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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The New Yangge Opera and Wartime Social Mobilization Effects: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Between 1943 and 1945, the Chinese Communist Party launched a new Yangge opera movement in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region. In a rural society with an illiteracy rate exceeding 80%, disseminating revolutionary ideas became an urgent political task. This study takes Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland as a case study to examine its effectiveness as a wartime mobilization tool and the mechanisms behind it. Existing studies have focused on historical significance and ideological content, neglecting its internal operational mechanism as a mobilization tool, particularly how folk musical forms achieved deep integration with revolutionary content. The study finds that the mobilizing function of the new Yangge opera did not stem from external political directives but from its deep borrowing and transformation of northern Shaanxi folk musical forms. Between 1943 and 1945, the opera was performed over 2,000 times, with a single audience reaching 20,000 people. This article argues that the success of the new Yangge opera lay in its effective integration of traditional folk forms with revolutionary content, providing a typical case for understanding how art can serve political mobilization.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by analyzing the new Yangge opera as a wartime mobilization mechanism from four dimensions: musical materials, performance forms, instrumental configuration, and dissemination mechanisms. It documents how traditional folk forms were systematically transformed to carry revolutionary content in a high-illiteracy rural society.

1. Introduction

In 1942, Mao Zedong put forward the principle of "literature and art serving the workers, peasants, and soldiers" at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art. The direct outcome

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of this principle was the New Yangge Opera movement, which flourished in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region and various anti-Japanese base areas from 1943 to 1945.

The New Yangge Opera was not created out of thin air. It evolved from the traditional *Yangge*, a folk square art integrating song, dance, and performance that had been circulating in northern Shaanxi for hundreds of years. During the Spring Festival of 1943, *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland*, created by teachers and students of the Lu Xun Academy of Arts, premiered at the square outside the South Gate of Yan'an, marking the official birth of the New Yangge Opera as an art form (Ju, 2014; Liu, 2023).

Why could the New Yangge Opera spread rapidly in a short time and become the most popular art form in the wartime border regions? How was its mobilization function realized? This paper attempts to answer these questions. Adopting a combined method of historical archive analysis and literature analysis, this paper analyzes the internal logic of the New Yangge Opera as a wartime mobilization tool from the dimensions of script origin, musical materials, performance forms, instrumental arrangements, and communication mechanisms.

The core argument of this paper is that the mobilization function of the New Yangge Opera did not stem from the forced implementation of external political directives, but from its deep borrowing and transformation of northern Shaanxi folk musical forms. Through an expressive system characterized by easy participation, high dissemination, and strong mobilization, it achieved an effective integration of folk forms and revolutionary content.

It should be noted that this article focuses only on the wartime period of the new Yangge opera (1943-1945). This represents the findings of the author's archival research on the historical analysis within the broader research project on the new Yangge opera. The analysis of the decline period (1945-1966), stagnation period (1966-1977), dormant period (1978-2005), and revival period (2006-2025) will be presented in subsequent chapters of the author's project dissertation.

2. Research Methodology

This study adopts historical archival analysis and literature analysis as its research methods, taking *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland* (1943-1945) as a case study.

2.1. Literature Search and Data Sources

The data sources of this study include two parts: electronic databases and physical collections.

For electronic databases, *China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI)*and *Wanfang Data* were used as the core search platforms. The core search terms included "new Yangge opera", "*Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland*", "*nationalism*", "*wartime mobilization*", "*Yangge tune*", "*Meihu tune*", and "*Xintianyou*", A search using the keyword "*new Yangge opera*" was conducted on *CNKI* for the period from 1943 to 2025, yielding 198 journal articles, theses, and conference papers. A search using the keyword "*Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland*" yielded 156 relevant documents. A supplementary search on *Wanfang Data* added 37 documents related to "*new Yangge opera*" and 29 documents related to "*Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland*". After deduplication and

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removal of irrelevant documents, a total of 112 core documents were included in the analysis.

