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**“Music for a National Defense”: Making Martial Music during the Anti-Japanese War**

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Abstract

This article examines the popularization of “mass songs” among Chinese Communist troops during the Anti-Japanese War by highlighting the urban origins of the National Salvation Song Movement and the key role it played in bringing songs to the war front. The diffusion of a new genre of march songs pioneered by Nie Er was facilitated by compositional devices that reinforced the ideological message of the lyrics, and by the National Salvation Song Movement. By the mid-1930s, this grassroots movement, led by Liu Liangmo, converged with the tail end of the proletarian arts movement that sought to popularize mass art and create a “music for national defense.” Once the war broke out, both Nationalists and Communists provided organizational support for the song movement by sponsoring war zone service corps and mobile theatrical troupes that served as conduits for musicians to propagate their art in the hinterland. By the late 1930s, as the United Front unraveled, a majority of musicians involved in the National Salvation Song Movement moved to the Communist base areas. Their work for the New Fourth Route and Eighth Route Armies, along with Communist propaganda organizations, enabled their songs to spread throughout the ranks.

Keywords: Anti-Japanese War, Li Jinhui, Liu Liangmo, Lü Ji, Mai Xin, mass song, National Salvation Song Movement, New Fourth Army, Nie Er, United Front, Xian Xinghai

Reflecting on his country’s defeat in World War II, a Japanese interviewed in Taipei 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 (*kangzhan gequ*) to arouse tremendous popular sentiment” (Chen F. 2003, 88). Chinese troops had sung their way to victory! (See figure 1.) Even if not fully persuasive, this explanation does hold a kernel of truth. Ever since Chalmers Johnson’s seminal 1962 study on how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) mobilized the peasantry by tapping into anti-Japanese sentiment, scholars have correlated the ability to wield mass nationalism with the Nationalist and Communist parties’ pursuit or loss of political power. Tactical mistakes with catastrophic consequences—such as the breaking of the Yellow River dykes to thwart Japanese

troop advances, brutal conscription policies, and endemic factionalism—are commonly cited as explanations for why Chiang Kai-shek’s regime lost popular support (Chi 1982; Eastman 1984). Conversely, Chang-tai Hung argues that leftist intellectuals’ wartime production of popular culture media—cartoons, drama, and newspapers—advocating patriotic resistance enabled the Communists to win the propaganda war among its people (Hung 1994). Yet given the fragmented nature of local wartime society (brought to life most vividly by Mo Yan’s novel *Red Sorghum*) and the high degree of illiteracy among the rural populace, print was not the most effective medium by which to create an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991).



Figure 1. Chinese Communist Party soldiers singing. *Source*: Jie (2005, 102).

Musicians relied instead on singing to mobilize the nation in the resistance against Japan. Song became a powerful propaganda weapon for a variety of reasons. In contrast to instrumental music, which required resources, practically anyone could sing anytime and anywhere. Moreover, a song’s ideological message was transmitted directly through its lyrics.¹ Composers such as Xian Xinghai realized that the emotional force of music accompanying songs enhanced the listener’s memory and reinforced the lyrics’ message: “National salvation songs are even more effective than writing or drama because songs emotionally affect all of our senses and powerfully stimulate the listeners’ feelings” (Xian [1937] 1989, 22). Finally, musicians involved in the Resistance argued that the participatory nature of singing could forge a collective ethos and national identity.

Given the unifying and mobilizing force of song, it is not surprising that vocal music assumed a prominent role in the everyday life of soldiers (see figure 2). In 1941, CCP playwright (and wife of the political commissar Yang Shangkun) Li Bozhao noted, “The song movement behind enemy lines was a large-scale movement with broad-based mass support and organization... The first to participate in song activities were the numerous soldiers; singing was an essential staple of their daily lives” (Chen Z. 2005, 118).

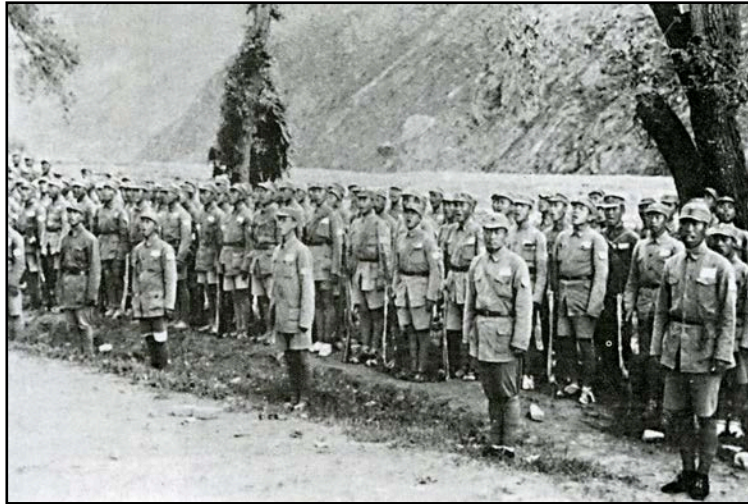


Figure 2. Singing patriotic songs at a military academy in the Wutai Mountains behind Japanese lines in 1938. *Source:* Carlson ([1940] 2003, 220).

James Bertram, a New Zealand journalist who traveled with Communist soldiers in 1938, was struck by how often the soldiers sang and the range of their songs:

Always, as they marched, the soldiers would sing, and they had a varied repertoire. This army has always made its own songs, and some of them, based on local airs from the various provinces the Red Army has traversed, have a real musical as well as historical interest. Others were the staccato marching songs of “National Salvation” that one had heard in Shanghai and Sian. But sometimes it would be a tune more familiar to Western ears, and it was a curious experience to hear these mountain gorges ringing with the *Internationale*, or the *Marseillaise*, or a theme-song from a Russian film—all rendered, with a difference, in throaty Chinese dialect. (Bertram 1939, 139)

How did songs become popularized during the Anti-Japanese War and come to play such an important role in army life, especially among Communist troops? This article highlights the urban origins of the National Salvation Song Movement and the key roles played by activists,

musicians, and song organizations in bringing songs to the war front. These songs eventually penetrated rural areas as well, mobilizing people for the Resistance in Nationalist-controlled territory, in Communist base areas, and behind enemy lines in northern and central China. The diffusion of military songs, especially a new genre of mass songs pioneered by the leftist musician Nie Er, was facilitated in part by their patriotic lyrics and in part by the National Salvation Song Movement. Led by a young Christian social reformer, Liu Liangmo, this grassroots social movement—which depended on the formation of amateur choral groups, the publication of numerous patriotic song anthologies, innovative pedagogical techniques, and mass song rallies—was likened by the musician He Lüting to a “wildfire sweeping through barren hills with the force of a prairie fire” (He L. 1939b, 54).

While Liu Liangmo organized the National Salvation Song Movement, the young songwriter and Marxist theoretician Lü Ji articulated its ideological basis. A close associate of Nie Er who self-identified as his successor, Lü continued Nie’s pioneering efforts to compose mass songs that would meet the demands of China’s revolution and national crisis. He engaged in the aesthetic polemics that Nie had initiated against rival musical styles—including the so-called decadent music (*mimi zhi yin*) associated with popular composer Li Jinhui and the academy style associated with allegedly elitist composers based at the National Conservatory of Shanghai. Personal interests, too, may have led Lü to champion the popularization (*dazhonghua*) of mass art. By doing so, Lü put to rest any lingering doubts about his commitment to Marxism-Leninism that may have arisen from his past involvement in anarchist circles.²

In early 1936, soon after the voluntary disbandment of the League of Left-Wing Writers (Zuolian, for short), Lü coined the political slogan “music for national defense.” In line with the CCP’s cultural policy, which dovetailed with the Comintern’s Popular Front, Lü called for an alliance among artists, a moderation of class struggle, and participation in national salvation work. To achieve national defense music’s goal of “organizing all the nation’s people,” the song form required popularization (Lü 1936, 614). Lü and his associates stressed that national defense music should adopt simplified melodies, colloquial lyrics, and realist subject matter that resonated with people’s daily lives in order to “create a mass national salvation consciousness.” Composers should abandon highbrow songs and avoid writing complicated melodies simply to show off their compositional skills. Rather, they should “strive to get closer to the masses, understand the people’s language so that they actively produce songs that the people need!”

