

Artistic Characteristics of the Songs of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army and Contemporary Cultural Communication

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Abstract: General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized the need to continuously enhance the nation's cultural soft power and the global influence of Chinese culture, urging more proactive efforts to disseminate traditional Chinese culture and showcase the image of China. Cultural soft power is an important metric for evaluating the competitiveness of a region, and music is one of the key ways to enhance cultural soft power. This paper will examine the artistic characteristics of the songs of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army and explore their cultural dissemination in contemporary society.

Keywords: Songs of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army, cultural communication, artistic characteristics, cultural soft power.

1. Introduction

Between 1931 and 1945, Japanese imperialism launched the September 18th Incident, plunging the people of Northeast China into the depths of war. Against this backdrop, a group of songs emerged that called for unity in resisting Japan and inspired fighting spirit in the war. These songs, rich in subject matter and flexible in style, possess artistic power that fosters the red spirit and boosts morale. The songs of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army are not only historical, but also contemporary [1]. In the new era, these red classics play a significant role in shaping the spiritual strength of the Chinese people, enhancing cultural confidence, and cultivating patriotic sentiment. This paper will focus on the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army, with the aim of promoting the singing and inheritance of these artistic classics.

The birth of thought cannot be separated from the historical conditions that serve as its foundation. The creation of the songs of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army similarly cannot be detached from the specific historical conditions and environment. These songs, as red artistic works created by the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army and the people of Northeast China from 1931 to 1945, were produced against the backdrop of the Japanese imperialist invasion, with the theme of the War of Resistance Against Japan. On September 18, 1931, the outbreak of the "September 18th Incident" triggered an uprising by the Northeast military and civilians. This war had unique characteristics, including frequent battles and high mobility, making it difficult to establish stable and long-term bases. Day and night, the soldiers faced the enemy's brutal invasion and the hardships of war, enduring immense physical and mental suffering and unprecedented tests. The soldiers needed

spiritual nourishment to lift their morale and solidify their determination to win. Due to the creative environment and the audience of the songs, a series of Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army songs emerged, characterized by catchy, simple, and straightforward lyrics with explosive power, combined with flowing, beautiful, and highly evocative melodies infused with the strong musical culture of Northeast China. These red artistic works not only showcase the artistic nature of music but also serve as a testament to the War of Resistance Against Japan. They became a fast and effective means of transmitting the Party's policies, inspiring the spirit of resistance, and strengthening patriotic faith.

2. The Study of the Musical Essence of Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army Songs

The songs of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army not only reflect the indomitable national spirit of the people and soldiers of Northeast China during the 14 years of the War of Resistance Against Japan but also showcase the artistic phenomena of this specific period. The emergence of Northeast red songs coincided with a historical phase in which China's professional music composition was influenced by Western musical culture. As a result, these songs possess a rich variety of genres and flexible, diverse creative styles.

