

Context, Image, and Landscape: A Comparative Study of Chinese and Soviet Anti-Fascist Songs Taking "The Sacred War" and "On the Taihang Mountains" as Examples

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ABSTRACT

The Soviet Union and China made indelible contributions to the anti-fascist war, during which music works with strong echoes were born. The music works born during the war shaped national identity and boosted the morale of the anti-fascist war. However, due to the different geographical conditions, forms of war, and social conflicts between the two countries, the anti-fascist songs of the two countries have different characteristics. The article compares the similarities and differences between "The Sacred War" and "On the Taihang Mountains" from three perspectives: the "context" of song creation, the artistic "image" in the song, and the "landscape" shaped by the lyrics. The literary and artistic workers of the Soviet Union and China, based on the perspective of socialist realism aesthetics, created songs that served their own political needs, which have condensed national emotions, and strengthened their sense of community.

Keywords: *Anti-fascist war, Anti-Japanese war songs, Socialist realistic aesthetics.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Soviet Great Patriotic War and China's Anti-Japanese War were important components of World War II. China and the Soviet military and civilians made tremendous sacrifices and made immortal contributions to world peace. In terms of anti-fascist stance, China was consistent with the Soviet Union (Russia today), and the suffering brought about by the war has become a common memory of the two peoples. In the same time and space, Chinese and Soviet artists created a large number of popular music works, inspiring the morale of the military and civilians to persist in struggle, and playing a positive role in achieving the victory of the world's anti-fascist movement. After the COVID-19 epidemic, the economies of all countries in the world went down, and the international situation was turbulent. The retrospective and comparative study of songs in the Sino-Soviet anti-fascist war aims to rewrite and recognize the historical significance of relevant songs from a contemporary perspective, and affirm the inheritance value of Sino-Soviet anti-fascist

songs. It is hoped to incorporate music culture into the discourse system of a community with a shared future for mankind, in order to shape a sense of cherishing peace.

2. COMPARISON OF CREATIVE BACKGROUNDS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF "CONTEXT"

"Context" refers to the situation or scenario that people face before taking action, which has a certain special significance. It includes the relationship between the behavioral subjects, the process of interaction, etc.¹ China and the Soviet Union were both in the context of anti-fascist wars at the global level, but there were also differences in consciousness and behavior due to different national conditions, targets, and geographical spaces.

From the perspective of the nature of war, both China and the Soviet Union were to defend their

1. Li Ran, *The Sino-Soviet Music Exchange under the Viewpoint of Sociology* [D]. Harbin Normal University, 2011.

countries. China and the Soviet Union, as the subjects of aggression, are in opposition to the fascist "other". In this adversarial relationship, the "other" was played by Nazi Germany and Japanese militarism, which combined to form the Axis Alliance. The fascist forces aimed to enslave other countries, plunder resources, and dump industrial surplus, essentially constituting the annihilation of democratic systems and freedom of life, trampling on the right to survival of the people of other countries, and dehumanizing humanity. Therefore, China and the Soviet Union were not only the righteous masters of maintaining the independence of their own nation, but also the backbone of striving for world liberation. From the perspective of the political strength of the leadership in fighting against fascism, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the CPC both played a decisive role. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union led the struggle between the Red Army and Nazi Germany from beginning to end, coordinating with the Allies to open up a second battlefield. Although the CPC had not yet captured the national power, it had promoted the Kuomintang Communist cooperation united front, carried out guerrilla activities in the vast enemy occupied areas, harassed the supply lifeline of the Japanese invaders, and hindered the Japanese support for the Pacific battlefield. In addition, the left-wing cultural cause carried out by the Communist Party of China and the Soviet Union had led a progressive creative direction and united the vast masses of the people.

China and the Soviet Union, which were in the same camp, had presented different war scenarios due to their different historical conditions. Firstly, the main contradictions faced were different. The Soviet Union was in the stage of economic construction and industrialization, so its main challenge was the contradiction between economic construction and Nazi aggressors attempting to seize resources. However, China was still in the unfinished stage of its internal revolution, so it was under the dual structure of class contradiction and enemy self-contradiction. It was necessary to unite all progressive forces to resist Japanese militarist aggressors and also to overthrow the internal reactionary forces that oppress the people. Secondly, there were differences in the forms of war. The Soviet Union had a strong industrial foundation and was able to organize reserve forces to confront Nazi Germany head-on even in the early stages of the war. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union basically achieved the integration of internal forces in the early stages of the war, and was able to call