(Zhou W. 1936, 618). Popularization would also bridge the gap between intellectuals and the masses. By creating music for and about the “people,” and instructing farmers, soldiers, and workers in song, urban-based musicians believed they could transcend their own class backgrounds. In theory, national defense music would bridge class divisions that had previously impeded a common national art form, whether literature, drama, or music.³

Although labeled “music for national defense,” the songs were not exclusively military music. Since the musicians envisioned the Resistance War as a total war in which both noncombatants and soldiers had to be mobilized, they stressed the heroic struggles of the people, defined broadly to include soldiers as well as women, children, workers, merchants, students, and farmers. At the same time, Lü Ji recommended that the subject matter for songs concern military themes such as “exposing the enemy’s brutality and crimes during the course of invasion and war of aggression” (Lü 1936, 616). Lü and his fellow leftist musicians took inspiration from the songwriters Alexander Davidenko and Boris Alexandrov and the many Soviet composers who had experienced life in the Red Army. This call to arms would be taken to heart by those Chinese songwriters and musicians who started out in urban areas but then moved into war zones.

Once the war broke out in the summer of 1937, both political parties provided organizational support for the National Salvation Song Movement. The war zone service corps and mobile theatrical troupes supported initially by the Nationalist government served as a conduit for musicians and dramatists to propagate their art in the hinterland. By the late 1930s, as the United Front began to unravel, a majority of songwriters and musicians involved in the song movement moved to the Communist base areas. Their work for the New Fourth Route and Eighth Route Armies alongside Communist propaganda organizations enabled their songs to become diffused throughout the ranks.

With the important exception of He Lüting and Xian Xinghai, who had received formal training at Western-style conservatories, most musicians and activists involved in the song movement were autodidacts or, at best, had received piecemeal training in songwriting and composition. The rapid pace and mass scale of song production provided rich fodder to critics of the song movement, some of its harshest from within the movement. He Lüting, a student of the Western-trained composer Huang Zi and a staunch advocate of composition and harmony training for amateur musicians, candidly spoke to the shortcomings of national salvation songs,

with their faulty compositional structures and rehashing of folk rhymes: “Some of the pieces that are called music are nothing but revolutionary poems or slogans appended to Arabic numerals [for simplified notation]” (He L. [1936] 1999, 41). But if we judge the songs from a political perspective, it is hard to deny their success in galvanizing the public. With literally thousands of songs composed during the Anti-Japanese War, musicians met a central goal of popularization by taking as their subject matter people of all walks of life and creating a genre of mass songs that was accessible to both singers and listeners.⁴ Through formal musical analysis of several well-known march songs, this article aims to demonstrate that those songs’ popular reception was also the result of compositional devices (rhythm, meter, use of triplets, and syncopation) that reinforced the ideological message of their lyrics. Paradoxically, the relative lack of training among musicians involved in creating mass songs may have had a liberating effect. Unhindered by any inferiority complex vis-à-vis the European musical tradition, wartime musicians were open to experimentation in using folk music and melding lyrical and martial songs. The songs created during the late 1930s thus contributed to the making of a “new Chinese music” for popular consumption.⁵

Army Songs during the Early Republic

Military songs were introduced to China via Japan by reformers during the last decade of the Qing as a means of creating a citizenry and attaining wealth and power. The main impetus for military music came from the creation of the New Army whose soldiers were taught army songs. During the early Republic and 1920s, the Christian warlord Feng Yuxiang spearheaded the promotion of army songs. Convinced that song could inculcate both discipline and patriotic values among his troops, Feng wrote close to one hundred songs and edited countless others. Feng’s “compositional” method was to arrange Chinese folk melodies, school songs, Japanese army songs, or Christian hymns, such as “Faithful Soldiers of Christ,” and then add lyrics to the melody. Several of Feng’s songs retained their popularity through the 1940s, including the melody for “Dashu lianbing,” which the Red Army adapted into “Sanda jilu, baxiang zhuyi” (Three main rules of discipline and eight points for attention) (Wang Y. H. 2009, 40–41).

This last example represented a shift during the early 1930s to more politicized “revolutionary songs” encouraged by the policies of the Jiangxi Soviet. As early as 1929, in the Gutian Resolution, Mao Zedong instructed that, since the Red Army was a political force,

propaganda was a priority. According to Mao, art should become a weapon of revolutionary propaganda, closely linked to politics and in service to the people. Mao thus ordered each political department in the Red Army to collect and edit revolutionary songs (Mao [1929] 1995, 214, 219). Political departments established Lenin clubs (amateur literary and art organizations supervised by Communist Youth League members) and, in 1933, the Gorky Drama School, which was the first CCP organization to train cadres in the arts.⁶ Greater political supervision over the arts produced songs that had a strong didactic element and surged with revolutionary optimism. As music historian Wang Yuhe explains,

These [revolutionary] songs no longer resembled the folk songs of a previous era which only rendered bitter accounts of one's misery or related the freedom to love or a future auspicious life, but rather reflected how residents of the revolutionary base areas had acquired freedom and happiness in their new lives...or reflected the people's love and admiration for revolution, their leaders and the Red Army, and reflected the people and soldiers' revolutionary struggles in the base area. (Wang Y. H. 2002, 163)

Aside from Soviet army songs, whose lyrics were translated, revolutionary folk songs (*geming mingge*) were generally arranged by adding lyrics to familiar folk melodies and urban ditties, in a method similar to that used by Feng Yuxiang.

The composition of music and new lyrics designed to mobilize the Chinese military and the multiclass Resistance against Japan was a product of the Movement of Singing for the Resistance against Japan and National Salvation (*Kangri jiuwang geyong yundong*). The National Salvation Song Movement, as it was more commonly known, can be divided into three stages: its beginnings in the immediate aftermath of the Manchurian Incident, expansion during the December 9 (1935) Movement, and peak in scope and influence after the outbreak of war in 1937. Although the first stage witnessed a diversity of styles, ranging from the more lyrical “art songs” of the Western-trained composer Huang Zi to the mellifluous love songs of Li Jinhui, it was the mass songs of Nie Er that gained ascendancy by the mid-1930s. Because Nie Er became the standard bearer of the National Salvation Song Movement and War of Resistance songs after, or perhaps even because of, his premature death in 1935, an introduction to the musician and his music is merited.

Nie Er and the Rise of the Mass Song

Born in 1912 in Kunming, Nie had experiences as a youth that shaped his later efforts to create a new music that would “cry out on behalf of the masses” (Nie 1985a, 511). At the age of five, Nie lost his father, leaving widow Peng Jikuan to raise him and his three young siblings. The hardships endured by the family no doubt left Nie sympathetic to the downtrodden and oppressed in society, the subjects for most of his songs. An affinity for the theater also alerted the young Nie to the potential of the arts to reform society. Nie advocated reforming traditional drama, which he deemed “obscene with elements of illicit sexual relations” (Nie 1985e). This view of popular theater carried over to his later criticisms of the Shanghai song and dance world, which Nie also condemned as prurient. Instead, Nie heralded “new drama” as a “sharp weapon of social education” (Nie 1985e, 1985f). As early as 1925, Nie was already thinking in terms of the propagandistic value of the arts.

Influenced by a certain Mr. Bernie, who had served as translator to governor-general Cai E following the 1911 Revolution and later taught English at the YMCA in Kunming, Nie immersed himself in Western culture, studying the violin and Nordic mythology, and going so far as to adopt a Western pseudonym, “George Njal,” in homage to the hero of the thirteenth-century Icelandic folk epic *Njal's Saga*. Nie's fascination with Western culture coincided with an iconoclastic rejection of traditional culture in line with the New Culture Movement: “We young and promising people will soon go to war with this odious society.... There are all kinds of pernicious customs and many outdated rituals and teachings that cannot be adapted to the scientific era of the twentieth century. We must overthrow all of this. In other words, overthrow the wicked society and construct a new society” (Nie 1985d).

