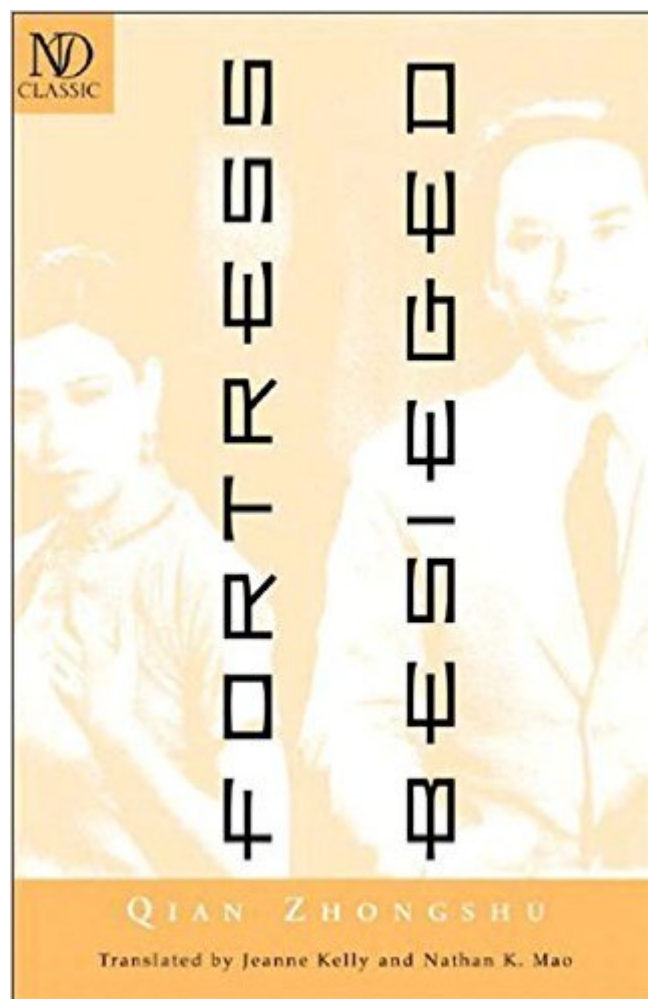


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Fortress Besieged



Synopsis

The greatest Chinese novel of the twentieth century, *Fortress Besieged* is a classic of world literature, a masterpiece of parodic fiction that plays with Western literary traditions, philosophy, and middle-class Chinese society in the Republican era. Set on the eve of the Sino-Japanese War, our hapless hero Fang Hung-chien (À la Emma Bovary), with no particular goal in life and with a bogus degree from a fake American university in hand, returns home to Shanghai. On the French liner home, he meets two Chinese beauties, Miss Su and Miss Pao. Qian writes, "With Miss Pao it wasn't a matter of heart or soul. She hadn't any change of heart, since she didn't have a heart." In a sort of painful comedy, Fang obtains a teaching post at a newly established university where the effete pseudo-intellectuals he encounters in academia become the butt of Qian's merciless satire. Soon Fang is trapped into a marriage of Nabokovian proportions of distress and absurdity. Recalling Fielding's *Tom Jones* in its farcical litany of misadventures and Flaubert's "style indirect libre," *Fortress Besieged* is its own unique feast of delights.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Fortress Besieged by Zhongshu Qian Facing a precarious looking rattan footbridge without railings & "afraid he'd only make a mess out of it if he tried to help her" all Fang Hung-chien "could do was smile ruefully" at the young lady---whom he'd earlier characterized behind her back as "a delicate little Shanghai girl"---and say "that leaves just us two cowards." To which she countered: "Mr. Fang, are you scared? I am not. Would you like me to go in front. If you follow me you won't have to look at the void below and you won't have the feeling that the bridge is endless. This way you would

have more confidence." (Aside: try re-reading the above after substituting the word "life" in lieu of "the bridge.") Once the pair were safely across Mr. Fang's pal Chou Hsin-mei smilingly asked of the lady (whom I'm not going to name for your benefit) "were you leading him from the front or was he looking after you from behind?" Good question. And this is what this book is about, such questions on the subject of courtship---but not relating to any and all Chinese. No, this novel by a Chinese intellectual---whose first names can be translated as "book-lover"---primarily concerns & satirizes the foibles and pretensions of other intellectuals; particularly Chinese students who have journeyed abroad seeking foreign degrees. The story thus conveniently commences aboard a steamship making its way back to China, peopled by a number of Chinese students (among them Fang Hung-chien) returning from Europe. The year is 1937 and the characters' lives are set amidst a backdrop of European hegemony and increasing Japanese aggression vis-a-vis China.

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