For physical collections, the author conducted field research between 2024 and 2025 at the *National Library of China*(Rare Books Reading Room and Microfilm Reading Room), the former site of the *Lu Xun Academy of Arts in Yan'an*, the *Yan'an Literature and Art Memorial Hall,* the *Yan'an Revolutionary Memorial Hall*, the *Northern Shaanxi Folk Song Museum*, and *Yan'an University*. The archival materials consulted include: original microfilms of *Jiefang Daily* from 1943 to 1945, work logs of the Lu Xun Academy of Arts, performance records, creative manuscripts, historical photographs, and folk song collection materials, totaling 136 items.

2.2. Literature Screening and Analytical Methods

The screening process followed the following inclusion criteria: (1) studies or archives directly related to the new Yangge opera or *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland*; (2) published in peer-reviewed journals, authoritative archival compilations, or primary historical sources; (3) providing verifiable historical data or original records. The exclusion criteria included: (1) studies only on traditional Yangge rather than the new Yangge opera; (2) commentary articles lacking original data or archival support; (3) duplicate or incomplete materials. After screening, the final analysis included 68 academic journal articles, 14 theses, 39 archival documents, 26 newspaper reports, and 13 monographs, totaling 160 items.

The analysis focused on four dimensions: script source, musical materials, performance forms, and dissemination mechanisms. The specific steps were as follows. First, 26 reports on *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland* published in *Jiefang Daily* between 1943 and 1945 were read one by one to extract quantitative data such as performance time, location, number of performances, and audience size, as well as qualitative descriptions such as audience feedback and official evaluations. Second, the work logs and performance records in the Lu Xun Academy of Arts archives were organized chronologically to compile performance frequency statistics from 1943 to 1945. Third, the original folk tune collection materials housed in the Northern Shaanxi Folk Song Museum were compared with the score of *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland* to identify the sources and adaptations of its musical materials. Fourth, high-frequency keywords—such as "everyone can sing", "nationalization", "mobilization", and "education" —were extracted to summarize the key pathways through which the new Yangge opera achieved its mobilizing function.

2.3. Research Ethics and Quality Control

This study strictly adheres to academic ethical standards. All references to archival materials are accompanied by citations of their sources and accession numbers to prevent academic misconduct. Where historical sources contain textual variations or inconsistencies (such as discrepancies in the number of performances recorded across different archives), a cross-verification method was employed, taking the original work logs of the Lu Xun Academy of Arts as the definitive source and cross-referencing them with reports in the *Jiefang Daily*.

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3. Literature Review

3.1. The Birth Background of the New Yangge Opera

The emergence of the new Yangge opera was closely related to the specific social conditions of the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression.

3.1.1. High Illiteracy Rate and Communication Dilemma

In 1939, the illiteracy rate in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region was as high as 99 percent. By 1945, despite the launch of literacy campaigns, the rate remained above 80 percent due to wartime population mobility and the influx of refugees from Japanese-occupied areas (Li, 1986, p. 566). Under such conditions, printed propaganda was ineffective, and literacy classes had minimal impact (Wang& Tang, 2022, p. 39). How to reach the illiterate masses became an urgent political issue.

3.1.2. The Turn of the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art

In May 1942, Mao Zedong delivered his key speech at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art. Before the forum, theatrical works at the Lu Xun Academy of Arts focused on Chinese and foreign classics, which were popular only among cadres and students but divorced from the masses. A military cadre even left a performance midway, saying he "could defeat the Japanese invaders but not the concerts of the Lu Xun Academy of Arts" (Shi Leimeng, 1992, p. 322). Mao then proposed that literature and art should serve workers, peasants, and soldiers, and stressed transforming folk forms into dynamic revolutionary art (Mao Zedong, 1942). This speech directly spawned the New Yangge Opera movement.

