: On December 12, 1939, the English Association held a grand tea party to welcome the new teachers and friends. Mocun Qian, Tongqia Shen, Yanmou Xu, and Zanwu Zhou came here from Shanghai on December 4. More than thirty new members joined the association. On January 31, 1940, the Book Committee held a meeting to decide the distribution of 25,000 yuan for books. Zhongshu Qian, chairman of the Book Committee, together with five other members, attended the meeting. In the second half of 1940, all committees of NHNC were re-appointed, of which Zhongshu Qian was chairman of the Book Committee, and Tai Zhong, Juefu Gao and eight other teachers were members. Dozens of teachers were hired as tutors, among whom Zhongshu Qian was the tutor of English Department. As of April 1941, there were 48 students in the three grades of the English Department, including thirty-five male and thirteen female students. According to *Fortress Besieged*, since the crisis of Changsha, nine of ten professors had telegraphed to cancel the contract, so it was not easy for the college to offer many courses. Luckily, affected by war, only one hundred and eighty students had been able to come to the college. The four professors joined the college. The staff group became larger and it would be more decent to report to the Ministry of Education. The number of students in the novel was small, and the number of students at the beginning of NHNC was also very small.

In NHNC, Qian maintained an active habit of reading. Zhongkuang Wu, who served as Jibo Qian’s teaching assistant, often studied and dined together with Zhongshu Qian. He recollected: “The master (i.e. Jibo Qian),

from early morning to late night every day, always sat by his big book case, unremittingly writing, compiling Chinese literature history, and keeping diaries for reading. Zhongshu was also full of energy, and read all day long. In general, he read foreign language books in the morning, most of which were brought here from abroad. For the rest of the time, he read the inscription and practiced calligraphy” (137). People today should be motivated by their good habit of reading. Wu remembered that in cold winter days, they used charcoal basins to heat themselves while studying hard; every midnight, they wrapped eggs with waste paper, made them wet, threw them into the basin, and had the eggs as night snacks.

As mentioned above, Zhongshu Qian was the tutor of the English Department in NHNC. This is also reflected in his novel. In *Fortress Besieged*, when hearing that Sanlü University was to implement the tutorial system, Fang made a lot of comments and said with a smile:

How can there be an expert on the tutorial system? Wouldn't any student at Oxford or Cambridge know a lot more about it? All those people in charge of education can ever do is try to impress everyone with fancy names. By the same token, there should be experts on studying abroad and experts on being a university president. The tutorial system is a new policy of the Ministry of Education. They're telling every university to put it into effect, but apparently the response hasn't been very good. Our President Gao here is most enthusiastic about carrying it out (429)... British teachers take their meals with the students but sit at separate tables. They sit on a platform while eating so that students and teachers are cut off from each other. That too has to be changed. From now on we're to eat all three meals a day at the same table with the students. Why not just go ahead and sleep in the same bed with the students! (431)

The novel *Fortress Besieged* has the following description of the situation when teachers and students were eating together:

Meiting Li, whose mind was always busily at work, anticipated that many of the professors would put down their chopsticks after eating half a bowl of rice with the students and slip out of the dining hall to go home and eat in comfort, so he made the following dining hall regulations: The tutors' bowls were to be filled with rice by the students first, and the students were to wait for the tutors to finish eating before tutors and students left the dining hall together. To all appearances this was done out of respect for the tutors. In addition, no one was to speak while eating. Eating in silence, a person had to keep his grievances to himself. (441)

In reality, a tutorial system did exist in NHNC. They held regular meetings. Consulting the Archives of NHNC 61-1-8, the author of this paper found the description of a meeting in 1941. At 3: 30 p.m., on January 16, 1941, fifty-five tutors, including Shicheng Liao, attended the meeting. The seventh item on the record of the meeting states clearly that all tutors and students should improve their patriotism, develop the spirit of service, cherish the public goods and materials, maintain order in the dining room, keep good discipline in rallies, and pay great attention to courtesy. The tutoring system of NHNC has a profound influence on the creation of the novel *Fortress Besieged*.

In the Hunan Archives, Zhongshu Qian's profile when he was working in NHNC can be found among the teachers' questionnaires, stating: Zhongshu Qian, also Mocun, male, aged 30, born in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, married, working in NHNC since August of 1939, Bachelor of Arts in Literature from National Tsinghua University. He studied in France and Britain, and once was a lecturer of Guanghua University, editor of *China Review Weekly*, professor of Southwest Associated University, special editor of the *Oriental Philosophy and Religion Series of Oxford University*. He was hired as a professor in NHNC and served as head of the English Department. He taught education and English courses with a salary of 400 yuan per month. In July 1941, he resigned and left NHNC. In *Fortress Besieged*, Fang got a fake Ph.D. from abroad. He worked only as an associate professor with a monthly salary of 280 yuan.

