

## From Folk Entertainment to Revolutionary Stage: The Formal Transformation of the New Yangge Opera (1943–1945)

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### ABSTRACT

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Between 1943 and 1945, the New Yangge opera movement flourished in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region and various anti-Japanese base areas. Building on traditional northern Shaanxi Yangge, the New Yangge opera underwent a systematic transformation in six dimensions: thematic content, narrative structure, characterisation, performance form, performance space, and social function. Drawing on historical documents and archival materials, this study employs a comparative analysis to examine the formal differences between traditional Yangge and the New Yangge opera. The findings show that the thematic content shifted from folk entertainment to labour production and war propaganda; the narrative structure developed from improvised fragments into a complete dramatic framework; the characterisation eliminated clowning and flirtatious models, constructing ethical character relationships; the performance form evolved from a boisterous and improvisational song-dance style into an integrated square musical play combining singing, dancing and acting; the performance space expanded from temple fairs and village settings to public squares and simple theatres; and the social function transformed from folk entertainment to social education and ideological dissemination. This study reveals the specific pathways of formal transformation in the New Yangge opera and provides an analytical perspective for understanding the formal construction of literature and art in the revolutionary base areas during the War of Resistance against Japan.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study contributes to the existing literature by systematically comparing traditional Yangge and the New Yangge Opera across six formal dimensions: thematic content, narrative structure, characterisation, performance form, performance space, and social function. It documents how folk art was transformed into a standardised stage form for wartime mobilisation.

## 1. Introduction

In 1942, Mao Zedong put forward the core proposition of “art and literature serving the workers, peasants, and soldiers” at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art. This proposition directly drove the full rise of the New Yangge Opera movement in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region and various anti-Japanese base areas between 1943 and 1945 (Mao, 1942). As a widely influential wartime literary and artistic practice, the New Yangge Opera did not emerge out of thin air; rather, it was a stage art form shaped by content adjustments and formal transformations based on the traditional Yangge that had been circulating in northern Shaanxi for centuries. Characterised primarily by folk song and dance, festival rituals, and recreational social interaction, traditional Yangge had a loose form and single function, making it difficult to meet the needs of cultural communication and social education in the wartime base areas (Ju, 2014; Liu, 2023). It was against this backdrop that the New Yangge Opera completed its transformation, rapidly evolving from a regional folk art into a mainstream literary and artistic form covering all anti-Japanese base areas.

Existing studies have mostly discussed the historical background, artistic characteristics, cultural value, and social functions of the New Yangge Opera, providing relatively rich basic perspectives for understanding this artistic form (Li, 1986; Wang & Tang, 2022). Therefore, addressing the lack of systematic formal comparison in existing research, this study conducts a specialised analysis of formal transformation by taking traditional Yangge and the New Yangge Opera as its research objects.

Against the above background, this study draws on historical documents and archival materials, adopting a research method that combines documentary analysis and comparative analysis. It focuses on the process of formal transformation from traditional Yangge to the New Yangge Opera, examines the differences between the two in core formal elements, and reveals the internal logic and practical pathways of the formal reconstruction of the New Yangge Opera. The core argument of this study is that the formal transformation of the New Yangge Opera was not a simple imposition of external directives, but an integral transformation formed on the basis of the wartime social environment and folk art.

It should be noted that this study only focuses on the practice of the New Yangge Opera during the wartime period from 1943 to 1945, and does not involve subsequent stages such as the evolution, stagnation, and revival of the New Yangge Opera after 1945. Relevant extended discussions will be gradually carried out in follow-up research.

## 2. Methodology

This study adopts a combined research method of historical documentary analysis and comparative analysis, taking the formal transformation of the New Yangge Opera from 1943 to 1945 as its research object.

### 2.1. Sources of Documents and Archival Materials

The primary archives and documentary materials for this study come from two sources: physical archival institutions and electronic literature databases.