3.2. The Creation of Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland and The Wartime Context

3.2.1. Source of the Script: Adaptation from a True Story

Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland is based on a real story. In 1941, amid natural disasters and food shortages in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region, peasant Ma Pi'en and his daughter Ma Xing'er reclaimed 159 mu of wasteland without external support. Ma Xing'er worked over ten hours daily, breaking traditional gender norms and gaining economic independence. In early 1943, the pair were honored as "Father-Daughter Labor Heroes" (*Jiefang Daily*, Feb 23, 1943, p.1). The Lu Xun Academy of Arts adapted this story into a play, changing the father-daughter relationship to brother and sister for broader public resonance.

3.3. Changing the father-daughter relationship to brother and sister made it easier to resonate with young audiences, thereby enhancing the mobilization effect.

3.3.1. The Creative Team and Timeline

The creative team of *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland* comprised An Bo (music), Yang Luyou (plot and lyrics), and Wang Dahua with Li Bo (directorial conception), completing the work in under one month (Wang, 2010, p.78; Wang & Tang, 2022, p.41).

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Premiering at Yan'an South Gate Square on February 5, 1943, the performance drew about 20,000 spectators and received high recognition from Mao Zedong, Zhu De and other leaders. The Lu Xun Academy of Arts Yangge Troupe then toured the border region and gained wide popular acclaim (Ju, 2014, p.45).

3.4. Functional Positioning in the Wartime Context

In the wartime border regions, New Yangge Opera served as a cultural weapon for resistance and wartime mobilization, not mere entertainment. As Mao stressed, art should integrate with politics and form "a component part of the entire revolutionary machine" (Mao, 1942). *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland* mobilized participation in the Great Production Campaign, promoting "glorious labor" and self-reliance in line with the slogan "Draw on our own efforts to secure ample food and clothing." The opera inspired widespread grassroots reclamation. As one peasant noted in Jiefang Daily, "After watching Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland, I reclaimed several more fen of wasteland the very next day. This opera truly speaks to our hearts" (*Jiefang Daily*, April 5, 1944).

3.5. Folk Sources of Musical Materials and The Construction of National Identity

3.5.1. The Use of Four Northern Shaanxi Folk Tunes

The musical composition of *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland* strictly follows the principle of "using folk forms to carry revolutionary content." All musical materials in the opera are drawn from four folk tunes of the Han people in northern Shaanxi: *Yangge* Tune (A folk tune genre widely popular in northern China, originating from the traditional Yangge dance), *Meihu* tunes (A folk opera tune originating from Meixian and Huxian in Shaanxi, formed in the Qing Dynasty), *Huagu* tunes (A type of opera singing derived from Ming and Qing dynasty folk songs and dances), and *Xintianyou* (A type of northern Shaanxi folk song characterized by its high-pitched and expansive melody), with no Western compositional techniques or foreign musical elements introduced (Feng, 2005, p. 79).

As a typical one-act New Yangge Opera, the work adopts a Banqiang-ti[1] (fixed tune form) musical structure and the Qǐ-Chéng-Zhuǎn-Hé[2] **(**initiation-development-transition-conclusion) narrative form, combining northern Shaanxi folk song and Yangge dance. It consists of five sections: Dao Ban[3] (the prelude to the lyrical banqiang ti movement), The Rooster Crows Loudly, Antiphonal Singing between Brother and Sister, Emulate the Labor Heroes, and Celebration. Unlike Western opera, it has no separate overture; Dao

[1] Banqiang-ti: The core structural system of Chinese Xiqumusic, which takes symmetrical upper and lower melodic phrases as the basic unit and realizes the transformation between lyrical and narrative expressions through the "variation of tune forms" in rhythm (ban yan), tempo and melody. Typical tune forms include the Manban (for lyrical expression), Yuanban (for narrative expression), the Liushuiban (for fast-paced narration) and the Sunban (for free expression). It usually follows the dramatic rhythmic structure of "free-slow-moderate-fast-free" and is commonly used in opera genres such as Peking Opera and Henan Opera. (Editorial Committee of the Chinese Encyclopedia. *Chinese Encyclopedia: Volume of Opera and Quyi*. 1983, p.11)