2.1. Thematic Characteristics of Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army Songs

The themes of the songs of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army are rich and varied. These songs are witnesses to the entire Northeast Anti-Japanese War, with over 400 songs created and sung on the battlefield during this period. They present a panoramic view of the Northeast Anti-Japanese War. Therefore, the themes of these songs are closely related to the course of the Northeast Anti-Japanese struggle. After the September 18th Incident, in the face of the "non-resistance" order issued by the Nanjing government, the devastated people of Northeast China and the remaining troops of the Northeast Army spontaneously formed anti-Japanese volunteer forces to resist the invasion of Japanese troops [1]. During this period, works emerged that exposed the crimes of the Japanese army and depicted the heroic efforts of soldiers and civilians in fighting the enemy. Examples include *Northeast National Salvation Army Anthem*, *Manchuria's Suffering*, and *Anti-Japanese Grand Alliance*. After 1932, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China proposed the policy of the Party leading the anti-Japanese armed struggle. In 1936, the highest military leadership body of the Northeast Anti-Japanese movement, the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army, was formally established. The establishment of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army marked the climax of the Northeast's anti-Japanese struggle. During this period, a batch of songs emerged, calling for patriotism and promoting the idea of a united anti-Japanese front. Examples include *Hundred Thousand Troops*, *Hundred Thousand Men*, *We Must Struggle*, and *United to Fight Japan* [1]. In 1937, after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army faced brutal encirclement by the Japanese army, and their living and fighting conditions became even more difficult. This period saw the emergence of songs designed to boost morale, stabilize the army, and inspire soldiers' fighting spirit. An example is the *Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army First Route Army Anthem*. From 1938 to 1940, following the death of Yang Jingyu and the intensified Japanese "suppression" during the Battle of Chagou, the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army songs entered a period of decline as the anti-Japanese struggle in the Northeast reached a low ebb. However, some songs were still produced and spread, often eulogizing anti-Japanese heroes and expressing the sorrow and longing for these wartime heroes. Examples include *In Memory of Feng Zhigang*, *Martyrs' Memorial Anthem*, and *Never Forget Hero Yang Jingyu*. In summary, the thematic content of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army's red songs is diverse, covering events and figures, narrating battles, and expressing emotions. These artistic works became the first national anti-Japanese salvation music. They served as a new form of resistance against the Japanese invasion and became

a powerful tool for rallying the people of Northeast China and the Anti-Japanese United Army, symbolizing their courage, unity, and unyielding spirit in the fight against the enemy.

2.2. The Creative Characteristics of Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army Songs

Due to the historical conditions and environment at the time, the military lacked professional musicians, and most of the members of the Anti-Japanese United Army had not received formal cultural education. As a result, most of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army songs were created by adapting familiar folk songs with newly written lyrics, while a small number were original compositions. The melodies were mostly derived from well-known folk tunes, which gave these songs a strong regional character. For example, the melody of *Question and Answer Song* and *Anti-Japanese Salvation Children's Song* both come from folk music. The former adopts the melody of the suona tune *Man Jiang Hong*, while the latter is based on the two-man tune *Wen Hai Hai*. Other folk tunes, such as *Dui Hua*, *Washing Clothes Song*, *Jasmine Flower*, *Every Line Double*, and *Sacrificial Chant*, also served as sources for the melodies of Anti-Japanese United Army songs [1]. In addition to folk songs as the source of melodies, some works were created by adding lyrics to famous domestic tunes. For example, *Campsite Anthem* was created by adding lyrics to the ancient tune *Falling Flowers*, and *Four Seasons Guerrilla* was based on the melody of the popular classroom song *Geography and History of Eighteen Provinces*. Furthermore, due to the period in which these songs were created—during the early stages of cultural exchange between Western and Chinese music—some songs were composed by adding lyrics to foreign melodies. For instance, *Sworn to Never Be a Slave* and *Unite the Chinese Nation* were based on famous Soviet and Korean tunes. In addition to songs created by adapting existing melodies, there were also songs with original lyrics and music created by the Chinese themselves. Although these songs were fewer in number, they acted as an unwavering beacon of hope during the war, gathering the strength of the entire army and offering hope to the nation. For example, *March to the Frontlines of the Anti-Japanese War* was written by Yang Jingyu, with the melody played on the harmonica by Song Tieyan. *Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army First Route Army Anthem* was composed by Yang Jingyu, with lyrics by Han Renhe [2]. Overall, the songs of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army possess both national and artistic characteristics in terms of musical composition. Although the works are brief, the strength they provide to the people is boundless.

3. The Role of Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army Songs in Enhancing the Cultural Literacy of the Northeast Region

3.1. The Concept and Components of Northeast Cultural Soft Power

In recent years, revitalizing the Northeast has been a hot topic, but advancing this revitalization has proven difficult. General Secretary Xi Jinping has proposed the goal of “comprehensive and all-round revitalization” of the Northeast. In addition to enhancing the Northeast’s “hard power,” efforts must also focus on promoting its “soft power.” During the 17th collective study session of the Politburo of the Central Committee on October 28, 2024, General Secretary Xi emphasized the strategic objective of building a culturally strong nation by 2035, and the continuous development of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. He pointed out, “We must elevate the culture of the Chinese nation, protecting and passing on the treasures of Chinese civilization that have endured the vicissitudes of time.” This is also the central theme of this article.

