

# Yan'an Songs of "Laughtering Border City" and "Crying Out"

## The *Yellow River Chorus* During the Anti-Japanese War\*

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**Abstract**—During the Anti-Japanese War, Yan'an was once called "the city of singing". The singing voice not only relieved the highly sensitive political nerves, but also subtly shaped an "imaginary community" in a "hearing" way. The way of "singing in a collective voice" and "singing loudly" has brought Yan'an songs with a strong political meaning. At the same time, this extremely developed auditory imagination has become a vivid representation of the lack of modernity.

**Keywords**—Yan'an songs; *Yellow River Chorus*; shouting; hearing

### I. INTRODUCTION

During the Anti-Japanese War, Yan'an was surrounded by songs all day long. At the meeting, party or on the road...you could hear the song everywhere. The singing voice constituted a beautiful landscape in Yan'an. The singing voice diluted the tense atmosphere of the anti-war at that time, and to a certain extent, the songs made people escape to the fatigue, anxiety and even the disgusting mentality. It can be said that the singing voice shaped people's way of thinking and thinking to some extent. For singing, it was impossible to not listen and want to escape. Hearing was always in an open and state of control. In 1939, it was under such circumstances that Xian Xinghai and Guang Weiran jointly created the *Yellow River Chorus*. At that time, the *Salvation Daily* introduced the *Yellow River Chorus*, which was accompanied by the Guang Weiran, composed by Xian Xinghai, and accompanied by the band "Lu Yi". As stated in the manual, its skill and content was 'launched a tragic fantasy but reality books on the *Yellow River chorus*. From the first section of the *Yellow River Boatman's Song* to the *Rage of the Yellow River*, the song fully symbolized the current suffering of the nation that was only 'insist on the war is the way out!' Its excitement was indignant, and the earnest place was sober which could tightly grasp the audience's heart.[1] It could be seen that the *Yellow River Chorus* was closely integrated with the national destiny at the beginning. It was a scream of the times. The shouting at this time was already fundamentally different from the cry of the May Fourth literati represented by Lu Xun. It was no longer about the listening of the individual's soul, nor was it a deep anxiety about the lack of self-

awareness, not a rebellious voice that is incompatible with history. On the contrary, "the singing, shouting and the "personal 'sound" at this time was incorporated into the historical chorus of the national collective, and there was no distinction"[2]. Specifically, it was "evoking a new auditory experience, new listening imagination as the starting point and motivation"[3] and shared experiences which constrained and inspired people as a collective unconscious form.

### II. THE BORDER TOWN YAN'AN: THE DEVELOPMENT OF HEARING AND THE WEAKNESS OF VISION

For Chen Xuezhao, the most direct sense of Yan'an was darkness, singing and timelessness. In 1938, Chen Xuezhao came to Yan'an. At this time, Yan'an had no electric lights. This was a traditional way of living and working. As Mr. Ge Zhaoguang said, "Time allocation, when it comes to roots, is a matter of 'order'." [4] Then, due to the lack of electric lights in Yan'an, its nightlife was far less than the urban scenery of Shanghai which was also a hidden embodiment of "order". It was not a place to enjoy life but a place just to "live". But Yan'an night also had appropriate entertainment activities — the party. According to Chen Xuezhao, "The party, this was the only entertainment in Yan'an. If Yan'an did not have a party, it would be more monotonous! This was a proper entertainment to adjust the intense work!" [5]

Fortunately, there were still songs in Yan'an. The contents of the Yan'an party also included singing, acting and so on. The song made up the monotony of the visual. Yan'an lacked all chaos of the modern cities, it also lacked the excitement and surprise that vision brought to people. The visual representation of the lack of modernity was the neglect of time. Chen Xuezhao wrote in an article recalling Yan'an: "I am in Yan'an. It's almost eleven months now. I have been using a memorable watch because I have used it for 14 years. After breaking it, I have to know the time from asking a neighboring friend every day. But this friend is often absent. Of course, if I often ask him, that person will also feel annoyed. So, after a long time, I have lost the habit of knowing the time, and slowly it does not matter to obey the time." [5] Zhu Hongzhao also talked about the experience of Yan'an recording time. In Yan'an, the hourglass and the sundial were used to record the time, and the time was recorded in the morning and evening. This way of recording

\*Fund: Shaanxi Province Science and Technology Hall (Project No.: 2018KRM067); Shaanxi Province Education Hall (Project No.: 18JK0994).