[2] Qǐchéngzhuǎnhé is a classic structural paradigm in Chinese Xiquand folk music, which sets the tone and presents the theme in *Qǐ* (initiation/introduction), elaborates and consolidates the musical idea in *Chéng* (continuation/development), varies and develops the melody in *Zhuǎn* (transition), and concludes and echoes the theme in *Hé*(synthesis/conclusion). It completes the full expression of a musical phrase/ form with logical layers, embodying the typical mode of Chinese musical thinking. (Stock, J. (2003). *Chinese Folk Music.* p.45-48.)

[3] *Dao-Ban*: A free-rhythm instrumental prelude in Chinese Qiqu and folk operatic music. It introduces the aria, sets the tune, and foreshadows the mood, with free rhythm and usually connects to the core clapper-style arias. (Zhang, G., & Guo, H. C. 2002. *Anthology of Chinese Xiqu Music*. pp. 89-91)

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Ban acts as the introductory section, while the epilogue connects closely with the dance number, integrating folk art and national narrative (An, 1943; Tong, 2004, pp.211–240). The application of folk tunes in the five musical movements of the entire opera is analyzed separately below

3.5.2. Dao-Ban

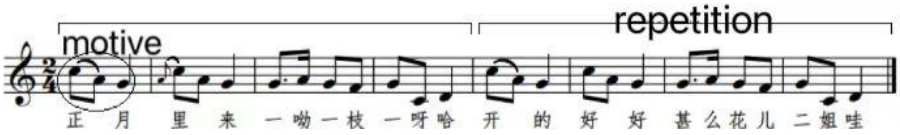
The rhythmic design of Dao-Ban extensively draws on northern Shaanxi Yangge drum and gong patterns. Taking the first four measures of the introduction as an example, its rhythmic framework is directly derived from basic Yangge percussion figures, with a dotted rhythm added for variation. This strengthens the dance-like quality of the 2/4 meter and fits the singing-dancing nature of New Yangge Opera (An, 1943). Dao-Ban also uses the interval leaps typical of the northern Shaanxi folk song Xintianyou, especially the "Sanshilipu" melody, which strengthens the work's regional identity.

3.5.3. The First Section: *The Rooster Crows Loudly*

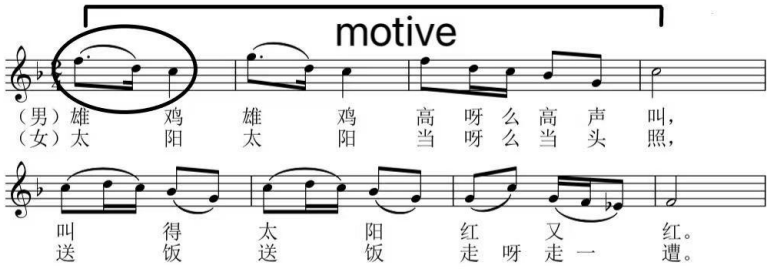
The first section, *The Rooster Crows Loudly*, adopts a one-part strophic structure and draws on the motivic material of the northern Shaanxi Meihu tune *June Flower* (A Meihu tune from northern Shaanxi. It takes four measures as one phrase unit, with the second phrase being an exact repetition of the first. Its meter is 2/4 time, and its final note falls on D *yu* in the F *gong* system.). While *June Flower* takes four measures as one phrase unit with the second phrase being an exact repetition of the first, *The Rooster Crows Loudly* expands the original two phrases into a four-phrase structure with richer melodic direction. Both share the same 2/4 meter, but the latter introduces greater melodic variety.

The following examples compare the thematic motif of the traditional Meihu tune *June Flowers* with the opening motif of the opera's aria *The Rooster Crows Loudly*.

