

Swarthmore College

Works

Chinese Faculty Works

Chinese

12-1-2002

Review Of "Buglers On The Home Front: The Wartime Practice Of The Qiyue School" By Y. Shu

Haili Kong

Swarthmore College, hkong1@swarthmore.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-chinese>



Part of the [Chinese Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Haili Kong. (2002). "Review Of "Buglers On The Home Front: The Wartime Practice Of The Qiyue School" By Y. Shu". *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, And Reviews*. Volume 24, 194-195. DOI: 10.2307/823484 <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-chinese/24>

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Chinese Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact myworks@swarthmore.edu.

Buglers on the Home Front: The Wartime Practice of the Qiyue School, by Yunzhong Shu. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000. Pp. x + 209. US \$ 18.95 (paper).

Yunzhong Shu's *Buglers on the Home Front: The Wartime Practice of the Qiyue School* is the first book-length study in English on the formation and development of the *Qiyue* school during this period; it presents a largely convincing analysis of representative works, both theoretical and literary, of the school in a historical framework. The *Qiyue* school refers to those who actively contributed their works to the journal, *Qiyue* (1937-1941), and its series (1942-1944) edited by Hu Feng (1910-1984), and who later became Hu Feng's followers and close friends. The so-called *Qiyue* school had never been an organized association like the ones in the 1920s, such as the Literary Association, but it was severely persecuted in the early 1950s as an anti-Party Clique, the first target and victim of Mao's constant anti-intellectual purges after the PRC was founded in 1949. As a consequence of this political persecution, the *Qiyue* School and its literary role during the war were never thoroughly and fairly examined until the 1980s.

After a quite comprehensive account of the historical background of the formation of the school, Chapters One and Four are both dedicated to detailed descriptions of Hu Feng, the "founder and guiding spirit of the *Qiyue* school" (p.18), the origins of his literary thought and ideas, such as his activist orientation and sectarianism, which could be traced back to the influence from Japanese Fukumotoism in the 1920s, and his core theory about the "subjective fighting spirit." Shu repeatedly emphasizes that the *Qiyue* school is an outgrowth of the Lu Xun camp, and directly and unyieldingly connected to the May Fourth spirit, regardless of the changes of literary trends and the political atmosphere. Hu Feng insisted on "the importance of internal cultural criticism" against China's feudalist tradition as the legacy of the May Fourth literature while both the CCP (the Leftist wing) and the GMD used "May Fourth pragmatically to justify a current political program" (p. 99). Particularly his "subjective fighting spirit" is emphasized through Hu's oppositional stand against Mao's utilitarian policy and call for "the utilization of popular forms of folk values" (p. 96), and through Hu's antidogmatic stand against vulgar Marxism, such as "socialist realism," the newly established canon of the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Therefore, Hu Feng was a dissident in the literary field during the War and after, who refused to distort or give up the May Fourth legacy represented by Lu Xun.

Shu's analysis of chosen literary products of the *Qiyue* school focuses mainly on two genres, reportage and the novel. Although reportage, as a newly developed literary genre, became a collective tool during the Wartime to promote national defense, Cao Bai, Qiu Dongping, and A Long from the *Qiyue* school distinguished their works by maintaining their personal voices and by avoiding flat description and excessive sentimentalism. In this they followed Hu Feng's directives or principles on reportage writing. While emphasizing individual rather than collective voices, Hu Feng preferred authorial intervention in reportage writing. In other words, a good literary report should be "a reflection on history rather than a merely factual record" (p. 68), such as demonstrated by A Long's exemplary report, "Fighting started at Zhabei." This also reflects and embodies Hu Feng's "subjective fighting spirit."