Nie's early writings manifest an ethical and critical stance toward capitalism and individualism, themes that would preoccupy him throughout his short life. In 1925, as the “anti-imperialist, class-inflected” May 30th Movement was sweeping across the coastal cities, Nie wrote, “I would like to avoid the perils of strikes, but we must first smash the capitalist class” (1985b). At school, Nie used his artistic talent to raise money for Shanghai workers and joined the Xingfu She (Association for Happiness and Well-Being) to put his collective ethos into practice. In 1928 he became a member of the Communist Youth League. It was probably at this time that he wrote the essay “Capitalism and Social Problems,” in which he adopted a Marxist

perspective, giving a brief overview of capitalist development and its attendant class conflict (1985g). Involvement in the student movement and betrayal by an imprisoned fellow Communist Youth League member forced Nie into exile. He accompanied a Yunnanese merchant to Shanghai, where he began working at a store marketing cigarettes. Too poor to pursue his dream of studying at Shanghai's Jinan University or the National Conservatory of Music, Nie labored on as a shop clerk while continuing to teach himself English, Japanese, and the violin (Nie 1985c, 124).

Nie's entry into the Shanghai music world came by chance a week after the store went out of business. In March 1931, responding to an advertisement in the *Shenbao*, Nie Er successfully tested into Li Jinhui's Bright Moon Song and Dance Troupe. Nie would soon undermine his rapport with Li by criticizing the popular music director and composer of a Sinified jazz that became pejoratively known as "yellow music" (Jones 2001). Yet Nie shared certain affinities with Li Jinhui. Since the May 4th Movement, Li had been a leading proponent of adopting Mandarin Chinese to offset the plethora of regional dialects and to serve as a unifying force for China's nationalist project. Besides working for a time as director of the standard Chinese-language department associated with the Shanghai Zhonghua Shuju press, Li wrote compositions for children that were to be sung in Mandarin with simple, direct language. These qualities influenced Nie's song writing; we know from Nie's colleagues that he assiduously studied the national phonetic alphabet of Mandarin Chinese with Li so that he also could produce a standardized national language in his song compositions.

The Manchurian Incident was pivotal in Nie Er's turn to radical politics; it prompted him to reconsider the role of art and the relationship between Shanghai's cosmopolitan musical culture and the particular needs of China's revolution. Nie pondered in his diary on February 7, 1932: "How to make revolutionary music?... Isn't *classic*[al] music just a toy of the leisure class? I spend several hours a day practicing etudes, several years, a dozen years to become a violinist, and to what purpose? Can a performance of a Beethoven *sonata* excite and encourage the laboring masses? I've been mistaken! This is a dead end!" (1985a, 365). In the remaining few years before his life was tragically cut short during a drowning incident in 1935, Nie Er became an active participant in leftist artistic circles, wrote several articles on the role of music as an

instrument of nationalist propaganda, and composed a small but influential number of mass songs, many of them for the burgeoning Chinese film industry centered in Shanghai.

Like other leftist musicians of the time, Nie Er adroitly used cutting-edge technology—in particular the phonograph and sound cinema—which helped popularize his songs among young urban intellectuals, the base of the National Salvation Song Movement. Nie was mentored by the dramatist Tian Han, who helped Nie to gain a foothold into Pathé-EMI, where he developed an important relationship with the company’s music director, Ren Guang. Starting in 1933, Nie worked as vice director of the company’s music division and used the platform to circulate leftist music recordings. By the eve of the war, Pathé-EMI had recorded close to fifty mass songs. These included Nie Er’s popular “Dalu ge” (Song of the highway), “Kailu xianfeng” (Road-building pioneers), “Biyege” (Graduation song), and “Yiyongjun jinxingqu” (March of the volunteers) (Dai 1994, 424).

Nie Er’s mass songs (a genre popularized by the Soviet proletarian music movement of the mid-1920s) made for effective agitprop that could accompany the demonstrations and rallies that fueled the National Salvation Movement. Richard Kraus and Isabel Wong observe that Chinese “songs for the masses” may not have been the most sophisticated musical compositions, but they made for highly effective political propaganda (Kraus 1989, 49; Wong 1984, 121, 136, 143). They were sung either a cappella or with accompaniment that merely doubled the melody. Nie’s songs were typically sung in unison (*qichang*)—that is, without harmony. Most mass songs had several verses but were strophic: each verse repeated the same tune. As songs of protest and military mobilization, 2/4 march rhythms were common. To an unprecedented degree, Nie Er relied on single notes, rhythmic repetition, a limited melodic range, and a preference for short (eighth and sixteenth) notes. The songs were not technically difficult, which allowed Nie to bring them to his target audience—workers, peasants, children, and soldiers—so they could sing along. The language of the songs often relied on slogans employing a terse, didactic vernacular that could be easily understood and sung. These were mobilization songs with lyrics and rhythms designed to inspire political courage and to aid mass demonstrations (see figure 3). By singing together, young Chinese would build a shared consciousness of the nation.

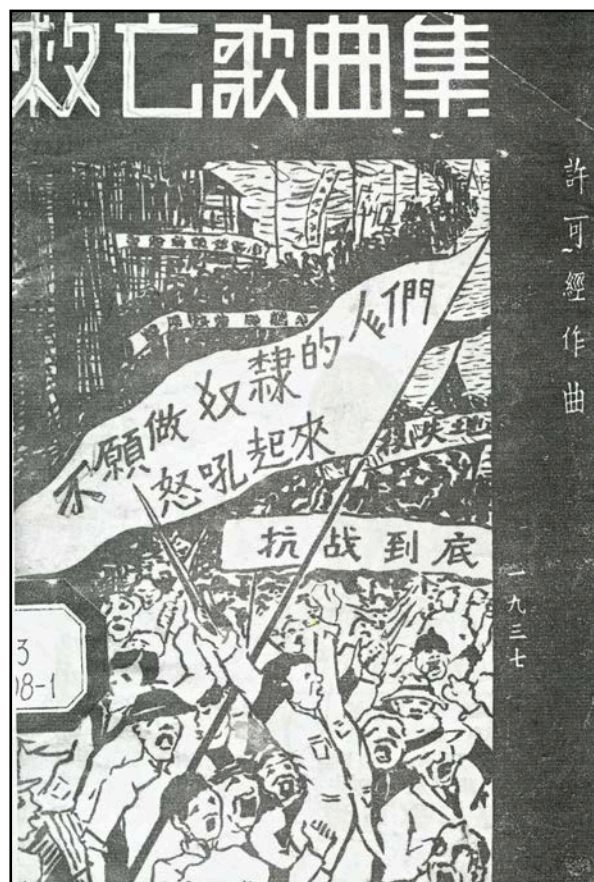


Figure 3. Cover of Xu Kejing, *Jiuwang gequji* (Anthology of Xu Kejing’s national salvation songs), 1937. Note that the central banner’s slogan—“Bu yuan zuo nuli de renmen” (All those who refuse to be slaves)—is a direct quote from Nie Er’s song “March of the Volunteers.”

Of all his works, Nie Er’s last song—“March of the Volunteers” (*Yiyongjun jinxingqu*), written in 1935 for the film *Fengyun ernu* (*Children of the storm*)—became the prototype for the National Salvation Song Movement and subsequent army songs (see figure 4).⁷ (The song’s widespread popularity in China and abroad during World War II was decisive in its selection as the national anthem upon the founding of the People’s Republic.) The introductory salvo, or bugle call; the opening and concluding motif, based on an ascending fourth interval (from D to G) inspired by “The Internationale”; and the driving rhythmic pattern of triplets, accented downbeats, and syncopation mesh perfectly with Tian Han’s lyrics, which call on singers and listeners to “arise” and “advance”—both figuratively and literally—and mobilize for the Resistance. In terms of the piece’s style and structure, Nie uses a Western form—the march—and bugle call based on a tonic triad as its core notes, producing a powerful, clarion-like effect.