Example 1. Thematic Motif from the *Meihu tune* "*June Flowers*"



Example 2. The Opening Theme Motif of *The Rooster Crows Loudly*



As shown in Examples 1 and 2, the opera's opening motif directly adapts the four-note motive from the Meihu tune, retaining its rhythmic profile while simplifying its ornamentation.

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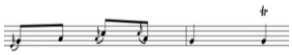
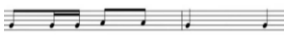
3.5.3. The Second Section: Antiphonal Singing between Brother and Sister

The second section, *Antiphonal Singing between Brother and Sister*, is adapted from the Northern Shaanxi Yangge tune (*Laborer Tune*) (A northern Shaanxi folk Yangge tune sung by peasants during labor. It is characterized by a simple pentatonic scale and a straight melodic line, with a 4+4 upper-and-lower phrase structure), and dramatic conflict is constructed through first-person dialogue. *Langong Diao* is a folk tune sung by northern Shaanxi peasants during labor, characterized by a simple pentatonic scale and a straight melodic line (An, 1943).

The following table presents the typical application of the northern Shaanxi folk *Yangge* tune *Langong Diao* in Antiphonal Singing between Brother and Sister.

Table 1 compares the melodic features of the original Langong Diao and its adaptation in the opera.

Table 1: An application of *Langong Diao* in the *Antiphonal Singing between Brother and Sister*.

Title	Measures	Melodic Example	Lyrics/Refrain Syllables	Core Features
Langong Diao	1-2		The laborer brother (ai)!	Abundant melodic ornaments and flourishes with refrain syllables (ai, yohe) that highlight recreational characteristics; the final note lands on the tonic D (number 5 in numbered musical notation), creating a bright and high-spirited mood
Antiphonal Singing between Brother and Sister	1-2		Brother, listen to me!	All refrain syllables are deleted; no melodic ornaments or flourishes with a concise and straight melodic line; the final note lands on the tonic D without high spirits, conveying a mood of grievance

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3.5.4. The Third Section: Emulate the Labor Heroes

The third section, *Emulate the Labor Heroes*, centers on the Grand Yangge Tune and employs a flattened seventh scale degree to strengthen its appeal. The *Celebration* coda draws on the zhi-mode cadence of the Meihu tune and concludes the opera on the zhi pitch (Tong, 2004, p. 223).

3.5.5. Coda: Celebration

The *Celebration* section continues the mood of the third movement, employs the Zhi-mode cadence from Meihu Tune, and closes the opera on the Zhi pitch (Tong, 2004, p. 223).

This choice of material was functionally motivated: folk tunes provided a familiar musical language that reduced audience reception barriers. An Bo used the pentatonic Zhi mode as a unifying framework, integrating features of three folk tunes within one modal system. This preserved the authenticity of northern Shaanxi folk music while ensuring musical coherence across the opera (An, 1943, p. 12).

3.5.6. Melodic Colloquialism and Memorability

The melody of *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland* emphasizes colloquialism and transmissibility.First, it follows the intonation of the northern Shaanxi dialect, creating a "singing as speech" effect. Lyrics are drawn directly from peasant daily language with little ornamentation.

Second, it uses short, regular phrases, mainly a 4+4 parallel structure, making them easy to memorize. The whole opera lasts only 15–20 minutes, enabling audiences to grasp the main melodies quickly (Yan'an Literature and Art Series Editorial Board, 1984, p. 161).

Third, repetition functions as a key developmental device. As Tong (2004, pp. 211–240) notes, core melodic motifs recur in varied forms, consistent with folk music traditions and integrating music with drama.

3.5.7. Folk Character and Portability of Instrumentation

The instrumental configuration of *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland* is entirely based on northern Shaanxi folk instruments, including Gongs, Yangge drums, Suona, Erhu, Banhu, and Sanxian. The 1943 original version used only five instruments: one Yangge drum, one Large gong, one Small gong, one pair of Cymbals, and one Suona (Lu Xun Academy of Arts Archives, 1943, Vol. 3, p. 13). This configuration fully met the acoustic needs of open-air square performances.

