Music and Politics: Chinese Songs of Resistance against Japan Based on the 5W Model of Communication

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Abstract

A series of military conflicts between China and Japan broke out from 1931 to 1945, which are most commonly known in China as Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. Against this backdrop, a large number of songs emerged and were widely sung for the purpose of national salvation. Drawing on the analysis framework of the 5W Model of Communication proposed by Harold D. Lasswell, this article explores the communication process of Chinese war songs during the Fourteen-Year War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. It also compares the changes that the communication of Chinese songs of resistance against Japan undergone in the aspects of communicators, themes, channels and audiences during two periods of 1931-1937 and 1937-1945. This article argues that the wartime communication of Chinese songs of resistance against Japan should not only be regarded as a purely artistic act of singing, but also as a political tool to mobilize various sectors of Chinese society to participate in the War of Resistance against Japan and win the sympathy and support of the international community.

Keywords

Songs of resistance against Japan, 5W model of communication, War of Resistance against Japan, Kuomintang, Communist Party of China, music, politics

1. Introduction

Chinese songs of resistance against Japan are the mark of Chinese nation’s Century of Humiliation between 1840 and 1949. As early as the late 1910s, the Christian warlord Feng Yuxiang wrote Song of National Humiliation (Guochi ge) against the Twenty-One Demands, which made by the Empire of Japan to the Republic of China (ROC) in 1915. During the Fourteen-Year Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression between 1931 and 1945, national salvation songs played a part in the Chinese national salvation movement. A large number of national salvation songs have emerged since the outbreak of the Manchurian Incident on 18 September 1931. In July 1937, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident broke out, marking the beginning of the Eight-Year China’s Full-Scale War of Resistance against Japan. National salvation songs became the mainstream of the development of Chinese art at that time. By the date when Japan declared its unconditional surrender in August 1945, at least 6,000 national salvation songs had been created (Wang et al., 2012).

The research literature of national salvation songs is relatively rich. However, few scholars have conducted research on national salvation songs from the perspective of political communication. With obvious characteristic of
political propaganda from their very beginning, the national salvation songs have a high degree of conformity with the 5W Model of Communication proposed by Harold D. Lasswell (1948-2013), the leading American political scientist and communications theorist. Therefore, this article attempts to analyse the communication process of Chinese national salvation songs between 1931 and 1945 based on the theoretical framework of the 5W Model of Communication, with an aim to enrich the academic research of national salvation songs.

The next section of this article mainly describes the analysis framework of Lasswell’s 5W Model of Communication. Then the communication process of national salvation songs is elaborated from five aspects, namely communicators, contents, channels, audiences and effects. The final section concludes transformations of the communication of national salvation songs experienced in different periods between 1931-1937 and 1937-1945.

2. The Songs of Resistance against Japan and the 5W Model of Communication


The wartime communication process of Chinese national salvation songs is consistent with the five basic elements of Lasswell’s Model of Communication. Details are given as follows:

“Who” refers to the communicator. The communicator can be individuals, a collective or a specialised agency. Communicator is responsible for the creation, collection, processing and transmission of information in the process of communication. The communicators of national salvation songs include not only the songwriters, but also the organizations, political parties and work units to which the songwriters belong, as well as China’s central and local government departments at different levels.

“Says What” refers to the content of the message to be disseminated. It is composed of a set of meaningful verbal or nonverbal symbols. The content of national salvation songs mean the different themes reflected in these songs.

“In Which Channel” refers to the media or material carrier through which information is disseminated. It can be interpersonal media, such as letter and telephone, or mass media, such as newspaper, radio and television. The communication channels of national salvation songs mainly consist of records, music scores, song collections, mass singing sessions, movies, radio stations and speakers, etc.

“To Whom” refers to the audience. Audience is the general term for reader, listener and viewer, etc. It is also the ultimate target and destination of communication. As far as the national salvation songs are concerned, their audiences include not only all the Chinese people, but also Japanese soldiers, overseas Chinese and international anti-fascist alliance.

“With What Effect” refers to the impact upon audiences in their cognitive, emotional and behavioral levels. It is an important yardstick for testing the success of communication activities. The communication effect of national salvation songs means to give full play to the assimilation, guiding, attractive and imitative roles of national salvation songs.