### 2.1.1. Physical Collections and Archival Institutions

The author collected and organized original documents and script materials from the following institutions:

- i. Rare Book Reading Room of the National Library of China
- ii. Confidential Reading Room of the Library of Shenyang Conservatory of Music
- iii. Office of the Yan'an Literature and Art Memorial Hall
- iv. Memorial Hall of the Former Site of the Yan'an Lu Xun Academy of Arts
- v. Archives of the Northern Shaanxi Folk Song Museum
- vi. Documentation Office of the *Minzhong* Opera Troupe, Baota District, Yan'an, Shaanxi Province

The relevant scripts and documents held by the above institutions are preserved in the form of rare books, microfilms, photographs, copies, and photocopies. During the research process, the author fully transcribed all relevant archival information and conducted a comprehensive analysis in conjunction with historical data and research materials from literary and art histories, drama histories, school histories, folk art records, newspapers, and collected works.

### 2.1.2. Electronic Literature Databases

Electronic literature retrieval was carried out using three core databases: CNKI, Wanfang Data, and CQVIP. Search keywords included: New Yangge Opera, traditional Yangge, formal transformation, performance form, performance practice, and comparison between old and new Yangge.

## 2.2. Document Screening and Analytical Methods

This study only includes original archives, contemporary newspapers, authoritative historical document compilations, and monographic research results directly related to the original form of traditional northern Shaanxi Yangge, the formal transformation of the New Yangge Opera, performance practice, and performance settings. General discussions lacking historical evidence and duplicate materials were excluded.

Taking formal transformation as the core thread, the study conducts a comparative analysis around six dimensions: thematic content, narrative structure, character setting, performance form, performance venue, and functional orientation. Each dimension is organized and summarized following the path of "traditional form, New Yangge Opera transformation, and characteristic differences".

## 2.3. Research Ethics and Quality Control

This study strictly adheres to academic norms. All archival materials are marked with their holding institutions and document forms, and cited content is based on transcribed original archives. Where there are discrepancies in historical records, the original rare books, microfilms, and contemporary newspapers from each repository are taken as the final basis, and cross-verification of historical materials is adopted to ensure historical accuracy.

This study only discusses the wartime period from 1943 to 1945 and does not involve subsequent developments. This research received no relevant funding support, and there are no conflicts of interest.

### 3. Literature Review

#### 3.1. Background and Wartime Context of the Emergence of the New Yangge Opera

In the 1940s, the illiteracy rate in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region was high, making it difficult for written propaganda and classroom education to reach the general public. Folk art, suitable for oral communication and live performance, became an important carrier for information transmission and ideological guidance. Li Weihai (1986) recorded the early cultural backwardness in northern Shaanxi in his memoir *Recollections and Research*: in the early days of base-area construction, the local literacy rate was extremely low. Despite continuous literacy campaigns launched by the border-region government, overall cultural popularization proceeded slowly due to practical constraints such as wartime population mobility and the influx of refugees, and written propaganda was difficult to implement effectively (p. 566). Wang Shaoyu and Tang Yue (2022) further clarified in *Art Mobilization in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region* that folk art rooted in local language and customs possessed irreplaceable communication advantages in a society with low literacy (p. 39).

After the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art, the direction of literary and artistic work shifted toward a practice-oriented approach close to workers, peasants, and soldiers. Mao Zedong (1942) put forward the fundamental principle of "literature and art serving the workers, peasants, and soldiers" in *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art*, promoting the integration of literary creation with public life. Against this background, the New Yangge Opera, rooted in northern Shaanxi folk art, gradually took shape and became an important literary and artistic form covering all anti-Japanese base areas between 1943 and 1945. Both Qu Quanhai (2014) in *A History of the New Yangge Opera in China* and Liu Ying (2023) in *A Study on the Creation of Yan'an New Yangge Opera* pointed out that the emergence and popularization of the New Yangge Opera were typical manifestations of the shift of Yan'an literary and artistic policies to the mass line (pp. 71, 89).

#### 3.2. Research on the Original Form of Traditional Northern Shaanxi Yangge

Traditional Yangge is a folk song-and-dance style that has long been prevalent in northern Shaanxi, with festival gatherings and village performances as its main scenarios.