More importantly, these instruments were highly portable, suitable for touring under wartime conditions. The Yangge Troupe of the Lu Xun Academy of Arts carried these instruments into villages, military units, and government offices across the border region, achieving a level of dissemination that allowed performances anytime and anywhere. The 1945 standardized version added banhu, erhu, and dizi, but still maintained a purely folk instrumental configuration, with no Western orchestral instruments introduced (An, 1963, p. 68).

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3.5. Performance Forms and Dissemination Mechanisms

3.5.1. Accessible Features of Square Performance

Original performances of *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland* were all staged outdoors. The premiere took place at Yan'an South Gate Square, with later shows held in open spaces including markets, drill grounds, and village threshing floors. Lacking formal stage facilities, these performances allowed the audience to gather closely around the performers (Wang, 2004, p. 424; Li, 1985, p. 32).

This form was accessible, free, and scheduled in daytime to suit peasant life, with no physical barriers between performers and the audience. As recalled by a cast member who performed in the 1943 production, during the 1943 Spring Festival performance, peasants sat in front, soldiers and other spectators stood behind, and crowds even occupied slopes and walls, with order maintained voluntarily (Li, 1985, p. 32).

3.5.2. Dialect Dialogue and Character Identification

All dialogue in *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland* uses the northern Shaanxi dialect instead of formal theatrical language. Lines such as "I attended a meeting last night and went to bed late" and "You sleep in broad daylight, causing great delay" reflect the daily speech of local peasants (An, 1943, p. 22). This language choice improved accessibility for illiterate audiences and strengthened identification, as viewers felt the drama depicted their own lives. As one peasant commented, "This opera portrays the lives of us farmers and speaks in our northern Shaanxi dialect" (*Jiefang Daily,* April 24, 1943).

3.5.3. Physical Participation and Collective Mobilization

The dance movements in *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland* are drawn entirely from basic northern Shaanxi Yangge steps, simple and easy to imitate (Wang, 2010, p. 89). Audiences often joined in spontaneously after shows (Li, 1985, p. 35). Archival records show that during a 1943 performance in Suide, cast members entered the crowd to sing and dance, with over 80 percent of spectators joining in. In a 1944 border-region show, interactive slogans such as "Labor is most glorious" and "Unite for production" drew enthusiastic audience responses (Yan'an Literature and Art Historical Materials, 1987, pp. 326–327). This physical participation turned passive viewers into active contributors, merging art closely with life.

3.6. Data and Evidence of Wartime Mobilization Effects

3.6.1. Performance Frequency and Coverage

Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland achieved an unprecedented scale of dissemination between 1943 and 1945. According to official statistics, it was performed over 2,000 times across major anti-Japanese base areas, with the highest number in 1944 (more than 1,000 performances). The Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region alone recorded over 1,200 performances. Audiences ranged from hundreds to 20,000 per show. From December 1943 to April 1944, the Lu Xun Academy of Arts troupe presented the work 68 times in the Suide sub-region, attracting a total audience of over 150,000 (Lu Xun Academy of Arts Archives, 1944, Vol. 7, p. 28; Music Research Institute of the

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Chinese Academy of Arts, 1981, p. 96).

As shown in Table 2, the performance statistics across different base areas and tours further demonstrate its widespread reach.