Both the wartime communication of Chinese national salvation songs and the proposal of the 5W Model of Communication share political nature. The former not only mainly reflects the international political struggle of aggression and anti-aggression between Japan and China, but also partially reflects the party struggle between the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Community Party of China (CMC). The propaganda has been regarded as an important tool for political struggle. In June 1941, the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the CPC issued the Outline of the Party’s Propaganda and Agitation Work (Dang de xuanchuan gudong gongzuo gangyao), which proposed a Chinese-style “general approach” to propaganda work (Chen, 2012). The wartime communication of national salvation songs became an indispensable part of CPC’s propaganda work. Lasswell’s academic career began with the study of propaganda. He (1927/1938) stated in the book, Propaganda Technique in World War, that the purpose of his research was to “evolve an explicit theory of how international war propaganda may be conducted with success” (p. 12). Later, Lasswell gradually shifted to communication studies and was considered as one of the four founders of the communication studies. He also advocated conducting interdisciplinary research, and put forward the famous Policy Sciences of Democracy (Zhang, 2012). He is a famous political scientist who specializes
in studying political issues from the perspective of psychology and sociology.

Lasswell’s 5W Model of Communication has been regarded as “one of the earliest and most influential communication models” by many researchers in the fields of communication and public relations (Shoemaker et al. 2004, 120). Therefore, Lasswell’s 5W Model of Communication still has guiding significance and application value for the research on national salvation songs after more than 70 years.

3. Communicators of the Chinese Songs of Resistance against Japan

The communicators of Chinese songs of resistance against Japan mainly include three groups, namely the songwriters; the organizations, political parties and work units to which the songwriters belong; and various political departments at different levels including both KMT and CPC governments.

The number of songwriters of national salvation songs experienced rapid growth during the War of Resistance against Japan in 1930s and 1940s. Only more than twenty composers and thirty lyricists participated in the creation of national salvation songs during Six-Year Regional War of Resistance against Japan between 1931 and 1937, while the number of songwriters during Eight-Year Full-Scale War between 1937 and 1945 had increased to 500, nearly ten times that of the previous period (Wen, 1995, 30). Patriotic bourgeois musicians and people without party affiliation first began to write national salvation songs between 1931 and 1933, and then became the leaders in the creation of national salvation songs. Representatives included Huang Zi, Xiao Youmei, Liu Xue’an and Chen Hong, etc. As Nie Er was introduced to the CPC by Tian Han in 1933, musicians under the leadership of the CPC gradually became the dominant players in national salvation songs creation between 1934 and 1937. Representatives in this period were Nie Er, Ren Guang, Jiang Dingxian and Zhang Hanhui, etc. During the Second KMT-CPC Cooperation period between 1937 and 1945, patriotic musicians and communist-led musicians jointly created the national salvation songs, but the latter dominated. Representative musicians included Xian Xinghai, Mai Xin, Zhang Shu, He Lüting and Lü Ji, etc.

The professional organizations to which the songwriters belong are not only their source of knowledge, but also the first organizers for the communication of national salvation songs. During the period between 1931 and 1937, Shanghai city was the centre for national salvation and national salvation songs creation. The Shanghai National Conservatory of Music was the only higher music school across China at that time. Many songwriters including Huang Zi engaged in teaching at this school, and He Lüting, Jiang Dingxian, Liu Xue’an graduated from this institution. A series of professional music organizations emerged for national salvation songs writing during this period, such as the Soviet Union Friendship Society established by Tian Han and Nie Er in January 1933, the Chinese New Music Research Society founded by Nie Er and Ren Guang in February 1933, and the Song and Lyric Writers Association in early 1936, etc (Wang et al., 2012). During the period between 1937 and 1945, Wuhan, Chongqing, Xi’an, Yan’an and various Anti-Japanese Base Areas led by the CPC became concentrated areas for national salvation songs creating.