As noted in Qu Quanhai (2014)'s *A History of the New Yangge Opera in China*, traditional Yangge is characterized by singing, dancing, banter, and impromptu performance; it has a loose structure and focuses on folk entertainment and daily pastimes (p. 71). Wang Shaoyu's (2004) investigation of Yan'an literary and artistic history in *A History of Yan'an Literature and Art* shows that traditional Yangge was mostly attached to folk occasions such as temple fairs and festivals, serving mainly for self-entertainment and social interaction without a stable dramatic structure or clear educational function (p. 125).

Studies in this section have clearly presented the folk attributes and existing forms of traditional Yangge, laying a foundation for the comparison between old and new Yangge.

### **3.3. Research on the Creation, Performance, and Functions of the New Yangge Opera**

During its formation, the New Yangge Opera extensively borrowed and adapted folk music and performance forms. An Bo (1943, 1963) argued in *Musical Issues of the New Yangge Opera* that the New Yangge Opera widely adopted northern Shaanxi folk tunes, featured plain language and concise structure, and was thus accessible to the public (p. 42). Tong Zhongliang (2004) pointed out in *Chinese Traditional Musicology* that the New Yangge Opera emphasized regularity and transmissibility in the arrangement of tunes, sentences, and rhythmic patterns, enhancing the clarity and appeal of performances (p. 168).

Regarding performance and dissemination, Li Bo (1985), based on recollections of contemporary participants, noted that the New Yangge Opera was mostly performed in public squares, which were open, low-threshold venues that could attract large crowds (p. 112). Wang Shaoyu (1994) further proposed in *Studies on Chinese Folk Literature and Art* that the simple movements and straightforward language of the New Yangge Opera made it easy for ordinary people to imitate and sing, granting it strong popularization (p. 57).

In terms of social function, existing studies generally agree that the New Yangge Opera fulfilled the roles of wartime propaganda, production mobilization, and ideological education. Based on newspapers and archives from the Yan'an period, Cao Ziqing (1985) in *Compilation of Materials on the Yan'an Literature and Art Movement* and Su Zuqian and Li Li (2011) in *Historical Materials of the Yan'an Yangge Opera Movement* demonstrated that the New Yangge Opera conveyed ideas of self-help through production and unity against the enemy through vivid performances, exerting a direct influence on the people in the base areas (pp. 243, 156).

### **3.4. Limitations of Existing Research and the Positioning of This Study**

Although existing literature has adequately discussed the historical background, musical sources, performance forms, and social functions of the New Yangge Opera, obvious limitations remain overall.

Most studies focus on the interpretation of macro historical significance and ideological value, and few systematically and specifically analyze formal transformation from a comparative perspective between traditional Yangge and the New Yangge Opera.

Existing research offers insufficient systematic examination of such dimensions as thematic content, narrative structure, character setting, performance form, performance venue, and functional orientation. It fails to clearly reveal how the New Yangge Opera gradually evolved from folk-based, improvised folk art into standardized and popularized stage practice.

Based on existing research and supported by historical documents and original archives, this study conducts a comparative analysis of the above dimensions to remedy weaknesses in the research on formal transformation.

#### **4. Original Form of Traditional Yangge**

Traditional Yangge in northern Shaanxi is a folk performance style naturally formed through long-term rural life. Its mode of existence and presentation bear distinct spontaneous folk characteristics. Such performances are attached to local folk scenarios, characterized by collective participation and impromptu presentation. They are flexible in form and have no fixed creation or performance norms.

From the perspective of performance composition, traditional Yangge mainly expresses itself through alternating songs and dances and on-site banter. The performance process is not restricted by fixed scripts. The content mostly centers on rural life and festival atmosphere, aiming to create entertainment effects without undertaking thematic expression or ideological transmission (Qu, 2014, p. 71).

From the perspective of overall structure, traditional Yangge lacks a stable dramatic framework and narrative thread. Performances are held at folk events such as temple fairs and festivals, mainly for public self-entertainment and group interaction, without clear educational or propaganda functions (Wang, 2004, p. 125).

##### **4.1. Thematic Content and Scope of Materials**

The performance content of traditional Yangge is close to rural life and local customs. Materials are mostly drawn from farming work, festival celebrations, neighborhood games, and folk banter. The performance does not preset a unified theme or convey specific ideological propositions. The content is animated, lively, and close to daily life. Lyrics and movements originate from local oral traditions and life experience, without involving public issues, policy propaganda, or value guidance, presenting a simple and natural folk taste.