on workers and farmers from various regions and ethnic groups to participate in the Great Patriotic War. In China, there were both enemy forces led by the Communist Party and armies at all levels of the Kuomintang, as well as numerous democratic parties and overseas Chinese groups. The issues of class, ethnicity, and territory were relatively complex. Therefore, the forms of warfare in China's battlefield were diverse, with both main decisive battles and guerrilla warfare behind enemy lines. Thirdly, there were differences in war patterns caused by geopolitical structures. At the beginning of the war, the Soviet Union and Germany faced off on a long border, with the battlefield covering the vast plains of Eastern Europe. Therefore, the pattern of war was the weaving and weaving of mechanized troops, with unprecedented intensity of confrontation. Due to the dense rivers and rolling hills in China, the anti-Japanese armed forces in China rely on geographical conditions to carry out defensive and protracted warfare, guerrilla warfare, with the aim of depleting the active forces of the Japanese aggressors and accumulating our own strength.

In the war to defend the country, the different "contexts" between China and the Soviet Union influenced the creative process of "On the Taihang Mountains" and "The Sacred War". The lyrics of "The Sacred War" were created in the early stages of the war. On June 22, 1941, Nazi Germany launched a Blitzkrieg against the Soviet Union along three routes: north, central, and south. After witnessing the ruins and suffering of the people after the war, poet Va Lebedev Kumachi wrote poetry with a sense of sadness and anger and published it in the Red Star and Truth newspapers. Subsequently, the head of the Red Flag Song and Dance Troupe, Alexandrov, adopted the lyrics and composed "The Sacred War" on the recommendation of others. Due to the urgent situation of the war, there was no time to reprint and distribute the music scores. Alexandrov had to write the scores and lyrics on the blackboard, and the team members copied and sang them themselves. They made their debut at the Belarusian train station in Moscow, inspiring the soldiers who rushed to the front line. In 1937, Gui Taosheng was appointed as the political representative of the First Brigade of the Second World War Camping Guerrilla, mainly responsible for speeches and promotional activities.² After

2. Wu Zhifei, Gui Taosheng and "On the Taihang Mountains" [J]. *Over the Party History*, 2015(08): 26-27.

seeing the towering and magnificent Taihang Mountains, he was also moved by the enthusiasm of the anti-Japanese military and civilians for national liberation and the determination to persist in the war. He created the poem "On the Taihang Mountains" and wrote it on cigarette packaging paper. Later, Gui Taosheng invited Xian Xinghai to compose a choir for the poem.

Both "The Sacred War" and "On the Taihang Mountains" were created in the context of the collapse of the country and the downfall of the family. Therefore, their creative motives were the same, but they were rooted in different "contexts", and the creative backgrounds were different as follows. Firstly, Nazi Germany launched an attack by tearing up the "Treaty of Non-Aggression between the Soviet Union and Germany", which was characterized by suddenness. In the early stages, the Soviet Red Army suffered continuous defeats due to improper deployment, and the song was hastily composed. When creating "On the Taihang Mountains", Japan's invasion of China had lasted for seven years, and the song was created under the plan of the lyricist and songwriter. Secondly, the Soviet German battlefield was located on the plains of Eastern Europe, with relatively single geographical features. The lyricists rarely wrote about geographical scenes, and instead focused more on criticizing enemies and inspiring morale. When Gui Taosheng created "On the Taihang Mountains", he used the scenery to express his emotions, borrowing from the geographical landscape of the Taihang Mountains region. Thirdly, "The Sacred War" was created in Moscow, located behind the front line, while "On the Taihang Mountains" was created in the guerrilla zone behind the enemy lines. There is a gap between the writing conditions of the music text and the performance venue of the music.

3. COMPARISON OF ARTISTIC IMAGE

Artistic image refers to the most basic unit, form, or element composed of artistic works and artistic images.³ Composers and lyricists use songs to objectify their inner artistic imagery through the fusion of external image and internal emotions. For songs, artistic image is contained in two dimensions: semantic text and audio text.