As a matter of fact, Qian didn't have a colorful life in NHNC. This is reflected in *Fortress Besieged*, in which Xinmei Zhao, Miss Fan, and Mrs. Wang elaborated on the dull life in Sanlü University. Xinmei Zhao complained that there was no place for amusements. Mrs. Wang even complained to President Songnian Gao that it's his fault for finding such a dull place to set up this university. Qian also stated that he lived a stable but

dull life in NHNC. However, this dull life was not necessarily a bad thing for Qian, who loved reading. He spent most of his time reading and writing in addition to teaching and chatting with his friends. In the exuberant period in NHNC, Qian had a fruitful lifetime for literary creation.

The Hunan Archives contain seventeen classical poems of Zhongshu Qian in the *NHNC Quarterly*. Some of these poems—modified based on the original poem, as is Qian's unique style for literary creation—were included in *Huaiju Poems* published later. In 1940, Zhongkuang Wu, in place of Qian, printed *Recent Poems of Zhongshu*, and included Qian's old-style poems created from Shanghai to Hunan in the winter of 1939.

Secondly, he began the creation of *Notes on Literature and Art*, a milestone of a review on poetry in China. In NHNC, Qian completed half of the book. As he said in the Prologue of the book: "I began to write this book when I was in Xiangxi, and half was completed in that period... In the poor area of Xiangxi with few friends, there was plenty of time for me. I wrote some parts when inspiration came to me" (*Notes on Literature* 1). His friend, Zhongkuang Wu, recalled: "The book *Notes on Literature and Art* was also created during this period of time. Qian bought rough papers from the town and wrote a chapter every night and modified it two or three days later... Every time he finished a chapter, he handed it to me to read. Chapters on Qian Tao, Changji Li, Shengyu Mei, Wanli Yang, Jianhai Chen, Shiquan Jiang, [and others] were first written. I have the copies. In 1941, before he left Lantian, he struggled to revise the manuscript and transcribe a copy of it. He gave it to me and hoped I could store it" (138-139).

In his days in NHNC, Qian also published the paper *Chinese Poetry and Painting*. After the completion of the paper, it was unanimously praised by experts and scholars, and published three times before liberation in 1949. After liberation, Qian revised the paper several times. The text included in the *Patchwork: Seven Essays on Art and Literature* consists of more than 20,000 words. The notes of the article also increased from eight to thirty-seven. According to Yan Tang, Zhongshu Qian wrote five articles in Lantian, "Window," "On Happiness," "Eating," "Notes on Aesop's Fables," and "On Morals," which were included in *Writings on the Edge of Life* (226). In the Acknowledgments, Qian explained that some articles had been published in the journals of Dayu Sun, Wangshu Dai, Congwen Shen, and Tang Sun; Qian also expressed thanks to Jiang Yang who selected and compiled these essays into a collection. The collection was published in December 1941 by Kaiming Bookstore. Ten essays were included. According to Mr. Qian and Yan Tang, the other five essays were previously published during his days at Southwest Associated University.

Most importantly, in NHNC, Qian conceived of *Fortress Besieged*. Chaozong Zheng disclosed: "In 1980, *Fortress Besieged* was reprinted. Xu (i.e. Yanmou Xu) wrote a letter telling it to me 'Though Qian's *Fortress Besieged* was completed in Shanghai, the conception and layout were really conducted in the poor area of Xiangxi. It's still visible before eyes that forty years ago, by the stove, we were listening to him telling the stories in this book'" (115). Undoubtedly, as mentioned above, Qian's experiences in NHNC are projected and become an invisible part in the novel *Fortress Besieged*.

In June 1941, Qian, together with Yanmou Xu, left NHNC and took a ship from Guangxi to Shanghai. Zhongshu Qian created a poem "To Yanmou" to record the return, and the main idea of poem goes as follows:

Last June, we went to Hunan; together, we traveled through numerous mountains.
We tramped on the rocky roads which twisting round and round.
Home was so remote in the poor area that it's not easy to live and come out.
Luckily, though caged, we two formed a habit of writing poems.⁴

In his monograph, *Zhongshu Qian: No.1 Talent in the Republic of China*, Yan Tang concluded:

Staying in Lantian for less than two years, exactly speaking, is extremely important to Zhongshu Qian. Comparatively speaking, in Lantian, he had a productive period. He began to write the book *Notes on Literature and Art*, created the poetry collection *Recent Poems of Zhongshu*, and finished half of the book *Writings on the Edge of Life*. Most importantly, in Lantian, he conceived and gave birth to the novel *Fortress Besieged*. He was not willing to go to Lantian, and on the road he had a lot of hardships and was thus in rather low spirit. However, facts show those hardships were valuable to him. From the literary point of view, Zhongshu Qian harvested a lot in the poor mountains of Xiangxi, so it could be said that although Zhongshu Qian came to

Lantian by fault, yet it's a blessing in disguise. Maybe some people would say that Zhongshu Qian's creation of *Notes on Literature and Art* and *Writings on the Edge of Life* is only a matter of time. But here we can surely say: If there hadn't been a trip to Lantian, Zhongshu Qian would never have produced *Fortress Besieged*. Without *Fortress Besieged*, the history of Chinese literature will appear rather dull. Therefore, although small, the town Lantian is of great significance to Zhongshu Qian and the modern Chinese literature. (232-233)

Tang may exaggerate a little bit here. But if Qian had not had the relevant experience at NHNC, *Fortress Besieged* might never have been written, and certainly would not be the masterpiece that today is considered one of the world's greatest novels of the twentieth century.