But the entire piece is written in the Chinese pentatonic scale, with the exception of one *bianyin* note (the F) in measure 8. A master craftsman in using the inherent musicality of the Chinese language, Nie achieves a close fit between the rhyme (*shengyun*) and tone of the words (*yindiao*).

Yiyongjun jinxingqu
March of the Volunteers

Lyrics by: Tian Han Music by: Nie Er

Tempo di marcia

(Bugle solo) 起来! 不

8 愿做奴隶的人们! 把我们的血肉筑成我们新的长城! 中华

16 民族到了最危险的时候, 每个人被迫着发出最后的吼声! 起

24 *f* 来! 起来! 起来! 我们万众一心, 冒着敌人的炮火, 前进!

32 冒着敌人的炮火, 前进! 前进! 前进! 前进!

Figure 4. Nie Er's last song, "March of the Volunteers" (Yiyongjun jinxingqu), 1935. *Source:* Wang Y. H. (2000, 1: 286).

As described by musicologist Liang Maochun, "“March of the Volunteers” created a new national style characterized by its robust, resonant, heroic, and powerful sound—a fervent vigorous quality previously unknown to Chinese songs” (Liang 2006a, 77). Contemporary descriptions of the song underscored its militant quality using the term *xiongzhuang* (“with power and grandeur”), whose root word, *zhuang*, connotes martial and masculine qualities, as in *zhuangshi* (“heroic man” or “warrior”). This was a mark of approval, used to describe other popular military songs inspired by “March of the Volunteers.”

Nie Er's music also became the model for subsequent national salvation songs because Nie, along with other leftist musicians, denigrated their "competition"—the so-called academy music, popular love songs, and "yellow" jazz of Li Jinhui. Had Nie lived, it might have been more difficult for proponents of a Chinese "new music" to use his life experience and his mass songs as a counterpoint to the alleged elitism of the National Conservatory of Music.⁸ But in the immediate aftermath of his drowning, Nie's friend and Zuolian member Zhang Tianxu attacked the "academy clique" for its naïve faith in "art for art's sake" and for relying on the Nationalist government's institutional support.

He Lüting, who had worked in propaganda before studying composition and piano, adopted a more nuanced view of academy musicians. Given the need for Chinese musicians to develop a technical foundation in the discipline of music, He argued, it would be wrong to reject the conservatory, but it was valid to criticize faculty who refused to write for the National Salvation Song Movement. While He criticized composition professors and students for their rarefied songs and empty lyrics, he remained hopeful that they would "produce more patriotic and colloquial songs that the common people can easily sing, and thus fulfill their civic duty" (He L. [1936] 1999, 42).

He Lüting saved much of his vitriol for Li Jinhui. He and other leftists criticized Li's commercialization of sing-song girls exposing their legs (see figure 5), the sultry lyrics of his love songs, and his melding of "sexy, wild jazz" and Chinese melodies (Chen B. 1935).



Figure 5. Wang Renmei and the members of the Bright Moon Song and Troupe. *Source*: Xu and Yu (2009, 159).

He Lüting accused commercial songwriters of poisoning society with lewd and lascivious songs performed by “promiscuous women” (He [1936] 1999, 43). Supporters of Nie Er contended that Li’s music was an opiate of the petty urbanites, whereas Nie’s music had awakened their nationalist consciousness. As Chinese leftist Xi Ju wrote,

A primary reason I so respected Nie Er was that his songs could completely sweep away the likes of [Li Jinhui’s] “Drizzle” and “Darling, I Love You,” decadent sounds that rendered people’s nationalist consciousness numb and listless. Whereas his [Nie’s] songs were fervent, vigorous and heroic, exactly what we needed.... He could stimulate nationalism, he could make both singers and listeners strengthen their resolve. (1935, n.p.)

Liu Liangmo and the National Salvation Song Movement

Liu Liangmo, an ardent champion of Nie Er’s music and a pivotal leader of the song movement, also believed that Li’s songs had weakened China. His antidote was to organize song groups that could resist colonial domination and stimulate anti-imperialist consciousness:

If we Chinese want to break free of imperialism’s iron shackles..., if we want China to exert itself, our people must be able to loudly and vigorously sing powerful songs full of spirit and vitality. If the people of China can sing these songs, no doubt the sound will shake the earth. Any youth who can sing should spread the “people’s song” movement to each province, city, county, and countryside. The dawning of a new China will arrive when all the people of China can sing these majestic and powerful songs. (Liu L. [1935] 2010, 20–21)

Liu put his words into action by organizing song groups that would form the nucleus of the National Salvation Song Movement. His motivation arose from his deep-seated patriotism, Christian faith, and social activism. Born in Zhejiang in 1909, Liu converted to Christianity in middle school and went on to work as student secretary of the national YMCA (Luo 2005, 93). Although not a musician by training, after a chance reading of an American songbook, *Music Unites People* and participation in the university’s church choir, Liu became convinced that song groups were the most effective way to promote patriotism and moral virtue, despite China’s lack of a collective singing tradition (Ding 2009, 100). A populist streak also led him to extend song participation beyond church congregations and mission student groups: “My plan was to make music the possession of all and not the privilege of the few” (Lenz 1942, 52). With permission from K. Z. Loh, General Secretary of the Shanghai YMCA in February 1935, Liu established a mass singing club for some sixty underprivileged youth—clerks, doorkeepers, office boys,

elevator operators, and apprentices (Lenz 1942, 52). Within a week, the number of participants had nearly tripled, and by mid-1936 the group, known as the People's Song Association, had surpassed one thousand members (primarily students, clerks, and white-collar workers), with regional branches in Hong Kong and Guangzhou (Liu L. [1936] 2010, 24).

The People's Song Association was the first of many song groups and choruses established during the National Salvation Movement. In June 1935, Lü Ji took the music cell of the League of Left-Wing Dramatists that Nie Er once oversaw and used it as the nucleus for the National Salvation Amateur Choir (Kangri jiuwang yeyu hechangtuan) (see figure 6). Staffed by Lü and other left-wing musicians, the Amateur Choir broadened the social basis of its audience by teaching songs to students as well as factory workers. Within short order, schools and factories established their own choruses.



Figure 6. Lü Ji (standing, bottom right) with other members of the National Salvation Amateur Choir in Shanghai, 1936. Mai Xin stands in the back row, second from the left. Sitting in the third row on the right is Meng Bo. *Source*: Wu Y. (2005, 5).

Core activists in the People's Song Association, such as Mai Xin, participated in multiple organizations, using their networks to spread the song movement. Born in a Shanghai working-class family, after his father died in 1925, the nine-year-old Mai was forced to suspend his schooling and take up an apprenticeship, which eventually led to a job as an insurance clerk. In 1935, Mai joined the People's Song Association and in short order was appointed secretary,

responsible for planning group activities and performances. Through Lü Ji's introduction, Mai also joined the National Salvation Amateur Choir. By the spring of 1936, Lü and the composer Sun Shen had organized the Song and Lyric Writers Association (Geci qu zuozhe xiehui) and the Song Research Group (Gequ yanjiuhui). Mai frequently participated in these two organizations' discussions about composition, music theory, and songwriting, many of which took place at the residence of composer Xian Xinghai, who had just returned to Shanghai after a lengthy sojourn in France where he had studied with Vincent D'Indy and Paul Dukas studying at the Paris Conservatory. (Both Mai and Sun Shen would go on to study conducting and composition with Xian.) These contacts led Mai to engage in composition and organizing, teaching singing at the Qingxin Girls Middle School, for example (Wang Y. H. 1992, 236; Chen M. 1994, 509–511).