During the Eight-Year Full-Scale Resistance of War against Japan, various political departments at all levels including KMT and CPC governments were not only the supporters of the creation of national salvation songs, but also the organizers of the communication of national salvation songs. There were five well-known political organizations in the KMT controlled areas. The first was the All-China Anti-Japanese Association of Musicians established in Chongqing city in December 1938, with Chen Lifu as its honorary president, and Sheng Jialun and He Lüting as directors. The second was the Third Section of the Political Department under direction of the Military Affairs Commission of the KMT Government, which was headed by Guo Moruo. The third and fourth organizations were the Culture Working Committee under the Political Department of the Military Affairs Commission and the Music Education Committee under the Ministry of Education of the ROC. The latter launched the Music Festival on April 5th every year, and set up a series of music organizations. The last one was the Office of the Eighth Route Army in Chongqing headed by Zhou Enlai. It has led several music organizations, such as the New Music Society and the Music Group of the Yucai School.

4. Communication Contents of the Chinese Songs of Resistance against Japan

During the Fourteen-Year Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, the communication of songs of resistance against Japan had an eternal theme, that is, strong nationalism and passionate patriotism. In addition to eternal theme, these war songs in different stages also showed other themes that reflected the characteristics of times.
There were two themes during the communication of national salvation songs between 1931 and 1937. On one hand, national salvation songs called on the Chinese sons and daughters to Go to the Front (Shang qianxian), Join the Army—For the Volunteer Army (Congjun-wei yiyongjun er zuo) and to Kick the Enemy Out of the Territory (Ba diren ganchu lingtu) with singing Song of Resistance against the Enemy (Kang di ge). On the other hand, the national salvation songs exposed and accused the crimes of Japanese aggressors, expressed Chinese people’s love for their hometown and relatives, and awoke national consciousness. Representative works included Exile Trilogy (Taowang sanbu qu), and The September 18th Incident (Jiu yi ba), etc.

The communication of songs of resistance against Japan was the most abundant during the period from 1937 to 1941. The eternal theme was singing Song of the Dawn (Liming qu) in the darkest time before dawn, believing in that The Final Victory Belongs to Us (Zaihou de shengli shi women de), calling for General Mobilization of the People (Laobaixing zong dongyuan) and Unite to the End (Tuanjie dao di) to defend the motherland. According to The Voice of National Salvation: Songs Compilation of Resistance against Japanese Aggression (Jiuwang zhi sheng: zhongguo kangri zhanzheng gequ huibian), more than 1,000 national salvation songs contained the lyrics of “nation”, “China” or “Chinese nation”, over 200 songs started with lyrics of “we”, “China”, “motherland”, “nation”, “people” or “everyone”, and 357 songs contained the lyrics of “unity” (Wang, 2008).

Chinese songs of resistance against Japan in this period showed five featured themes. The first theme was to reflect the major defense battles and praise the heroic resistance of the National Revolutionary Army on the front battlefield. Representative works included Defend Lugou Bridge (Baowei lugouqiao), Defend Our Pingjin (Baowei women de pingjin), Defend Great Shanghai (Baowei dashanghai), Defend Great Wuhan (Baowei da wuhan), etc.

The second theme was to reflect the revolutionary heroism spirit of the Chinese people who resisted the Japanese war bravely and would rather die than surrender. The masterpieces included the Song of Wounded Soldiers (Fushang jiangshi ge), Heroes (Yingxiong zan), Song of the Eight Hundred Warriors (Ge babai zhanshi), General Zhu De (Zhude jiangjun), and Hero Miao Kexiu of Resistance against Japanese Aggression (Kangri yingxiong miao ke xiu), etc. The next theme was to praise the wisdom and strength of the people displayed by various strategies and tactics, such as guerrilla warfare, and promote the fighting spirit of military-civilian unity. The masterpieces included Going Behind the Enemy (Dao diren houfang qu), Taiwan Volunteer Team Song (Taiwan yiyongdui dut ge), Anti-Sweeping Minor (Fan saodang xiaodiao), etc. The fourth theme was to expose traitors to the capitulation faction, stigmatize national scum, and promote Chinese nationalism. Representative works included Slaying Traitors (Dasha hanjuan), Down with Wang Jingwei (Dadao wang jingwei), and The Chinese Don’t Beat the Chinese (Zhongguo ren bu da zhongguo ren), etc. The last theme was to promote the policies of the Communist Party of China in Yan’an. The representative works were Ode to Yan’an (Yan’an song), Democratic Power Song (Minzhu zhengquan ge), and Election of Good People to Be Officials (Xuanju haoren lai zuoguan), etc.