After generations of unremitting efforts, NHNC, where Qian worked for about two years, has become Hunan Normal University (HNNU), a key university of the country's "211" project. The university has always been proud that Zhongshu Qian was the first head of the Foreign Languages Department, and that Qian always sheds light on all the staff and students who pursue knowledge unceasingly.

Notes

1. The author of this paper, in the journal *Review* (Volume 6, 2006), published *Story inside and Outside Fortress Besieged: Zhongshu Qian and National Normal College*, upon which this paper has been heavily revised. All the English quotations from *Fortress Besieged* are from the translated version published by People's Literature Publishing House (2003).
2. Southwest Associated University was a temporary university made up of National Peking University, National Tsinghua University, and Private Naikai University in the period of Anti-Japanese War in China.
3. Yuan Qu was in the post of Official Sanlü of Chu State in the Warring States period, presiding over the temple sacrifice and administrating the educational affairs of the children of three noble families: Qu, Jing, and Zhao. Qu Yuan was named Chu Sanlü for this. Sanlü University in *Fortress Besieged* got its name from Chu Sanlü.
4. The source text of the poem: 去年六月去湖南，与子肩輿越万山。地似麻披攢石皱，路如香篆向天弯。只看日近家何远，岂料居难出更艰。差喜捉笼囚一处，伴鸣破尽作诗慳。 In *Huaiju Poems* (《槐聚诗存》), published by SDX Joint Publishing Company, in 2001, p. 65.

Works Cited

- Chen, Bing, editor. *A Special Memory*. Contemporary World, 1999.
- Fortress Besieged*. New Directions, www.ndbooks.com/book/fortress-besieged/.
- Fu, Daobin. "Biography of Mr. Qian Jibo." *Volume of Jibo Qian*, edited by Mengxi Liu. Hebei Education, 1996, pp.1-4.
- Liu, Mengxi, editor. *Volume of Jibo Qian*. Hebei Education, 1996.
- Liu, Zhongguo. *Zhongshu Qian: Elegy of Humanity of 20th Century* (Volume 1). Huacheng, 1999.
- Pankaj, Mishra. "Sentimental Education in Shanghai." *New York Review of Books*, 12 June 2008, www.nybooks.com/articles/2008/06/12/sentimental-education-in-shanghai/.
- Qian, Zhongshu. *Notes on Literature and Art*. Zhonghua Book Company, 1984.
- . *Fortress Besieged*. SDX Joint, 2001.
- . *Fortress Besieged*. Translated by J. Kelly, et al. People's Literature, 2003.
- . *Huaiju Poems*. SDX Joint, 2001.
- Qu, Wenjun. "New Exploration of Creation Purport of *Fortress Besieged*." *Journal of Literature, History & Philosophy*, no. 1, 1992, pp. 68-72.
- Spence, Jonathan D. "Forever Jade," *New York Review of Books*, 17 April 1980, www.nybooks.com/articles/1980/04/17/forever-jade/.
- Tang, Caibo, editor. *Selections of Shicheng Liao's Educational Works*. People's Education, 1992.
- Tang, Yan. *Zhongshu Qian: No.1 Talent of the Republic of China*. China Times, 2001.
- Yang, Jiang. *Records of Zhongshu Qian and Fortress Besieged*. Hunan People's Publishing, 1986.
- . *Selections of Jiang Yang's Works. Essay (II)*. People's Literature, 2004.
- . *Complete Works of Jiang Yang. Essay (III)*. People's Literature, 2014.
- Wang, Weiping. "The Spiritual Connection between *Fortress Besieged* and Western Modernist Literature." *Journal of Modern Chinese Literature Studies*, no. 2, 1996, pp. 183-196.
- Wu, Xuezhao. *Mi Wu and Yinque Chen*. Tsinghua UP, 1992.
- Wu, Zhongkuang. "Recollecting Mr. Qian Zhongshu." *A Special Memory*, edited by Bing Chen. Contemporary World, 1999, pp. 135-144.
- Zheng, Chaozong. "Reminiscence." *A Special Memory*, edited by Bing Chen. Contemporary World, 1999, pp. 109-118.
- Zou, Wenhai. "Recollecting Zhongshu Qian." *A Special Memory*, edited by Bing Chen. Contemporary World, 1999, pp. 80-83.