Innovative teaching approaches and an emphasis on forging a collective ethos through singing helped propel the movement and provided a template for song instruction among soldiers. To teach group singing to his student initiates, Liu began with his own composition, "Jiu Zhongguo" (Save China), sung in rounds to the melody for "Row, Row, Row Your Boat."

Jiu, jiu, jiu Zhongguo	Save, save, save China
Yiqi xiang qianjin	Onward we advance
Nuliya, nuliya, nuliya, nuliya!	Working hard, hard, hard!
Jiuguo yao fendou	Struggling to save the nation

The singing experience had the desired effect. As Liu recalls, "Within half an hour they had learned the song. At first they sang softly but by the time they had learned the song they were chanting loudly. Once they learned to sing it in canon form, they were in high spirits and full of fight. They had a taste of collectively singing patriotic revolutionary songs" (Liu L. [1978] 2010, 49). "Jiu Zhongguo" was followed by other national salvation songs, many of them written by Nie Er, such as "Daluge," "Kailu xianfeng," and "Biyege."

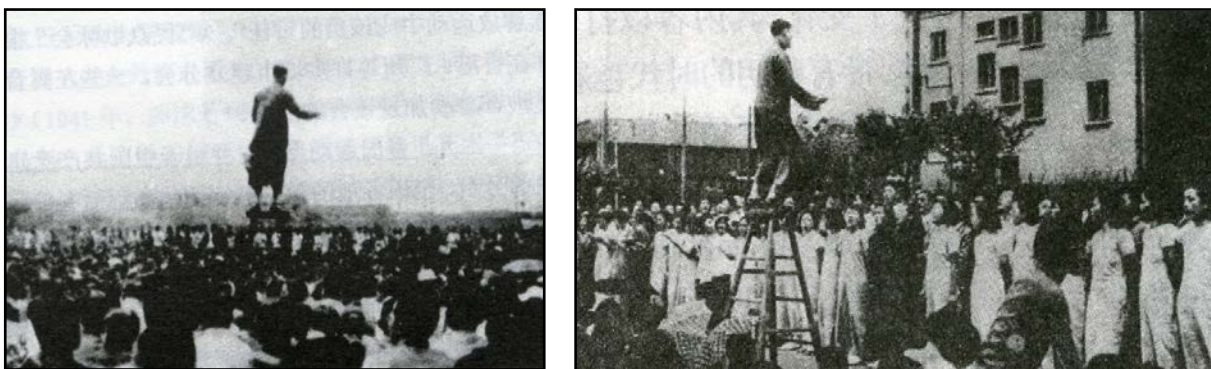
Through a process of teaching, publishing song anthologies, and performing at mass song rallies, Liu expanded the National Salvation Song Movement. He recalled that Nie's tragic death aroused in him a missionary zeal to teach others to sing national salvation songs so that he could carry on Nie's work (Liu L. 1957, 25). One of Liu's guiding principles was for participants to spread the patriotic songs they had mastered: "At the time our slogan was that once one learns a national salvation song one must teach it to others, one should pass on the national salvation

song to ten people, ten to hundred, a hundred pass it on to a thousand others, a thousand to ten thousand” (Liu L. [1978] 2010, 49). Using his contacts at other local branches of the YMCA, Liu promoted the movement to people from all walks of life.

In the meantime, Liu had begun to recruit the more skilled singers to become vocal instructors. Two of his recruits were Mai Xin and Meng Bo, who went on to play important roles as activists and composers of national salvation songs. Mai and Meng coauthored *Dazhong gesheng* (Mass singing), the first anthology devoted exclusively to national salvation songs. The book was first published in 1936 and was reprinted four times in its first year; a second volume was issued the following year (Wang Y. H. 1992, 237). The first volume included over three hundred national salvation songs and articles on song composition, folk music, and building the song movement. In his preface, Mai emphasized the goal of popularization, the need to “bring the national salvation songs to every corner of China—to the street corners, countryside, factories, schools, shops, and army” (Chen M. 1994, 510). *Dazhong gesheng* provided the main material for the song movement, often reprinting songs that had been published in journals and newspapers. By 1937 over a third of all music-related publications were anthologies of Resistance, national salvation, and patriotic songs. During the following two years, some 91 out of 151 titles, approximately 60 percent, were war related (Chen J. and Chen J. 2005, 255–259, 273–277, 292–296). Liu Liangmo’s most popular publication, the pocketbook version of *Qingnian geji* (Collection of youth songs), was printed between 1935 and 1936 in seven editions, totaling over ten thousand copies. These anthologies show that Nie Er’s most popular mass songs occupy pride of place. In general terms, the mass song, typified by the march form, became the prototypical national salvation song, but one should also note the development of patriotic lyrical songs starting in 1934 with songs such as Nie Er’s “Tietixia de genü” (Girl under the iron heel), He Lüting’s “Jialingjiang shang” (On the Jialing River), and Zheng Lücheng’s “Yan’an song” (Ode to Yan’an). In sum, the years 1936–1939 witnessed an outpouring of publications devoted to national salvation songs, reinforcing their status as the “new Chinese music” and fueling the social movement.

Publications and song instruction were oriented toward mass song rallies, which served to create a spirit of national unity and, in the words of writer Zou Taofen, a collective ethos: “Besides educating the people and awakening the people, this type of large-scale mass song rally can also cause the people to feel the great power of the collective. One person’s voice is weak

and lacks force, but the collective sound of a hundred thousand will reverberate across the heavens, topple the mountains, and overturn the seas” (1936, 31). One of the first mass rallies was held on June 7, 1936, to mark the founding of the National Salvation Association. Roughly one thousand singers representing the People’s Song Association and eight other choral groups assembled at the West Gate athletic field near Nanjing Road (see figures 7 and 8).



Figures 7 (left) and 8 (right). Liu Liangmo conducting the People’s Chorus at Shanghai West Gate athletic field on June 7, 1936. *Sources:* Xu and Yu (2009, 175) and Xia (2004, 170).

Liu Liangmo directed his singers in a program filled with Nie Er’s mass songs as well as Ren Guang’s celebrated “Dahui laojiaqu” (Fight to regain our homes) (see figure 9). Ren’s march song expressed through colloquial Chinese and mobilizing slogans the people’s determination to regain the northeast. An example of the emerging “national” style of Chinese music, “Dahui laojiaqu” adapted the Western march form by relying on the pentatonic scale, Southern style melody, and antiphonal singing to reinforce lyricist An E’s words—“Fight to regain our homes”— thus combining elements of the militant mass song and lyrical style.

Ren Guang drives home the ideological force of the lyrics by repeating the title phrase four times at the song’s opening and using antiphonal singing (call and response) and sequencing (a melodic pattern successively repeated at different pitches). The recapitulation (starting at measure 41) reaffirms the lyrics. The song’s second phrase emphasizes resistance to imperialism by using long notes to accompany the lyrics “diguo zhuyi” (imperialism). The second part of the song (starting at measure 29) is more expansive, allowing more time for the weight of the lyrics describing Japanese crimes to sink in: “Ta shasi women tongbao, ta qiangzhan women tudi” (He killed our compatriots, he stole our land). At the climax of the song, the music ascends to the

highest note of the piece alongside the lyrics “Dongbei tongbao kuaiqilai!” (Northeastern compatriots, quickly arise!).

Dahui laojiaqu

Lyrics by: An E Fight to Regain Our Homes Music by: Ren Guang

打 回 老 家 去! 打 回 老 家 去! 打 回 老 家 去!

10
打 回 老 家 去! 打 走—— 日 本 帝 国 主 义! 打 走—— 日 本 帝 国

20
主 义! 东 北 地 方—— 是 我 们 的! 他—— 杀 死 我 们 同 胞, 他

30
强 占 我 们 土 地, 东 北 同 胞—— 快 起 来! —— 我 们 不 做 亡 国

40
奴 隶 打 回 老 家 去! 打 回 老 家 去! 打 回 老 家 去!