The term “soft power” was first introduced by American scholar Joseph Nye in 1990. It refers to the attractiveness of culture and ideology or the ability to control political agendas. Among these, “cultural soft power” occupies a central position. It refers to the impact of culture on national development, which is considered to be a two-way influence: it serves as an internal driving force

and cohesion for national traditional culture and ideological concepts, and generates external attraction and penetration. Music is an important aspect of cultural soft power. It refers to the cultural resources of music, both traditional and innovatively developed, that help promote the enhancement of regional cultural soft power.

3.2. Embodiment of the Role of Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army Songs in Enhancing Cultural Literacy in the Northeast Region

3.2.1. Preserving Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army Culture from a New Perspective

The songs of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army are not simply artistic pieces but also a panoramic representation of the 14 years of the Anti-Japanese United Army's struggle. These songs bear the hardships of the soldiers' lives during the resistance and the heroic sacrifices of revolutionary figures. They serve as an effective means of recording and preserving the cultural history of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army. Over the course of the 14-year war, many soldiers perished, and the nature of the battles made it difficult to maintain stable records. Most of the relevant military documents were destroyed, and what remains are primarily memoirs of those involved and orally transmitted historical records, with many originating from Japanese and puppet regime archives. Thus, the reliability of this information is often questioned. To further supplement and verify these historical records, we turn to the "living fossils" of Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army history—its songs. A large portion of the songs provide a realistic portrayal of the actual conditions of the war, including military tasks, politics, daily life, and the relationships between soldiers and civilians, offering a solid foundation for restoring the historical facts of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army. For example, one of the most famous songs of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army, *Campsite Anthem*, written by Li Zhaolin, Yu Tianfang, and Chen Lei to the ancient melody *Falling Flowers*, consists of four parts that describe the soldiers' camping life before and after deployment, as well as throughout the year, reflecting the difficult conditions of the Anti-Japanese United Army during the war. Another piece, *The Ten Major Principles Anthem*, uses simple and clear language to highlight the strict military discipline and clear political direction of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army. This work served as an indispensable educational tool for strengthening the military and improving both the political and military qualities of the army at the time.

3.2.2. Nourishing the Spirit of Contemporary People

"Educational entertainment" and "There is no better way to change customs and habits than through music" emphasize the subtle and transformative influence of music on people's hearts and minds. "Music expresses what cannot be said and what must remain silent." Despite the simple development of melodies, concise lyrics, and straightforward musical structures in the songs of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army, their value and significance lie not only in the music itself but, more importantly, in the ideals and beliefs they convey. These songs embody unwavering commitment to ideals; the heroic spirit of "swearing never to be a slave of a defeated nation"; the selfless spirit of sacrifice, with people willing to march forward, follow one another, and face death fearlessly; the internationalist spirit of solidarity and shared struggles; and the steadfast, never-give-up belief in fighting for a cause. This outstanding revolutionary culture continues the spirit of the "Red Boat," and represents a deeper embodiment of the Yan'an spirit and the Xibaipo spirit. It also fuels the unrelenting momentum of the Chinese nation's march forward with confidence and strength. As a form of artistic work that transmits red revolutionary spirit, the songs of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army carry the ideals, beliefs, and spiritual strength of martyrs like Yang Jingyu and Zhou Baozhong, giving meaning and faith to the lives of contemporary people. Therefore, deeply exploring and learning these songs, and experiencing the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army's cultural spirit

through their unique artistic expression, provides abundant nourishment for the spiritual lives and values of today's people.