##### **4.2. Performance Structure and Presentation**

Traditional Yangge does not have a complete dramatic structure or narrative thread. Performances are dominated by alternating songs and dances and formation changes, with no fixed plot development or character relationship design. The performance process is flexibly adjusted according to the on-site atmosphere, highly impromptu, variable in length, and has no unified opening, development, or closing routines. Music accompaniment uses folk suona, gongs, and drums melodies, which are not bound to the plot, mainly for setting off the atmosphere, and does not undertake narrative functions.

##### **4.3. Character Settings and Performance Division**

The roles of traditional Yangge come from the folk Shehuo system. Common divisions include Yangge leader, musicians, and bantering roles. Roles are designed to liven up the on-site atmosphere and do not serve to shape characters, express positions, or convey ideas. The images are rustic and entertaining, mostly using exaggerated movements and teasing interactions to mobilize emotions, without symbolic meaning or typical guidance.

Figure 1: Documentary of traditional Yangge performance in Yan'an area (from the documentary photography series *Northern Shaanxi Yangge, Yan'an*)



#### 4.4. Performance Space and Organizational Form

Traditional Yangge is mainly performed in open spaces such as village squares, street open areas, temple fairs, and markets. Performances do not require stages, sets, or professional props. The organization is flexible and spontaneously assembled by villagers. Viewing is free and open; audiences can join or leave at any time, showing the characteristics of mobility, randomness, and non-professionalism.

Figure 2: Traditional northern Shaanxi Yangge performance of Beicun Brigade, Taixian Commune, Huangling County, Yan'an City, Shaanxi Province, February 18, 1981. Private photography



#### 4.5. Social Function and Existential Significance

The core functions of traditional Yangge are folk entertainment and community connection. Performances are mostly used for festival celebrations, prayer rituals, and neighborhood gatherings to meet people's needs for relaxation, communication, and

community cohesion. Its value is limited to folk cultural inheritance and local life scenarios, without involving social mobilization, ideological dissemination, or public education, and has no direct connection with wartime propaganda and social construction.

## 5. Formal Transformation of the New Yangge Opera

Between 1943 and 1945, the New Yangge Opera in Yan'an completed a systematic transformation from folk performance to stage art on the basis of inheriting folk music elements such as northern Shaanxi folk Yangge tunes, Huagu tunes, and Xintianyou. This transformation was not a simple modification of traditional forms, but a systematic reconstruction around six dimensions: thematic content, narrative structure, character setting, performance form, performance space, and social function, centering on specific expression needs. A comparative analysis of each dimension is presented below.

### 5.1, Thematic Content

The thematic content of the New Yangge Opera underwent a fundamental shift, no longer limited to rural daily life and folk banter, but closely focused on core issues such as wartime rent and interest reduction, army recruitment and frontline support, women's liberation, and production construction. According to a 1945 statistical report from the Yan'an Lu Xun Academy of Arts, more than 500 New Yangge Opera works were created in various base areas between 1943 and 1945, among which works themed on production construction, supporting the army and giving preferential treatment to military families, and anti-Japanese mobilization accounted for more than 80% (Li, 1957, p. 41).

However, due to poor preservation of documents during the war years and the loss of materials in subsequent historical periods, most of the more than 500 works mentioned above no longer have complete scripts or performance records available. Within the scope of materials currently accessible to the author, only 72 surviving works with complete plots and clear themes have been sorted out. As shown in Table 1, the thematic classification of these 72 plays is as follows.

Table 1: Thematic Classification of Surviving New Yangge Opera Works (1943–1945)

Subject Category	Number of Plays	Percentage (%)
Mass Production Campaign	19	26.4
Military-Civilian Relations	11	15.3
Study and Reform	10	13.9
Resistance and Defence	14	19.4
Anti-Imperialism and Anti-Feudalism	18	25.0

Source: Compiled by the author based on archival materials from 1943–1945.