time was obviously lagging and rough. This led to a lack of sense of time in Yan'an, including the phenomena such as late meetings and inefficiencies. The lack of sense of time, the neglect of time and the lack of attention led to the lack of modern sense of order and the discontinuity in the development of modern processes. In Yan'an, visual stimuli and conflicts were greatly diminished; on the contrary, what follows was a great stimulus and response to hearing. In 1938, He Qifang wrote the essay *I sing Yan'an*, which macroscopically depicted the young students' picture in Yan'an. This picture had the heroic and romantic voice of the song, and was also full of fierce and vigorous war; or specific a series of songs and grand occasions, such as *Yan'an Laud*, *Eight-Road Army March*, *Production Chorus*, etc, built the grand occasion of Yan'an "Gongcheng" with concrete practice. In particular, the *Liberation Daily* on March 11, 1944 reported the song *President Mao Leads the Poor to Turn Over* in *The Immigrant Singer*. In the lyrics, Chairman Mao was associated with the image of the sun: "Dongfanghong, the sun rises, China has a Mao Zedong. He seeks survival for the people; he is the great savior of the people." [6] The Yan'an people and their intellectuals who traveled from the Kuomintang area to Yan'an were pursuing a new time. They also felt the context of the times in their hearing and constantly impacted the subject's self-consciousness.

Yan's "singing voice" has thus transcended the simple range of hearing and is closely integrated with the historical process of the war of resistance and the context of the times. Paying attention to Yan'an's "singing voice" must inevitably focus on the political connotation hidden behind it. In a sense, "singing voice" can be regarded as "occupation" or "misappropriation" of hearing and thinking. It tried to form people's thinking cognition in a more secret way, and also tried to correct the mentality of the intellectuals who were "uneasy" during the war.

### III. YELLOW RIVER CHORUS: IMAGINATION OF THE NATIONAL COMMUNITY

Xian Xinghai was from Wuhan to Xi'an and joined Lu Xun Art College. During the Lu Yi period, he wrote the songs such as *Production Chorus*, *September 18 Chorus*, *Yellow River Chorus* and other songs. Particularly, *Production Chorus* and *Yellow River Chorus* were warmly welcomed at the time and were staged in various places. According to Xian Xinghai's recollection, "Yan'an people were very welcome to the *Yellow River Chorus*, which had been played nearly ten times. (All of them were performing at the "evening party". The "evening party" was once a few days. It was the entertainment method of Yan'an.), they are also willing to listen." [7] In addition to this, there were often performances in other places, such as: "in order to relieve the overseas students of our school, we launched to perform the *Yellow River Chorus* and *Production Chorus* in Lianxian County (two kilometers away from Dongpu)." [8] Yan'an songs, represented by the *Yellow River Chorus*, had been spread from Yan'an to all parts of the country. The *Yellow River Chorus* played a great guiding role in the whole singing period during the war.

*Yellow River Chorus* contained six parts, namely: *Yellow River Boatman's Song*, *Yellow River*, *Yellow River Water Comes to the Sky*, *Yellow Water*, *River of the River*, *Yellow River Resent*, *Defending the Yellow River*, *Roar*, *Yellow River*. The image of the "Yellow River" was borrowed to awaken the enthusiasm and confidence of the anti-Japanese national salvation. "Cough! Plane... dark clouds, cover the sky! Waves, high as mountains! Cold wind, rush on the face! Waves, get into the boat! Cough! Plane... Partner, open your eyes!" The beginning of the *Yellow River Chorus* was dark and oppressive, as if it were suppressed in a very limited space, and "cough! draw" was driven by the imposing manner and solidarity. The ending part corresponding to the beginning symbolized the light of the war. From darkness to light, this was a narrative about the direction of history. "Most revolutions in history have conceived themselves as returning to a purer initial state. Any consistent revolutionary theory also implies a cyclical view of history, no matter what successive cycles is seen as alternating (bright, dark); the style is still seen as a symbolic spiral rise based on a more systematic progressive doctrine." [9] It can be seen that this narrative about darkness and light has already surpassed the pure visual range and rose to the political level.

The *Yellow River Chorus* was based on chorus. This "collective singing" way allowed the individual voice to be fully integrated into the collective. The voice of the individual was erased, which was completely infected and assimilated by the collective voice. "Growing collectively" was not only an external way of singing, but also weakened individual consciousness in the collective. In the continuous practice and repetition of "singing" and "listening", in the collective voice of chorus or chorus, the individual "small me" was completely replaced with "big me." At this time, the "big self" has escaped from the personal love, and placed himself in the identity of the revolutionary subject. In this way, both the singer and the listener are already imagining the national community. The stimuli that hearing brings to people are the inability of vision to achieve. Compared to vision, hearing can't be rejected by people. It permeates every corner of life and is everywhere. The Yan'an songs represented by the *Yellow River Chorus* are in the sway of singing, combining local, sound and political. The song of Yan'an is a farewell to the dark old society, and also a declaration of new life and future.

