



Chinese Reportage: The Aesthetics of Historical Experience (Asia-Pacific: Culture, Politics, and Society)

Charles A. Laughlin

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Chinese Reportage details for the first time in English the creation and evolution of a distinctive literary genre in twentieth-century China. Reportage literature, while sharing traditional journalism's commitment to the accurate, nonfictional portrayal of experience, was largely produced by authors outside the official news media. In identifying the literary merit of this genre and establishing its significance in China's leftist cultural legacy, Charles A. Laughlin reveals important biases that impede Western understanding of China and, at the same time, supplies an essential chapter in Chinese cultural history.

Laughlin traces the roots of reportage (or *baogao wenxue*) to the travel literature of the Qing Dynasty but shows that its flourishing was part of the growth of Chinese communism in the twentieth century. In a modern Asian context critical of capitalism and imperialism, reportage offered the promise of radicalizing writers through a new method of literary practice and the hope that this kind of writing could in turn contribute to social revolution and China's national self-realization. *Chinese Reportage* explores the wide range of social engagement depicted in this literature: witnessing historic events unfolding on city streets; experiencing brutal working conditions in 1930s Shanghai factories; struggling in the battlefields and trenches of the war of resistance against Japan, the civil war, and the Korean war; and participating in revolutionary rural, social, and economic transformation. Laughlin's close readings emphasize the literary construction of social space over that of character and narrative structure, a method that brings out the critique of individualism and humanism underlying the genre's aesthetics.

Chinese Reportage recaptures a critical aspect of leftist culture in China with far-reaching implications for historians and sociologists as well as literary scholars.

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