50

Figure 9. Ren Guang’s celebrated “Dahui laojiaqu” (Fight to regain our homes), 1936. *Source:* Wang Y. H. (2000, 1: 296–297).

In the second half of the program, Liu taught other patriotic songs, such as Xian Xinghai’s “Jiuguo junge” (National salvation military anthem), to the estimated three to five thousand spectators. “Jiuguo junge” was the perfect model for proponents of national defense music, calling on all social classes to unite and implicitly criticizing Chiang Kai-shek’s “annei rangwai” (first pacification, then resistance) policy with its lyrics: “Point the guns to the invaders and march in uniform steps! Don’t hurt the civilians, don’t shoot fellow countrymen” (Wang Y. H. 2000, 367–368). Not surprisingly, by the summer of 1936, both the foreign concessions and the Nanjing government began to curb performances, songs, organizations, and publications, and

to threaten the arrest of song leaders. Rumors quickly spread, for instance, that Liu Liangmo was detained after the June song rally. Government leaders viewed songs as potentially subversive. For one of the first Resistance songs, “Kangdige” (Resist the enemy song), Huang Zi had been forced to substitute “enemy” for “Japan” in its title to comply with government censorship policies. Meng Bo’s “Xisheng yidao zuihou guantou” (Time to sacrifice), with lyrics by Mai Xin, was more brazen in its criticism of Chiang Kai-shek’s appeasement policy toward Japan, refuting the Generalissimo’s speech at the Fifth Nationalist Party Congress of November 1935, in which he had declared that “it is not the time to sacrifice all and never rush to sacrifice” (Li S. 2006, 437). Likely motivated by such songs and their mass appeal, authorities disbanded the People’s Song Association and National Salvation Amateur Choir in August 1936.

Despite government censorship policies, the lull in National Salvation Song Movement activities proved only temporary. The lyrical song “Songhua jiangshang” (On the Songhua River), which evokes the bitter nostalgia of soldiers for the northeast after they had been ordered south to vanquish the Red Army, was allegedly sung at a student demonstration in Xian and witnessed by Zhang Xueliang, thus bolstering his decision to kidnap Chiang Kai-shek the following day.⁹ Although this story is most likely apocryphal, what is more certain is that, as a consequence of Zhang’s bold actions, the ensuing United Front led the Nationalists to adopt a more tolerant policy and to tacitly endorse the song movement. By the spring of 1937, having received authorization from none other than Chiang Kai-shek to teach mass singing to the soldiers at the front, Liu Liangmo and Lü Ji began organizing in Suiyuan and Shanxi (Lin Y. 1941, 71). And one year later, the cultural propaganda division of the Third Bureau (Junshi weiyuanhui zhengzhibu di santing) based in Wuhan was coordinating mobile theater troupes, thus bringing them into the fold of the Nationalist government.

Taking Song to the Troops

Liu Liangmo’s song rallies and song instruction not only served to mobilize civilians but also provided Liu with valuable experience to propagate songs among soldiers. In February 1937, acting under the auspices of the national YMCA, Liu formed a war zone relief team and joined Yan Xishan’s forces in Suiyuan, which Yan had placed under the command of General Fu Zuoyi. No sooner had Liu arrived in early March than he was told to carry out Yan Xishan’s order for all troops in Suiyuan and Shanxi to learn Xian Xinghai’s “Jiuguo junge.” Liu was given

ten days to teach over ten thousand soldiers the song for a performance at an official inspection. Perhaps more unsettling to Liu was his fear that soldiers' "uncivilized manner (*yeman wuli*) might lead them to ignore me and even force me to leave" (Liu L. 1938, 6). But after residing in the army barracks, Liu quickly befriended many soldiers and recanted his jaundiced views:

My success in teaching songs was beyond my expectations. I discovered that it was even easier to teach singing to soldiers than to the common person. On one windy morning I taught 5,000 soldiers the "March of the Volunteers." When they started singing the sand blew into their mouths, but they didn't mind and kept at it in high spirits.... They learned quickly because they were organized and disciplined. Singing also enriched their regimented lifestyle, so they accepted it more quickly.... The work in Suiyuan was one of the most fulfilling in my life and to think of my worries when I started, how ridiculous. I can affirm that there is no reason to fear or hate soldiers. On the contrary, they should be respected and loved (1938, 7–8).

Liu's work with the soldiers was greatly facilitated by Fu Zuoyi, who shared the view that songs could be used as weapons to combat the Japanese and to mitigate the effects of widespread illiteracy among the troops. According to Fu, soldiers might ignore political lectures, "but if one teaches them to sing a song they'll learn it in an instant and will be able to memorize those words, understand their meaning, and be able to sing you the song" (Liu L. [1937a] 2010, 39). Songs and recitation of slogans were an integral part of Fu's political indoctrination program, since they could impart discipline and unity and dissolve barriers between civilians and soldiers. As he remarked, "Mass singing and slogans are the two great weapons to train the people and soldiers. Of the two, singing is more important because during the war it can stimulate a spirit of unity among our soldiers and masses" (Liu L. [1937b] 2010, 42).

With General Fu's encouragement, Liu set about teaching both officers and troops. Liu's teaching methods were shaped by practical concerns. The enormity of the drill grounds and severity of the seasonal sandstorms made it impossible to teach several thousand soldiers at a time, so Liu first assembled one hundred lower-ranking officers and taught them to sing "March of the Volunteers" and other national salvation songs that had been selected by Fu Zuoyi from Liu's songbook. After learning the songs, the officers assembled several thousand soldiers on the drill grounds. Liu stood on an elevated stand in the center of a square platform while the officers stood by each corner of the platform (see figure 10): "I would sing a phrase, the officers below me would sing the phrase, and then the soldiers would follow. In this manner we defeated the

windblown sand and all the soldiers learned to sing these powerful resistance songs” (Liu L. [1978] 2010, 61).

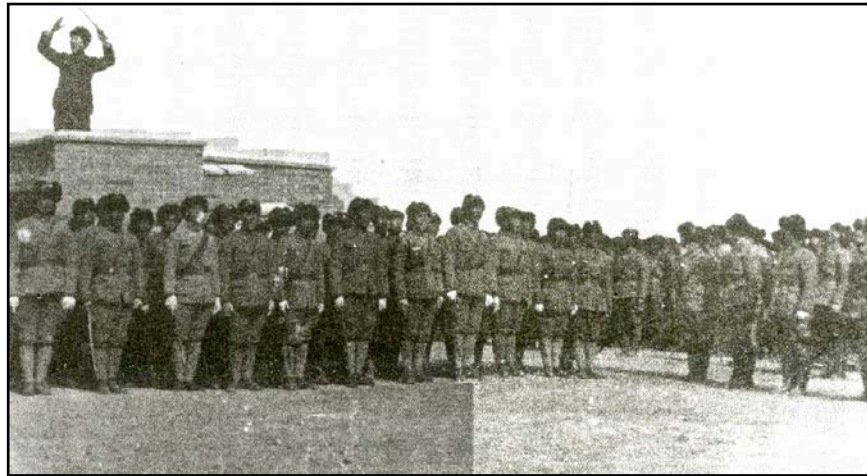


Figure 10. Liu Liangmo directing Fu Zuoyi’s troops in singing patriotic army songs, 1936.
Source: C. Liu (2010, 42).

After a month in Suiyuan, Liu left for Shanxi, where he began to implement Yan Xishan’s plan to train eighteen hundred students to become mass song instructors. From Liu’s description one can sense the emotional impact of the songs:

Each time they sing “Dahui laojiaqu” or “Wuyue de xianhua” [Flowers in May], many people are in tears. In the streets of Taiyuan, women and children all sing these majestic songs.... The other day the Taiyuan Sacrifice Group for National Salvation and Great Unity held three days of “singing demonstrations” with several thousand participants dressed up and booming out national salvation songs. The atmosphere was full of energy and had tremendous results. (Liu L. [1937c] 2010, 25–26)

Liu then proceeded to Datong, where he taught songs to cavalry officers and their men. After four days of instruction the soldiers performed for over two thousand civilians. As Liu recalled, “In the past it was rare for soldiers to receive the people, so we were pioneering in holding the concert” (Liu L. [1937b] 2010, 43).