The fundamental driving force behind this shift came from the practical needs of the wartime base areas. With an illiteracy rate of over 80% in the border region, written propaganda had little effect. Only through the literary and artistic forms most familiar and acceptable to the masses could urgent policies such as self-help through production and army recruitment and frontline support be quickly conveyed. The New Yangge Opera's highly focused themes on labour and resistance were essentially a response to

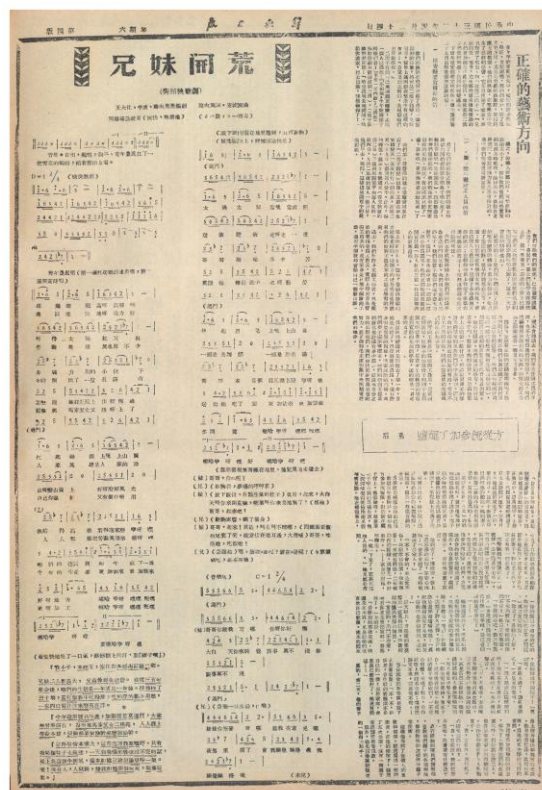
the practical problem of how to achieve effective mobilisation in a society with a high illiteracy rate.

### 5.2. Narrative Structure

Traditional Yangge had no fixed plot or narrative thread, and performances were mainly impromptu. In contrast, the New Yangge Opera established a clear dramatic structure, forming a complete narrative chain including introduction, development, climax, and conclusion. The performances, lyrics, and movements of each act served the advancement of the plot and were no longer adjusted arbitrarily according to the on-site atmosphere. Tong Zhongliang pointed out that the musical structure of the New Yangge Opera placed more emphasis on regularity and logic, and the changes and development of tunes were closely coordinated with the plot direction, enhancing the coherence and appeal of the narrative (Tong, 2004, p. 168). This structural transformation upgraded the New Yangge Opera from scattered song and dance performances to complete stage art works.

The standardisation of the narrative structure served the dual needs of replicability and communication efficiency. Wartime literature and art needed to cover multiple base areas in a short period, and impromptu folk performances could not guarantee uniform performance quality. The establishment of fixed scripts and complete structures freed the New Yangge Opera from the traditional model relying on the impromptu performance of individual artists, and turned it into a standardised programme that any troupe could perform after short-term rehearsal.

Figure 3: Original score and script of *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland*, published in *Jiefang Daily* on 24 April 1943



### 5.3. Character Setting

The roles of traditional Yangge aimed to liven up the on-site atmosphere, and their images were mostly bantering and exaggerated. The character setting of the New Yangge Opera, however, served thematic expression and formed a distinct logic of character shaping. Roles were endowed with clear identities, positions, and growth arcs, and were no longer mere entertainment symbols but typical images carrying value orientation. When creating *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland*, Wang Dahua, Li Bo, and Lu You demonstrated the transformation of labour concepts through the shaping of the brother and sister roles, reflecting the typicality and directionality of character shaping in the New Yangge Opera (Wang, Li, Lu, & An, 1943, p. 11). This character setting method endowed the characters in the New Yangge Opera with clear symbolic meaning and guidance.

The binary division of character types was designed to simplify cognition and strengthen the mobilisation effect. In the border region where the vast majority of the population was illiterate, complex psychological depictions were not only difficult to understand but would also distract the audience from the core information. Positive roles provided imitable models, and negative roles provided objects for criticism. Together, they constituted a concise and efficient value guidance mechanism.