3. Zhu Liyuan. A Dictionary of Aesthetics [M]. Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, 2014.04: 657.

"The Sacred War" is a three part C minor male choir song that adopts a 3/4 beat rhythm, with slow singing speed, obvious and regular retakes. Therefore, the auditory effect is approximately 2/4 beats, solemn and powerful, mainly due to the division of phrases. The phrase starts in the second half of the weak beat (the third beat in the measure) of an incomplete measure and ends in the strong beat (the first beat in the measure). The entire phrase lasts for twelve beats. In the phrase, there are four strong notes, each with a longer duration, located in the second, sixth, eighth, and eleventh beats, with even intervals between them, resulting in an auditory effect of two beats. The structure of the musical form is a section composed of starting, inheriting, transferring, and combining musical sentences, with a regular structure. The melody is catchy, easy to sing, and the sound effect is magnificent and inspiring. The lyrics of "The Sacred War" depict less specific characters or objective objects, while they criticize fascism and vent more emotions. For example, "We are like two poles, hostile in everything. We fight for light and peace, they fight for the kingdom of darkness. (Как два различных полюса. Во всём враждебны мы. За свет и мир мы боремся, Они — за царство тьмы.)"⁴ This sentence places fascism in the position of hostile "others", indicating the position that justice and evil are irreconcilable. Another example, "Let noble anger stir like waves! People's War, Sacred War! (Пусть ярость благородная, Вскипает, как волна! Идёт война народная, Священная война!)" This sentence is the concluding sentence of the entire song, calling on all Soviet people to bravely kill the enemy and submerge fascism in the vast ocean of people's war.

"On the Taihang Mountains" is a choir song in a minor of two parts, using a rhythm of 2/4 beats and a polyphonic form. Paragraph A contains three phrases, with a solemn and stirring mood, a slow pace, and a deep and steady tone. Paragraph A is mainly responsible for depicting the magnificent scenery of the Taihang Mountains and the severe war situation. Paragraph B contains two phrases, depicting the scene of guerrilla warfare and expressing a positive and optimistic spirit of struggle, light and lively. The comparison of the two emotions before and after reflects the composer's love for magnificent rivers and mountains, as well as the accusation of Japanese aggression, and also reflects the attitude of guerrilla members not afraid of strong enemies. The lyrics

4. This is a literal translation of the Russian original text.

not only depict specific objects, such as "red sun", "thousands of valleys", "high mountains and dense forests", but also depict ordinary Chinese family scenes at that time, such as "the mother calls her son to fight against Japan, and the wife sends her son to the battlefield". At the same time, the atmosphere is pushed to its peak through slogan like language, such as "where the enemy attacks, we will perish wherever they come from".

In the dimension of audio text, the two pieces have similar tones, but there are differences in the artistic image formed. Both "The Sacred War" and "On the Taihang Mountains" are minor works, but the auditory effect is mournful and not gloomy. This is mainly because the rhythm of the two works is relatively regular, like the steps of a hero, full of power. And the melodic lines are mostly mountain shaped, with significant undulations, like epic waves. Therefore, from the perspective of mode, tonality, and melodic lines, the images conveyed by the two songs are the same. Xian Xinghai and Alexandrov both hoped to outline the brutal war scenes first, and then highlighted the fearless spirit of the two peoples in fighting against the enemy. But from the perspective of musical structure, "On the Taihang Mountains" highlights artistic image through the comparison of speed and rhythm between the front and back ends, while "The Sacred War" strengthens artistic image through the transformation within a paragraph. In the dimension of semantic text comparison, it reflects the differences in the expression methods of the two works. Firstly, there is a difference in the title. "The Sacred War" is an abstract and holistic concept that summarizes the nature of the entire Great Patriotic War, while "On the Taihang Mountains" refers more specifically to the concept of geographical rationality. Secondly, the lyrics of "The Sacred War" express one's emotions directly and rely less on physical images, while "On the Taihang Mountains" expresses emotions through scenery, attaching emotions to natural and social landscapes. The war situation is one of the objective reasons for this difference. During the creation of "The Sacred War", the Soviet Red Army was in an emergency situation on the front line, and many troops were divided and surrounded by the German army. Therefore, there was an urgent need for works with appeal and direct attack on the heart to inspire the army and the people. When creating "On the Taihang Mountains", the main forms of warfare were guerrilla warfare and protracted warfare, and the front line was already located in the complex geographical environment of North China.

Therefore, geographical symbols can be used to create a unified national consciousness, and then to convey the belief of adhering to the War of Resistance.

4. A COMPARISON OF COMMUNITY DISCOURSE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF "LANDSCAPE"

"Landscape" refers to things that have visibility, meaning to people, and plays an important role in shaping national identity.⁵ In the creation of lyrics, shaping the "landscape" and giving it specific meaning can evoke public recognition of the territory of the motherland, and form an imaginative community from a conscious perspective. Given the social structure and geomorphological characteristics of China and the Soviet Union, visualized images can form broad identification, unite the forces of different ethnic groups and social classes, and jointly construct the anti-fascist united front.