### IV. THE BORDER TOWN YAN'AN: THE VAGUE AND EMBARRASSING "MODERNITY"

Yan'an was a border town, especially for those who came to Yan'an from the Kuomintang area. Yan'an was completely away from the modern landscapes such as neon lights and trams. Yan'an was desolate, and this desolateness pointed to both the desolateness in the geographical sense and the desolateness touched by vision. The victory of the Central Red Army and the Red Army of Northern Shaanxi, the outbreak of the "Xi'an Incident", the peaceful settlement, and the *Speech at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art* issued by Chairman Mao Zedong in 1942 gradually brought the border Yan'an into politics and the relative central position in literature. It is precisely because of these changes in the external environment that a large number of intellectuals

went to the rural areas of northern Shaanxi, and in the literary and artistic creations such as songs, dramas, and literature, effectively and rationally used the northern Shaanxi language and culture to truly achieve local culture and era and political integration.

The recitation of the *Yellow River Chorus* was also very meaningful. The recited phrase was a description of the chorus. It told the listener how to listen. It also told the singer how to sing. This was a vast world of rediscovery and re-listening.

"Friend, have you been to the Yellow River?

Have you crossed the Yellow River?

Do you remember the fisherman on the river fighting for life and the storm?

If you have forgotten it, then listen to it! "

"You listen," this was shouting, more imagination; this was prayer; it was a call to memory, a blessing to the future. In general, the *Yellow River Chorus* was "new", and it strived to get rid of the old shackles and strived to move toward the emerging modern road. However, inadvertently, there was a hidden shadow of "old", such as: "The Riverside Contrast" is based on the old folk form. The whole song has not changed much. Ordinary, in the *Yellow River Chorus* lost the unified tone; this may be the author's use of the old form, a little neglected." [10] The *Yellow River Chorus* also had some characteristics of folk songs in northern Shaanxi. The tune, such as "scratching! Rushing forward! Draw! Rush up! Draw! Rush up!" "Ah! Yellow River! Roar! Roar! Roar!", was quite similar to the "North" Son" folk song genre. In addition, the *Yellow River Chorus* mainly combined the recited words with the chorus. The recited words were closer to the people in the "friends" tone, telling the suffering of the people and the disaster of the nation. In the chorus, the singer of the victory of the Chinese nation was sung by the momentum of "sudging the mountains, rushing, screaming and screaming, causing people to rupture." This corresponding way of playing, in the narrative of assimilation and assimilation, has gathered together into a unique auditory experience in Yan'an.

For the youth at that time, coming to Yan'an was to say goodbye to the old order of life, which itself had the meaning of "revolution." The *Yellow River Chorus* depicted a "temporary fantasy but reality" scene with new attempts and new forms. Just as the fourth team of the Anti-Enemy Team of the Political Department wrote in the *Yellow River Chorus*, this was a chorus of "infusing his own life, singing his own doom and struggle, showing the power of our Chinese nation from a wide range of developments" [11]. However, this "Utopia" narrative based on changing the dark memory and reshaping the bright future was always expressed in the traditional way; while listening to let people passively "listen", it also inactivates the patience of "seeing" people. Therefore, the Yanbian side of the border, while forming a special auditory cultural landscape, also revealed the complex and embarrassing nature of its modern process. Yanbian also began to "go to the stage center of the Chinese revolution", "from the edge to the center, from the individual

and local narratives to the more popular and universal expression" [12], and then from the edge The strip has moved to the center, and the Yanan songs at the "center of the stage" have also begun to have a major radiation impact.

## V. CONCLUSION

Yan'an songs are often used as a powerful weapon for war. As the highest achievement of Yan'an songs and art, the *Yellow River Chorus* spreads the spirit of Yan'an's anti-Japanese salvation to all parts of the country in the form of "hearing". In the perspective of hearing, "modern is imagined as an era that emerges from the darkness, an era of awakening and "rejuvenation" that heralds a bright future." [9] The Yanan songs represented by the *Yellow River Chorus* are based on the dual aspects of form and content, which symbolize the darkness of the past and refer to the arrival of a bright era of awakening. In this way, both the creator's "singing" and the listener's "listening" are placed in the imagination of the national community with a distinct era and political imprint. But with the development of hearing, it is the decline of vision. There is a huge tension and gap between the development and the decline. At the same time, Yan'an songs completely cover and submerge the individual emotions in a chorus and sing. Underneath, and with the accusation of darkness and the expectation of light, we will announce the completion of the beautiful ideas of New China in the majestic momentum.

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