The communication of Chinese songs of resistance against Japan had four themes during the period between 1942 and 1945. The first was to reflect the victory of the anti-fascist war by the great unity of the people of the world. Among them, Merchants before 1942 (1942 nian qianzou qu) and Unity is Strength (Tuanjie jushu liliang) were representative works. The second theme was to call on the workers and peasants to work hard to promote production to support the War of Resistance against Japan, and to praise the model workers who supported the War. Representative works included Nan Ni Wan (Nan ni wan), Military and Civilian Production (Junmin da shengchan), and Model CPC Member Shen Jinhong (Mofan dangyuan shen jinhong), etc. The third theme was to reflect the victory of the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, such as Victory (Jie bao), and Victory in Eight Years of War of Resistance (Kangzhan banian shengli dao). The fourth theme was to publicize the CPC’s policies, call on the people of all ethnic groups to unite, support the leadership of the CPC under the leadership of Chairman Mao Zedong. Representative works included We Follow the Communist Party (Women genzhe gongchandang), There Would Be No New China without the Communist Party (Meiyou gongchandang jiu meiyou xin zhongguo), and The East Is Red (Dongfang hong), etc (Zhang, 2019).

5. Communication Channels of the Chinese Songs of Resistance against Japan

The communication channels of Chinese songs of resistance against Japan mainly include choirs and mass singing groups, song scores and collections, records, movies, radio stations, speakers, newspapers and periodicals, etc.

There were three main channels for the communication of national salvation songs from 1931 to 1933, namely choirs, music scores and song collections. Music educator Chen Hong organized a choir in Guangzhou and taught songs to the masses weekly. Liu Xue’an, a student of the western-trained composer Huangzi, independently found-
ed the music periodical *War Song (Zhan ge)*, edited and published a song collection titled *Going to the Frontline (Qianxian qu)* in 1932. According to statistics, dozens of song collections were published in 1932, such as *Anthology of Famous Anti-Japanese and National Salvation Songs (Kangri jiuguo ming ge ji)*, *Anthology of Anti-Japanese and National Salvation Songs (Kangri jiuguo gequ ji)*, and *Patriotic Songs (Aiguo gequ)* (Wang et al., 2012).

The main communication channels of national salvation songs between 1934 and 1937 expanded to records, movies, radio broadcasts, speakers and mass singing teams. The private Wuchang Zhonghua University periodical *China Weekly (Zhonghua zhoukan)* published a large number of song scores. Liu Liangmo was the representative who published the song collections of resistance against Japan. His most popular publication, the pocketbook *Youth Song Collection (Qingnian gequ ji)*, had been printed in seven editions between 1935 and 1936, and sold over 10,000 copies (Lu, 2015). The Pathé Shanghai, first major record company of the ROC, produced many national salvation songs composed by Nie Er and others. Broadcasting became an important anti-Japanese propaganda channel in some big cities after the Xi’an Incident in 1936. The KMT Government explicitly ordered radio stations to broadcast songs of resistance against Japan every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Loudspeakers were usually used for communication of national salvation songs in public gatherings with the aim to attract more ordinary people to join. The most distinctive feature in this stage was that the small-scale choruses were replaced by the mass singing groups. After the December 9th Movement in 1935, national salvation song activities were carried out in major and medium-sized cities across the country. More than one hundred singing groups emerged within a short period of time in Shanghai along.

The communicators continued to use the above-mentioned channels to propagandize national salvation songs between 1938 and 1941. On one hand, the national salvation song creators continued to record discs, publish song collections, and actively use radio stations for publicity. On the other hand, the song communicators of resistance against Japan launched a large-scale mass singing movement and actively use periodicals and magazines for publicity. After Shanghai fell into the enemy, Wuhan city became the center of the national singing movement. The singing movement also had implications on overseas Chinese and people all over the world. After the fall of Wuhan, the anti-Japanese aggression and national salvation singing movement shifted to Yan’an and other base areas of anti-Japanese aggression.