Between 1937 and 1939, Liu and other members of the National YMCA Soldier Relief Board facilitated closer relations between civilians and soldiers and the spread of the song movement among troops. In her social history of the Anti-Japanese War, Diana Lary suggests that the rise of mass nationalism improved the status of common soldiers, who became “soldiers

of the nation.” No longer was the soldier equated with riffraff. Propaganda posters, for instance, reversed the traditional jingle “Good iron doesn’t make for nails; good men don’t make soldiers” (Haotie bu da ding, haonan bu dangbing), changing it to “Good iron must make nails; good men must make soldiers” (Haotie yao dangbing, haonan yao dangbing) (Lary 2010, 52–53). Yet Liu’s accounts of the relief work suggest that staff workers kept their distance from wounded soldiers, thus reinforcing mistrust between the two parties. Besides enjoining female relief workers to be considerate but “not too informal” with soldiers, Liu adapted Mao Zedong’s “fish to water” analogy of the Red Army’s relationship to the people to improve soldier-civilian relations: “The commoners are like water, the soldiers like fish; fish and water are indivisible, the soldiers and people are one family. If the fish leave the water they will decay; if the soldiers leave the people, they will encounter many difficulties” (Liu L. 1938, 18).

Liu’s solution was to establish wounded soldier clubs (Shangbing julebu) within hospitals, where relief workers would work from morning until night with the explicit mission of befriending the veterans. Six relief workers would be assigned to every five hundred wounded. The clubs were education centers, using the arts to boost wounded soldiers’ morale and foster better relations between soldiers and civilians (Liu L. 1938, 44). Relief workers helped soldiers write letters, chatted with them about their hometowns, played chess, taught songs, and held song performances, often by children who evoked imagery of playful martial heroes (see figure 11).¹⁰

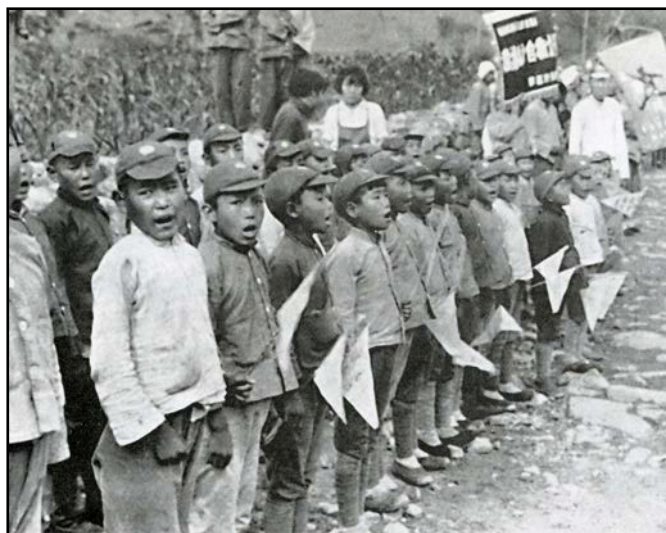


Figure 11. A children’s society in Western Hebei singing Meng Bo’s “Now Is the Time for Sacrifice.” *Source*: Carlson ([1940] 2003, 220).

Mai Xin followed in Liu Liangmo's footsteps by working closely with soldiers. To mark the founding of the Shanghai Nationalist Salvation Association, Mai penned an essay, "One Hundred Million Guns Aimed at the Enemy," advocating greater unity among musicians, more instruction of national salvation songs to the people, and the establishment of wartime relief teams that would either do propaganda work and fundraising in the rear areas or go to the front to do service work and first aid work for soldiers (Mai [1937] 1984, 82). Many musicians joined other cultural workers (predominantly former Zuolian members) to form war zone relief corps, and a dozen mobile theatrical troupes (Zhanshi yidong yanjudui) fanned out from Shanghai, bringing national salvation songs and drama to the peasantry and soldiers in the hinterland. These activities explain the popularity of patriotic songs in both urban and rural areas. As the painter and writer Feng Zikai noted,

Even shepherd boys in three family villages among the barren mountains were singing "Arise, arise," "March on, march on." From grandmothers in Changsha, Hunan, to the rickshaw pullers of Hankou, Hubei, all could sing the lyrics, "The Chinese people have arrived at their most perilous time." ...[O]ne can now affirm that wherever there is a home, there will be War of Resistance songs. (Feng 1938, 98)

In September 1937, Mai Xin joined the Nationalist Army's Eighth Company under the command of Zhang Fakui and, for the next three years, worked for the War Zone Service Corps as a political instructor, traveling with various Nationalist army units to Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Guangdong, Hunan, and Hubei. A CCP member since 1938, Mai propagated the resistance from within the Guomindang (GMD) army until adverse military and political conditions forced him to leave the front in Hubei in 1940 for Xian and eventually Yan'an (Wang Y.H. 1992, 238).¹¹

Like his mentor, Liu Liangmo, Mai sought to build trust between soldiers and civilians. To be an effective teacher among the troops required basic military knowledge and empathy, so that soldiers would not dismiss the teacher as a "commoner" (*laobaixing*)—the perjorative term describing those without military training (Mai [1938] 1984, 85). Anticipating the more formal guidelines set out by Mao Zedong in his 1942 "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art," Mai enjoined cultural workers to live among soldiers, farmers, and workers so that they could reform themselves and absorb materials that they might then bring back to the people in artistic form. Mai also stressed the need for a popularized song form. His army songs, such as

“Youjiduige,” “Guomin gemingjunge,” and “Tiaoshang zhandouji,” were intended to reflect the rhythm of soldiers’ lives and to be sung while on the march.

Xian Xinghai was another composer who brought his songs to the troops. Soon after the Battle of Shanghai erupted, Xian Xinghai joined forces with the Second Shanghai National Salvation mobile theater troupe led by the left-wing playwright Hong Shen (see figure 12).



Figure 12. Xian Xinghai (first row, third from the left) and the Second Shanghai National Salvation mobile theater troupe. *Source:* Li L. (2009, 259).

As the sole musician in the troupe, Xian taught and directed songs while his colleagues performed patriotic dramas. The troupe left Shanghai on August 20, 1937, and for the next two months traveled through Jiangsu, to Henan, and then south to Wuhan, stopping in cities and county seats where they would take shelter from the periodic air raids and perform for students and soldiers. After surviving an air raid in Nanjing, Xian redoubled his efforts: “We faced constant danger during this War of Resistance, but this made our lives interesting! We all wanted to undertake bravely this sacred National Salvation work!” (Xian [1937–40] 1989, 190, Aug. 24, 1937 diary entry). Reaching Luoyang in mid-September 1937, Xian taught Ren Guang’s “Dahui laoiaqu” and his own “Jiuguo junge” to over a thousand soldiers. “Jiuguo junge” was typical of National Salvation march songs in its use of the pentatonic scale and of syncopation and dotted rhythms (see figure 13). These rhythmic patterns accompanied the slogans “Point the guns to the invaders and march in uniform steps! Don’t hurt the civilians, don’t shoot fellow countrymen. Defend the Chinese nation, forever a free man!” which are highlighted in the more expansive B

section of the piece (starting at measure 12), thus creating an image of people confidently marching and shouting slogans as they advance.¹²

Jiuguo Junge

Lyrics by: Saike Martial song of National Salvation Music by: Xian Xinghai
Arranged by: [Arranger]

Energetico

枪口对外, 齐步前进! 不伤老百姓, 不打自己人!

9 我们是铁的队伍, 我们是铁的心! 维护中华民族, 永做

19 自由人! 枪口对外, 齐步前进! 维护中华民族,

29 永做自由

Figure 13. Xian Xinghai's "Jiuguo junge" (National salvation army song), 1936. *Source*: Wang Y. H. (2000, 2: 367–368).