Three of the book's chapters focus on the novel, two on Lu Ling's fiction and one on Ji Fang's. Differing from Kirk Denton and Kang Liu, two predecessors in Lu Ling studies, Shu argues that Lu Ling's novel *Children of Wealth* is not quite a *Bildungsroman* because "an essential component of the *Bildungsroman* is missing—the protagonist's eventual proper socialization achieved through self-cultivation and self-adjustment" (p. 150). According to Shu, it is the unusual use of the "narratorial perspective" among other major constituents (such as time, space, and characters) that makes Lu's *Children of Wealth* unprecedented and unsurpassed in the history of modern Chinese fiction. Undoubtedly, this feature also embodies Hu Feng's "subjective fighting spirit," and "refuses to conform to the formal requirements of any novelistic genre" (p. 20). Ji Fang, also a disciple of Hu Feng, likewise implemented Hu's "subjective fighting spirit" and "primitive vitality" to maintain historical authenticity in the novel *Night Travelers*.

As repeatedly argued by Shu, the reason why both reportage and fiction produced by the *Qiyue* school are so distinctive is mainly because they are particularly seasoned by Hu Feng's "subjective fighting spirit." This is closely related to the role of authorial subjectivity played in narratological strategy and the way of presenting history. After reading Shu's intensive discussion, we are made to rethink the literary contributions of the *Qiyue* school, especially its ideological connection with the May Fourth Spirit, and to admire the courage of this group to consistently combat both vulgar Maoist "formulism" and traditional "objectivism" during the War and afterward. Besides, as Shu mentions (p. 41), *Qiyue* members include, but are not limited to, those who were unattached to any group, but who were promoted by Hu Feng mainly based on their literary potential and because they shared his literary ideas. But, the reader may wonder, what is the esthetic value of the literary works besides the embodiment of Hu Feng's ideas? Lu Ling, the best of the group, may be an exception. But, even in his works, as Shu says, Lu's narratorial intervention is the main feature of his fiction writing. The reliable narrator "always speaks vehemently for the norms of the implied author" and "summarizes complex states of mind in analytical terms, without spending too much time to concretize their nuances" (pp 111-2). Besides, "Lu Ling often casts his characters as thinkers rather than doers," and he also portrays "the extensive intellectualization of his working-class characters" (p. 113). However, while Shu praises Lu Ling for creating workers and peasants endowed with their own minds and voices (p.115), he doesn't give any analytical or critical comments on this aspect.

Shu emphasizes only the dissident voice of the *Qiyue* school. Is there a theoretical connection to the leftist movement, or orthodox Marxism, since Hu Feng and his school were essentially only a faction of the leftist wing? Furthermore, while opposing vulgar Marxist "formulism," was there a tendency of the *Qiyue* to impose the idea "subjective fighting spirit" into creative writing as a new formula? In terms of reportage, Hu Feng promoted a kind of personalized as well as de-idealized style. The paradox is how a writer could prevent being personalized and from being idealized at the same time. To Shu, the *Qiyue* school continued the May Fourth legacy attacking tradition. Perhaps following that logic, Shu disagrees with Kirk Denton's thoughts about Hu Feng's lineage to Neo-Confucianism. Actually, it would be much more interesting if Shu could have provided further discussion on this issue.

In sum, this first comprehensive study in English of the *Qiyue* school asks readers to rethink the value of this dissident group, as a way to understand better the nature of the literary field in wartime China. For those who are interested in modern Chinese literature, this book is definitely worth reading.

Haili Kong
Swarthmore College

Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe, by David Porter. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001. Pp. xii + 296. \$49⁵⁰ (cloth).

David Porter's *Ideographia* is a critical project that sets out to chart the complex and deeply motivated processes through which early modern Europe engages with and coaxes into familiar forms of meaning what Porter calls "the unfamiliar and often enigmatic artifacts of Chinese culture." It reads and analyzes the production of Western knowledge of China from the moment of the originary Jesuit encounter up to the nineteenth-century outbreak of the historically momentous Opium Wars. Literary texts, journals, essays, records of church debates, and even the material artifacts of paintings, tapestries and porcelain vases get invoked to assess the