6. Audiences of the Chinese Songs of Resistance against Japan

During the War of Resistance against Japan, the communication of high-quality songs of resistance against Japan was not subject to geographic restrictions in the areas occupied or controlled by Japan, KMT government or CPC party. Just as famous music educator Feng Zikai pointed out, “There are songs of resistance against Japan in places where there are people” (Feng, 1994, 344-353). The audiences of songs of resistance against Japan included not only all the Chinese people, but also international friends and even the Japanese fascist army.

Soldiers and militias, who have played a vital role in winning the War of Resistance against Japan, were the primary audiences of songs of resistance against Japan. The communication of these songs helped to boost the morale of Chinese various armed forces and realize the joint resistance of the military and civilians. Songs dedicated to the National Revolutionary Army under the control of KMT Government included *Song of the Infantry (Bubing ge)*, *Song of the Cavalry (Qibing ge)*, and *Song of the Air Force (Kongjun ge)*, etc. The Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army were two main anti-Japanese armed forces directly led by the Communist Party of China. Songs created for them included *March of The Eight Route Army (Balujun jinxing qu)*, *Join the Eighth Route Army (Canjia balujun)*, and *Military Anthem of the New Fourth Army (Xinsijun junge)*, etc. There were also many songs to inspire the militia and the People’s self-defense forces, such as *Militia March (Minbing jinxing qu)*, *Militia War Song (Minbing zhan ge)*, *Song of the Self-Defense Force (Ziwei dui ge)*.

People from various social classes including students, workers, peasants, women and children have played supportive role in the War of Resistance against Japan. They were effectively mobilized to join the army or support the War through the communication of songs of resistance against Japan. Representative works for students, workers and peasants included *Student March (Xuesheng jinxing qu)*, *Song of Military Workers (Jun gong zhi ge)*, and *Payting Public Grain Tax (Jiaogongliang)*, etc (Lü & Liu, 2015). The masterpieces calling for women to support the War included *Send Son to the Army, Say Goodbye to Mother Before Expedition (Chuzheng bie mu)*, *Women Also Fight against Japan (Furen ye kangzhan)*, and *Heroine (Jinguo yingxiong)*, etc. In addition, representative songs designed to inspire the enthusiasm of the Hui Muslims in the War of Resistance against Japan included the *Chinese
Japanese troops andtraitors to China were also considered as audiences of songs of resistance against Japan. The communication of these songs have played a role similar to psychological warfare. The works dedicated to traitors to China included *Repentance Is Salvation (Huitou shi an)*, and *High Gun Tower (Paolou gao you gao)*, etc. In order to inspire the Japanese army’s thoughts of homesickness and war-weariness, Chinese songwriters refilled the tunes of Japanese pop songs with new lyrics, such as *The War Is Miserable (Zhanzheng shi canku de)* and *To the Eighth Route Army (Dao baijian qu)*, etc. In addition to being sang on the battlefield, the propaganda materials of the ballads were dropped into the hands of the Japanese troops.

China’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression received sympathy and support from overseas Chinese and the people of the world. After the outbreak of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in 1937, Chinese musicians went abroad and propagated songs of resistance against Japan to overseas Chinese and international friends. In 1940, Liu Liangmo taught local overseas Chinese and Paul Robertson to sing the *March of the Volunteers* and other national salvation songs in New York, and transferred the music score of the *Yellow River Cantata* donated by Song Qingling to the Princeton University Choir. In 1943, this choir performed the *Yellow River Cantata* in English for the first time, and it was welcomed by people.

7. Communication Effects of the Songs of Resistance against Japan

Song of resistance against Japan was one of the most effective literature and art forms during the War of Resistance against Japan. It not only played a positive role in the victory of the War, but also had a permanent incentive effect to Chinese nation. Reflecting on his own country’s defeat during the World War II, a Japanese attributed China’s victory “neither to superior weaponry nor to battle tactics,” but to the fact that it had “relied on War of Resistance songs to arouse tremendous popular sentiment” (Chen, 2002, p. 88, as cited in Wang, 2008). As Mao Zedong pointed out, the national salvation songs “have become an integral part of the entire revolutionary machine well. As a powerful weapon to unite the people, educate the people, fight the enemy and destroy the enemy, they helped the people fight against the enemy with one heart and one mind” (Mao, 1942, p. 848).