Figure 4: Wang Dahua and Li Bo performing the Yangge opera *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland* in the square outside the South Gate of Yan'an, photographed by Wu Yinxian in 1943



### 5.4. Performance Form

The performance movements of traditional Yangge were based on folk styles, highly impromptu, and without unified norms. The New Yangge Opera, however, unified the arrangement of movements, formations, and rhythms, forming a repeatable and transmissible performance paradigm. Movements were no longer dominated by banter and exaggeration, but served character shaping and plot advancement, emphasising the balance between life orientation and stage appropriateness. Li Bo mentioned that actors from the Lu Xun Academy of Arts Work Troupe sorted out and refined the movements of folk Yangge to form performance movements suitable for stage presentation (Li, 1985, p.

112). This standardised performance form enabled the New Yangge Opera to be performed stably on different occasions and enhanced its communication effectiveness. The standardisation of performance form directly served the organisational goal of mass participation. The performers of the New Yangge Opera were not limited to professional literary and art workers; a large number of amateur actors from the army, factories, and rural areas also needed to perform on stage. Refining the complex and changeable folk Yangge movements that highly relied on individual skills into a set of simple and fixed basic steps and labour simulation movements essentially lowered the technical threshold for large-scale mass participation.

### 5.5. Performance Space

Traditional Yangge was mostly held in open places such as village squares and street open spaces, without fixed stages or scenery. The New Yangge Opera began to shift to fixed stages, theatres, and square stages. The transformation of performance space brought about the development of scenery, lighting, and props, and also changed the audience from random participants to orderly viewers. Wang Shaoyu pointed out that the shift of the New Yangge Opera's performance venues from street open spaces to square stages not only retained close interaction with the masses but also had certain stage presentation conditions (Wang, 1994, p. 57). This spatial transformation provided conditions for the standardised dissemination of the New Yangge Opera.

The shift from street temple fairs to public squares was not merely a physical change of venue. The square is a space for public gatherings and collective viewing. When thousands of audiences gathered in the square to watch a play about production or resistance together and sang in unison at the end, the performance itself was no longer mere entertainment but a highly ritualistic collective mobilisation. The audience confirmed each other's existence in collective viewing and completed identity recognition in unison singing.

Figure 5: Restoration of the performance scene of the New Yangge Opera *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland*, photographed by the author at the Yan'an Literature and Art Memorial Hall, 21 October 2025



## 5.6. Social Function

The core function of traditional Yangge was folk entertainment and community connection, without involving public issues. The New Yangge Opera, however, was endowed with clear social functions and became an important carrier for transmitting policies, mobilising the masses, and building consensus. Zhang Geng pointed out: "Wherever the Yangge team goes, policies are transmitted there" (Zhang, 1944, p. 147). Studies by Cao Ziqing, Su Zuqian, and Li Li also showed that the New Yangge Opera played an important mobilisation role in work such as rent and interest reduction, army recruitment, and frontline support (Cao, 1985, p. 243; Su & Li, 2011, p. 156).

The reconstruction of the social function of the New Yangge Opera was essentially a fundamental change in the nature of literature and art—from folk self-entertainment to public mobilisation. Traditional Yangge was satisfied with a lively occasion, and the audience dispersed after watching. The New Yangge Opera, however, required that after the performance, the audience could translate the concepts in the play into practical actions—producing more, supporting the frontline more, and responding to calls more. This ability to transform from viewing to action is precisely the fundamental feature that distinguishes wartime literary and art mobilisation from literature and art in peacetime. The formal transformation in the above six dimensions ultimately serves the realisation of this functional goal.

## 6. Results and Discussion

### 6.1. Research Findings

Through a systematic comparative analysis of traditional northern Shaanxi Yangge and the New Yangge Opera, this study draws the following core findings. Between 1943 and 1945, the New Yangge Opera completed an integral formal transformation, embodied centrally in structural changes across six dimensions:

First, the thematic content shifted from rural entertainment and folk banter to clear contemporary issues such as production construction, supporting the army and frontline, women's liberation, and anti-Japanese mobilisation, presenting highly centralised thematic characteristics.