Table 2: Performance Statistics of *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland* (1943-1945)

Statistical Dimension	Subcategory	Value	Archive Source
Total Communication Data	Total Performances (1943-1945)	Over 2,000 performances, with the peak in 1944 (over 1,000 performances)	Music Research Institute of China Academy of Art, 1981, p.96
	Audience Range per Performance	Several hundred to more than 20,000 people (on-site audience scale without sound amplification equipment)	Collection of Historical Materials in Yan'an Literature and Art Memorial Hall, 1943; Shaanxi Provincial Library Red Memory Resource Database, 2025
	Audience Coverage of Single Tour	The maximum on-site audience of the Lu Xun Academy of Arts' tour in Suide exceeded 3,000 people, serving as the core performance program at temple fairs and gatherings in the border region	Henan University News Network, 2016; Shaanxi Provincial Library, 2021
Performances by Base Area	Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region	Over 1,200 performances (including Yan'an core area and Suide, Zizhou, Mizhi sub-districts)	Music Research Institute of China Academy of Art, 1981, p.96; Shaanxi Provincial Library, 2021
	Jincha Ji Base Area	About 300 performances	Music Research Institute of China Academy of Art, 1981, p.96
	Jin Sui Base Area	About 200 performances (the 120th Division Combat Drama Troupe as the core performing group)	China Yan'an Spirit Research Association, 2025
	Jin Ji Yu Lu Base Area	About 200 performances	Music Research Institute of China Academy of Art, 1981, p.96
	Other Anti-Japanese Base Areas	About 100 performances (including Jizhong, Ji Lu Yu sub-districts)	Music Research Institute of China Academy of Art, 1981, p.96

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Statistical Dimension	Subcategory	Value	Archive Source
Core Tour Data (Exclusive to Lu Xun Academy of Arts)	During the Yangge Movement in Yan'an (1943)	60 performances in 50 days, with an average of over 10,000 audience per performance	Beijing News Network, 2021; People's Network Party History Channel, 2013
	Tour in Suide Sub-district (Dec 1943 - Apr 1944)	68 cumulative performances, covering 5 counties (Suide, Zizhou, Mizhi, Jiaxian, Wubao), with a cumulative audience of over 150,000 person-times	Archives of Lu Xun Academy of Arts, 1944, Vol.7, p.28; Shaanxi Provincial Library, 2021
	Laojun Tour in Nanniwan, Yan'an (Mar 1943)	Performed with the Yangge Troupe of Lu Xun Academy of Arts for the garrison of the Eighth Route Army reclamation troops (multiple special performances)	China Business Network, 2025; Yan'an Literature and Art Memorial Hall, 1943
Distribution of Performing Groups	Core Compilation and Performing Group	Yangge Troupe/Literary and Art Troupe of Lu Xun Academy of Arts (core tour in Yan'an and across sub-districts)	People's Network Party History Channel, 2013; Beijing News Network, 2021
	Local Performing Groups in Each Base Area	120th Division Combat Drama Troupe in Jin Sui, Suide Sub-district Literary and Art Troupe (localized performances after training by Lu Xun Academy of Arts)	China Yan'an Spirit Research Association, 2025; Henan University News Network, 2016
	Mass Amateur Performing Groups	Folk Yangge Troupes in villages and towns of the border region (spontaneous performances by non-professional groups, no specific performance statistics)	Shaanxi Provincial Library Red Memory Resource Database, 2025; People's Government of Jingbian County, 2017

Note: Audience numbers are counted as cumulative person-times, with the same audience member watching multiple performances counted repeatedly.

3.6.2. Audience Feedback and Social Impact

Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland was deeply welcomed by border-region audiences. As one peasant wrote in *Jiefang Daily,* "After watching the opera, I reclaimed more wasteland the next day. It truly speaks to our hearts" (April 5, 1944). Audiences regarded New Yangge Opera as "opening the mind" and "boosting morale"—functions of ideological education and revolutionary encouragement (Cao, 1985, pp.117–118). When

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the Lu Xun Academy Yangge Troupe performed for the 359th Brigade in Nanniwan, the soldiers were deeply moved and responded with enthusiastic labor (Su & Li, 2011, p.87). The opera greatly stimulated public labor enthusiasm. The border region's reclaimed land rose from 13.387 million mu in 1942 to 14.363 million mu in 1943, a 7.3% increase, providing strong spiritual support for the Great Production Campaign (*Jiefang Daily,* March 9, 1944).