The communication effects of national salvation songs are mainly reflected in four aspects. Firstly, the communication of national salvation songs has played a guiding role during the War of Resistance. It directly contributed to the Second KMT-CPC United Front and the whole nation’s war of resistance against Japanese invasion. On the first anniversary of the December 9th Movement in 1936, the Xi’an Student Union, which was under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, petitioned Chiang Kaishek to immediately stop the civil war and jointly resist Japanese invasion. Chiang Kaishek ordered Zhang Xueliang to forcefully suppress the petitioning students. After hearing the students sang *On the Songhua River*, Zhang Xueliang said with tears: “Resolutely resist Japan and not fight a civil war.” Three days later, Zhang Xueliang along with General Yang Hucheng launched the Xi’an Incident that shocked China and foreign countries. Then, Shanghai’s *Battlefield Weekly* published the music score of the *On the Songhua River*. As a result, this song resounded across the country and provided an important opportunity for KMT-CPC peace talks. In September 1937, the second KMT-CPC Cooperation formally formed.

Secondly, the communication of national salvation songs has played an attractive and imitative role during the War of Resistance against Japan. A large number of workers, peasants, young students, women and children actively joined or supported the national salvation war. According to records, at the end of 1938, the Eighth Route Army recruited and expanded its troops by teaching and singing national salvation songs on its way to Hebei. It had recruited 25,000 soldiers in just a few months (Lü & Liu, 2015).

Thirdly, the communication of national salvation songs has played a charismatic role in effectively instigating traitors to China and puppet troops. According to records, on one occasion, the military art troupe sneaked down to the artillery tower to sing various national salvation songs. After several nights, three puppet troops defected. They walked to the Eighth Route Army and said, “You guys sang so heartbreaking!” (Wan, 2011, 37). This shows that the national salvation songs played a role in awakening national consciousness. Just as Mao Zedong once commented that “One song of resistance against Japan is worth the strength of two divisions” (Wang, 2016, 72).

Lastly, the communication of national salvation songs has enhanced the profile and influence of the Communist Party of China and its People’s Army at home and abroad. By the time of the victory of the War against Japanese Aggression in 1945, the communication of songs of resistance against Japan that promoted the policies of the CPC, praised the CPC leaders, propagated the military style and discipline of the People’s Army and guerrilla strategies...
not only “dismantled the authority of the KMT government, which was the representative of the orthodox state at the time,” but also “completely replaced the position of Chairman Chiang by Chairman Mao in the minds of the peasants in the Communist Base Areas” (Zhang, 2001, 223-224). At the same time, the spread of national salvation songs also prompted the international community to maintain a high degree of attention to the Communist regime and its army.

8. Conclusion

The purpose of this research on Chinese songs of resistance against Japanese aggression is not to exaggerate narrow or extreme nationalism to stir up hatred against Japan, but to explore the communication process of Chinese songs of resistance against Japan with the analysis framework of the 5W Model of Communication proposed by Harold D. Laswell. This article has highlighted the transformations that the communication of national salvation songs has undergone during the Fourteen-Year Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japan. Folk musicians spontaneously communicated the national salvation songs in the beginning of the War, then official musicians joined the communication process along with folk musicians. The number of communication themes has increased from only two in the 1931-1937 to nine in the 1937-1945. Likewise, the number of communication channels has increased from three to ten during the same time. Chinese people were the main audiences of the communication of national salvation songs during the War of Resistance against Japan. However, Japanese soldiers, overseas Chinese and international anti-fascist alliance were also regarded as audiences during the period of 1937-1945. This article has found that the national salvation songs, which were products of Chinese special historical period of War of Resistance against Japan, should not only be regarded as a purely artistic act of singing, but also as a political tool for Chinese authorities to mobilize various sectors of Chinese society to participate in the War of Resistance against Japan and win the sympathy and support of the international community.

References