3.2.3. Laying a Solid Foundation for Strengthening National Cultural Confidence

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out, "Cultural confidence is a more fundamental, more widespread, and deeper form of confidence. It is a more basic, profound, and enduring power. Firm cultural confidence is a major issue related to the rise and fall of the nation, cultural security, and the independence of the national spirit." Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army songs are an important artistic form of Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army culture. Their creation flows with the bloodline of traditional Chinese culture, draws from the gene of Chinese revolutionary culture, and accumulates the essence of advanced socialist culture, making them the cornerstone of national cultural confidence [3]. Rooted in the 14 years of the arduous struggle of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army, these songs are based on melodies from Chinese folk tunes, both ancient and modern, such as *Jasmine Flower*, *Wen Hai Hai*, and *Sacrificial Chant*, as well as classic domestic and international songs like *Falling Flowers*, the Soviet song *Bukhvani Cavalry*, and the Korean song *Final Battle*. Therefore, in-depth exploration of Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army songs today contributes to the inheritance of China's excellent traditional culture and revolutionary culture. By promoting the patriotic spirit of the Anti-Japanese United Army soldiers and their firm ideals, beliefs, and moral strength, these songs help people understand and appreciate the powerful spirit embedded in Chinese traditional music culture. This, in turn, drives the development of Northeast cultural soft power and lays a solid foundation for enhancing national pride and cultural confidence [4].

4. The Inheritance of Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army Songs

4.1. Enhancing Awareness of Protecting and Inheriting Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army Songs

In order to deeply inherit Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army culture, the first step is to raise national awareness, enabling citizens to fully recognize the significance of Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army culture, spirit, and historical value. This understanding will then help them realize the necessity of Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army songs in preserving the culture. A complete cycle should be formed, from the masses to artists, and from local governments to the national government. The government plays an essential role in protecting and inheriting Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army songs, conducting in-depth research on the culture from multiple perspectives, and collecting information on the songs in all aspects to eventually form a comprehensive archive. Cultural workers should then utilize their influence to deeply integrate these songs into society, fully promoting the Anti-Japanese United Army spirit and creating a nationwide atmosphere where people sing these revolutionary songs. This multi-subject approach will ultimately protect and pass down the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army songs.

4.2. Integrating Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army Songs into Public Education

"Public education," also known as "national education," refers to the school education provided by the state to its citizens. Public education is the fundamental means of cultural transmission. Young people are the future of the nation and the hope of the Chinese people, which is why it is crucial to focus on cultivating their revolutionary spirit. The effective channel of public education should be used to integrate Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army songs into the school curriculum. In primary and secondary education, Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army culture can be embedded into music and ideological courses; in higher education, practical activities can be used to guide students to visit

relevant Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army cultural and art museums, allowing them to personally experience the history and culture of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army. This will enable young people to deeply understand the cultural, spiritual, and historical value of Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army songs and ensure the continuity of this legacy.

4.3. Promoting the Media Dissemination of Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army Songs

In today's digital and online age, modern resources must be fully utilized, and the media is an important tool for cultural dissemination. It is essential to use diversified forms to comprehensively spread Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army songs. First, traditional media outlets, such as radio broadcasts, television, and newspapers, should be used to introduce the background, cultural significance, and spiritual content of these songs, making their promotion a regular and continuous effort. Second, emerging media platforms should be leveraged, utilizing platforms with high public participation such as TikTok and Kuaishou, learning how to produce short videos, create engaging content, and develop interactive platforms. These strategies will cater to different age groups and audiences at various levels. Comprehensive efforts should be made to enhance public awareness of Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army songs, ultimately integrating them into the daily lives of the people. This will achieve true protection and inheritance of these songs.

5. Conclusion

Cultural export is one of the most crucial aspects of a nation's soft power. Effective cultural export serves as a booster for enhancing a country's soft power [5]. Music is a vital pathway for cultural export, transcending national boundaries. Music is a universal language, the only language capable of directly reaching the soul. Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army songs play a key role in enhancing the soft power of Northeast culture, and similarly, Chinese music plays a critical role in strengthening the nation's soft power! The rise of national soft power is rooted in a deep, intrinsic confidence in China. I believe that the overflow of China's cultural soft power will be unstoppable!

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