3.6.3. Official Evaluation and Historical Position

Jiefang Daily, as the most influential official media in the border region, published a series of commentaries between 1943 and 1945, giving high praise to *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland*. A report on February 6, 1943, called it "the first outstanding popular work after the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art." An editorial on April 25, 1943, pointed out that the opera "shaped a healthy and bright new image of peasants in the border region and achieved a perfect integration of national form and revolutionary content." A concluding commentary on January 5, 1945, stated that the opera "used the simplest folk form to carry the most distinct spirit of the times and blazed a new path for Chinese national opera."

3.7. Discussion and Results

Based on the analysis above, the study yields the following results. Between 1943 and 1945, *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland* was performed over 2,000 times and spread across all major anti-Japanese base areas. The opera achieved effective integration of folk forms and revolutionary content through four key dimensions, which together explain its powerful wartime mobilization effects. As noted by Howard (2021), revolutionary music in modern China achieved its political efficacy by embedding ideological messages within familiar folk and sonic forms, a strategy similarly employed in the new Yangge opera.

3.7.1. Low Barrier to Participation: A Non-Professional Approach

Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland had no professional performance requirements. None of its singing, dancing, or acting demanded formal training. This meant that anyone, from a three-year-old child to an eighty-year-old elder, could sing, dance, and perform it. This non-professional design allowed the new Yangge opera to spread rapidly at the grassroots level, achieving the effect of easy participation and widespread performance (Wang, 2004, p. 425). All dance movements in the opera originated from northern Shaanxi folk Yangge, with no complex designs, remaining close to labor and daily life (Wang, 1994, p. 126).

3.7.2. High Transmissibility: Memorability of Folk Tunes

All musical materials of the opera were taken from northern Shaanxi folk tunes, which constituted the familiar musical language of the border-region population (An, 1943, p. 19). The melodies were short, regular, and highly repetitive, allowing audiences to remember the main themes after only one viewing (Tong, 2004, p. 215). After performances, the arias were often sung spontaneously among the public and even became work chants for peasants during labor (Li, 1985, p. 33).

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3.7.3. Emotional Resonance: Rooted in Real Life

The libretto of *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland* was drawn from the real-life deeds of model laborers in the border region. The lyrics used the northern Shaanxi dialect, and the dance movements imitated real labor actions such as land reclamation and soil breaking. This realistic creative approach made the audience feel that the characters were ordinary people like themselves and that the story reflected their own lives, thus generating strong emotional resonance.

3.7.4. Interactivity: From Spectators to Participants

The square performance format of the new Yangge opera broke down the physical barrier between stage and audience. During the finale, performers often walked into the crowd and invited the audience to sing and dance together. This interactive design transformed passive spectators into active participants, deepened the integration of art and life, and strengthened the reception of mobilization messages.

4. Future Research Directions

This study focuses only on the wartime period of the new Yangge opera (1943-1945). Future research may extend in the following directions.

First, future studies could compare the performance forms and dissemination mechanisms of the new Yangge opera across different periods, including the decline period (1945-1966), stagnation period (1966-1977), dormant period (1978-2005), and revival period (2006-2025).

Second, future studies could adopt a multi-case comparative approach. While *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland* is the representative work of the new Yangge opera, other works such as *Husband and Wife Learn to Read*, *Twelve Sickles*, and *Zhou Zishan* were also produced during the same period. Comparing these works could further test the generalizability of the analytical framework proposed in this study.

Third, future studies could conduct fieldwork and in-depth interviews to empirically test the findings of this research. As this study is primarily based on historical archives and literature, future research could interview surviving veteran artists, folk Yangge inheritors, and contemporary performers of the new Yangge opera to obtain additional empirical materials.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Not applicable (historical archival research with no human participants).

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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