Second, the narrative structure transformed from impromptu, loose folk performances without fixed threads into a complete dramatic narrative framework with a coherent structure of introduction, development, climax, and conclusion, with standardised and unified performance processes.

Third, the character setting changed from folk-style, bantering atmosphere symbols into character images with typical significance and value orientation, undertaking demonstration and guidance functions.

Fourth, the performance form evolved from spontaneous, unstandardised folk rhythms into a concise and standardised stage performance system that is easy to learn and disseminate.

Fifth, the performance space shifted from random and mobile venues such as village streets, temple fairs, and markets to open and concentrated square performance spaces convenient for mass gatherings.

Sixth, the social function transformed from folk self-entertainment and community interaction into public-level ideological transmission, policy propaganda, and social mobilisation.

The above transformations jointly promoted the New Yangge Opera from a regional folk activity into a stage art form with stable paradigms, clear themes, and public value.

## 6.2. Discussion

The formal transformation of the New Yangge Opera is essentially a systematic reconstruction of folk art in a specific historical context. It is not a negation or replacement of traditional Yangge, but a standardised upgrade at the levels of theme, structure, and function on the premise of retaining the cultural affinity and mass base of folk culture. Compared with the existence form of traditional Yangge centred on spontaneity, entertainment, and regionality, the New Yangge Opera places more emphasis on the purposefulness of expression, the integrity of narrative, and the popularity of dissemination, so as to adapt to the needs of large-scale, wide-coverage, and strongly oriented public expression.

From the internal logic of literary and artistic development, the New Yangge Opera provides a feasible path for the modern transformation of folk art: taking local cultural forms as the foundation and the needs of the times as the guide, realising the creative transformation of traditional resources through thematic focus, structural standardisation, and functional upgrading. This process not only maintains closeness to the masses but also enhances the organisation and effectiveness of literary and artistic expression, providing a clear analytical perspective for understanding the morphological evolution of literature and art in the base areas in the 1940s.

From a theoretical perspective, the systematic sorting of the six dimensions of formal transformation in this study reveals the internal mechanism for folk art to realise functional reconstruction in the wartime context. The success of the New Yangge Opera is not an artistic innovation in the sense of an individual case, but confirms a transformation path with universal reference significance: when folk art needs to undertake the function of public mobilisation, its formal transformation will inevitably revolve around thematic focus, narrative standardisation, character typification, performance standardisation, spatial publicisation, and functional reconstruction. This analytical framework is not only applicable to understanding the New Yangge Opera but also provides referenceable analytical dimensions for investigating the transformation of other folk art forms under similar historical conditions.

In addition, the comparative analysis method of this study places the original form and transformed form of folk art in the same analytical framework, comparing their differences in content, structure, character, performance, space, and function item by item, providing an operable methodological path for research on the modern transformation of folk art. The effectiveness of this method lies in: laying a factual foundation for further questioning the causes of changes by systematically describing the process of change.

## 7. Future Research Directions

Based on the research on the formal transformation of the New Yangge Opera in this paper, future research can be further expanded and deepened from the following three directions:

First, carry out multi-play comparative research. This paper takes the overall formal transformation as the core analytical object. In the future, representative works such as *Brother and Sister Reclaiming Wasteland*, *Husband and Wife Learn to Read*, and *Twelve Sickles* can be selected for case and comparative analysis to present the differences and commonalities of different plays in thematic expression, structural setting, and performance form in more detail.

Second, expand the in-depth excavation of documents and archives. This paper relies on 72 existing scripts for thematic classification and formal analysis. In the future, more original performance records, creation manuscripts, media reviews, and oral historical materials can be combined to restore the complete practice process of the New Yangge Opera from creation, rehearsal to tour, and enrich the historical details of transformation research.

Third, carry out cross-regional and cross-period comparisons. This paper focuses on the form of the New Yangge Opera in Yan'an and the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region from 1943 to 1945. In the future, the research scope can be extended to other anti-Japanese base areas and compared with the development and evolution of Yangge Opera after 1949 to present the long-term development context of this literary and artistic form more completely.

### 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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