Firstly, China and the Soviet Union have common ground in terms of geography, namely their vast territory. Therefore, people living in different regions do not have a specific understanding of the country's territory. The expansion of occupied areas and the shift of the front line reported in the news cannot directly evoke a sense of urgency among the people. For example, Soviet citizens living in Siberia may have abstract geographical concepts about the area west of the Ural Mountains, without a sense of belonging or familiarity with "home country" or "homeland". And the people in southwestern China were also unable to conceive in their minds the overview of the War of Resistance in North China. Secondly, China and the Soviet Union are multi-ethnic political entities. At that time, as a pre-modern country, China had not yet completed its transformation from a nation to a national race. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, was composed of republics spanning across Europe and Asia based on common political purposes. The public's identification with the community was not yet stable, and independent forces emerged in Ukraine and Georgia before the war. Therefore, in the writing of lyrics, using "landscape" to strengthen

5. Liu Jie, Landscape, Territory and National Identity: An Analysis Centered on the Resistance Songs such as "On the Songhua River" [J]. The Journal of Studies of China's Resistance War Against Japan, 2023(02): 100-111.

the understanding of the community is a necessary means of rallying people's hearts.

In "The Sacred War", the landscape "field (Поле)" is borrowed. In addition to this song, it also appears frequently in other Soviet songs. This is because the main battlefield of the Great Patriotic War was located on the plains of Eastern Europe, and the endless fields were a symbolic summary of this scene. The meaning of the field includes two images, the first being the golden wheat field, which represents the grain producing areas in the southern Soviet Union. Next is that the vast wilderness was the battlefield where cavalry and mechanized troops gallop. This undoubtedly raised concerns among the public about the loss of food production areas leading to famine, deepening their recognition of the importance of consolidating the defense line, which was to resist the invasion of Ukraine by the German Southern Army. The wilderness constituted an imaginative space for cavalry and tanks to gallop, symbolizing the battlefield of both sides' struggle and concretizing the scene of war. The landscape of "field" visualized the nature and situation of the Great Patriotic War to the Soviet people, inspiring them to join the military and engage in industrial production to defend the common "field". In "On the Taihang Mountains", three landscapes were constructed: "red sun", "farewell", and "Taihang Mountains". The "red sun" symbolizes hope, justice, and the Communist Party. The "red sun shining all over the East" means that the power of justice will eventually defeat fascism on the land of the East, full of hope for the goal of expelling Japanese invaders and building a homeland. "Red" refers to that the CPC was the mainstay to resist Japanese invaders, and the CPC held a clear position of uniting the united front of compatriots of all ethnic groups in the Anti-Japanese War. The phrase "mother calls her son to fight against Japan, wife sends her husband to the battlefield" describes the micro unit - the "farewell" landscape of a family. When the Chinese nation faces danger, every family needs to shoulder the responsibility of safeguarding their country. The scene of "farewell" reproduces the helplessness of each family having to separate before national hatred, making the audience empathize with it. The Taihang Mountains are a geographical landscape and a spatial expression of guerrilla warfare. After the "Lugouqiao Incident", the Japanese invaders threatened to destroy China within three months. At this vital moment, the CPC issued a call to "go to the enemy's rear" and tried to smash the Japanese

aggressors' ambitions by means of guerrilla warfare. Liu Bocheng and Xu Xiangqian led the 129th Division of the Eighth Route Army to advance into the Taihang Mountains and establish an anti-Japanese base. The term "Taihang Mountains" shapes the landscape of the Communist Party's guerrilla forces and the unremitting struggle against the Japanese invaders, and is a symbol of the indomitable spirit of the Chinese nation and a banner for the vast number of anti-Japanese soldiers and civilians.

Both "The Sacred War" and "On the Taihang Mountains" borrowed geographical landscapes within the territory and achieved visualization of battle scenes against fascism. This is not only because "field" and "Taihang Mountains" were the main battlefields of the Great Patriotic War and the Anti-Japanese War, but also because these two landscapes were well-known to the Soviet Union and Chinese military and civilians. The visualized landscape allows the people to experience the intense battle firsthand, strengthens their sense of national identity, and awakens their sense of responsibility to defend their countries.

5. CONCLUSION

Through a comparative study of the three levels of song creation: the "context", the artistic "image" in the song, and the "landscape" shaped by the lyrics, it is not difficult to find that the creation of the two songs, "The Sacred War" and "On the Taihang Mountains", has a realistic direction. Although there were differences in the historical objective conditions possessed by the Soviet Union and China, literary and artistic workers, based on the principles of socialist realism, hoped to place people of all ethnic groups and social classes under the same common entity. The two songs, with their unique "landscape" symbols and touching artistic "image", showcase the military and civilians' unwavering pursuit of peace.

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