In subsequent days, Xian supervised several thousand soldiers and officers, army choruses, and an army band (a rarity at the time). On the anniversary of the Manchurian Incident, these activities culminated with Xian directing over twenty thousand soldiers in a mass song rally at Luoyang Garrison Command (Xian [1937–40] 1989, 197–199, Sept. 14–22, 1937 diary entries). After reaching Wuhan, Xian continued his work in the National Salvation Song Movement, organizing several choruses, composing songs, and organizing mass song rallies (some exceeding one hundred thousand people) under the auspices of the Third Bureau. Xian's contact with soldiers was less frequent, but in February 1938 the second troupe performed in Anlu County for several thousand soldiers of the Thirty-Fourth Division, who joined in singing "Youji junge" and "Dang bingge" (Xian [1937–40] 1989, 206, Feb. 2, 1938 diary entry).

Wartime March Songs

Once the war broke out in 1937, the military tenor of the songs became even more pronounced. Songs now explicitly referred to conscription, guerrilla warfare, battles, air raids, and specific armies. Some of the more popular songs involving conscription and soldiers marching off to war, such as “Zhuangding shang qianxian” (Conscript off to the front), “Zhuangdinghao” (Good conscripts), and “Huidao qianxianqu” (Return to the front), were written by Zhang Shu, a leftist singer who coordinated musical activities with Xian Xinghai for the Third Bureau in 1938. Zhang Shu’s “Zhangfu qu dangbing” (Husband goes soldiering) is representative of a new Chinese lyrical style employing narrative. The lyrics are based on a poem written by Lao She that had been published in the popular literary journal *Kang daodi* (Resist to the end). The poem employs *shuochang* style (part verse, part prose) and is narrated from the perspective of a soldier’s wife, who selflessly enjoins her husband to join the Resistance and risk his life to save his country for the glory of his family. Zhang Shu’s lyrical style was directly influenced by his interest in Kunqu; several phrases in “Zhangfu qu dangbing” are musical quotations from Kunqu operas. Thus, Zhang Shu created a new style based on both the northern ballad tradition and a southern melody (Wang Y. H. 2002, 237; Zuoteng 2006, 32).¹³

Within days of the war’s outbreak, Mai Xin composed the song “Dadao jinxingqu,” which would become the de facto marching song of the Nationalist Army and was said to be loudly sung by soldiers as they charged their enemies (Wang Y. H. 1992, 241). Inspired by the valiant defense at the Marco Polo Bridge put up by the Broadwords Squadron in the Twenty-Ninth Route Corps of the National Revolutionary Army, Mai Xin used forceful rhythms and a simple, forthright melody to express the determination and patriotic fervor of the Chinese soldiers. Mai effectively placed accented rhythms to emphasize key phrases, such as “ba ta xiaomie” (destroy them), and also instructed singers to shout out the words “Charge!” (Chong a) and “Kill!” (Sha).

He Lüting’s “Youjidiuge” (Song of the Partisans) was even more directly inspired by the war. In mid-August 1937, He joined the First National Salvation Mobile Theater Troupe and left Shanghai under a barrage of artillery fire. The troupe performed in Zhengzhou, Luoyang, and Xian and then crossed the Yellow River, making its way to Linfeng in southern Shanxi, where they were to perform for Yan Xishan and his troops. Upon finding out that an adjacent village was home to the Eighth Route Army Office, He and his fellow troupe members decided to spend

two weeks there—time to celebrate the New Year and to discuss performances and new compositions. Conversations with the office director about the Eighth Route Army’s guerrilla tactics and its resourcefulness in acquiring artillery from Japanese POWs as well as from Yan Xishan’s fleeing troops inspired the subject matter of the song and its lyrics—“We have no rifles, we have no artillery; The enemy will make them for us.” He Lüting’s own experience en route to Linfeng, taking refuge in an air raid shelter from enemy machine-gun fire, would lead him to recreate the sound through the rhythmic beat of small drums. He recalled (see figure 14):

I reflected on how to make war tactics appear in a specific mass song. One had to use [real] life images to impart an emotional flavor so that both singers and listeners would retain their interest. But the thought and lives of the guerrilla soldier are complicated and diverse, and I needed to make the song vivid and have a positive educational significance. Thus, the lyrics emphasized heroism, tenacity, resourcefulness, and optimism, while the music emphasized the joy and lively rhythm of the marching troops. (He L. 1961, 249)

The song’s popularity in the Communist base areas and throughout northern China was no doubt helped by Commander-in-Chief Zhu De, who enthusiastically encouraged He to teach Communist forces “Youjidiuge.” Of equal importance was He Lüting’s skill in synthesizing Western compositional technique with his knowledge of the Chinese music tradition. To pique listeners’ interest and make the song easier to learn, He used the Western European folk song structure AABA, which he described as conforming to compositional principles for quatrain (*jueju*) forms of Tang poetry in using *qi*, *cheng*, *zhuan*, *he* (opening, elaboration, transition, and summation). More specifically, He changed the rhythm of the third musical sentence (measures 9–12) to produce a strong contrast with the other three identical sections, thus avoiding monotony and strengthening the piece’s climax. Other compositional devices included using the drumbeat to connote the soldier’s march, underscoring key words by placing them on the downbeat or giving them greater note value, and, in He’s inimitable style, providing an undulating melody and brisk tempo that imparted a cheerful and lively feel.¹⁴

Xian Xinghai’s song “Zai Taihangshanshang” (On the Taihang Mountains) also succeeded in expressing the partisans’ optimism and their will to achieve final victory. Although Xian composed the music while in Wuhan in 1938, the lyricist Gui Taosheng was at the front lines in Shanxi, providing Xian with vivid imagery of heroic guerrilla soldiers taking advantage of the Taihang Mountain strongholds:

The red sun brightens the east,
 God of freedom is joyfully singing!
 Ten thousand torrents and a thousand crags, as hard as steel and iron,
 The anti-Japanese flame is burning on the Taihang Mountains, swollen with high spirit!
 Mother bids her son to fight the Japanese, and wife sends her husband to the battlefield.
 We are on the Taihang Mountains, on the Taihang Mountains.
 In the high mountains and dense woods,
 We are powerful and horses are strong.
 Where the enemy attacks, where we send them to hell! (Li S. 2006, 45)

Youjiduige

Song of the Guerrilla Troupe

Music by: He Luting

我们 都是 神 枪手， 每一 颗 子 弹 消 灭 一 个 仇 敌 ； 我 们

都 是 飞 行 军， 哪 怕 那 山 高 水 又 深。 在 密 密 的 树 林 里， 到 处 都

安 排 同 志 们 的 宿 营 地； 在 高 高 的 山 岗 上， 有 我 们 无 数 好 兄 弟。

没 有 吃， 没 有 穿， 自 有 那 敌 人 送 上 前。 没 有 枪， 没 有 炮，

敌 人 给 我 们 送。 我 们 生 长 在 这 里， 每 一 寸 土 地 都 是 我 们 自 己 的， 无 论

谁 要 强 占 去， 我 们 就 和 他 拼 到 底。

Figure 14. He Lüting's "Youjiduige" (Song of the Partisans), 1937. *Source:* Wang Y. H. (2000, 2: 432–434).

The song was an immediate success. Xian recalled that its premiere at Hankou's War of Resistance Memorial Week Song Festival had the audience clamoring for a repeat performance: "It has spread throughout the country. Guerrilla forces at Taihang Mountain have chosen this song as their army song. Commoners and children can sing it, and everywhere one hears, 'Where the enemy attacks, where we send them to hell!'" (Xian [1940–1945] 1989, 133).

The song's popularity can be traced to Xian's compositional skills and his melding of romantic and realist temperament.¹⁵ Unlike most national salvation songs, which were sung in unison, Xian composed a two-part chorus. And rather than rely on major keys, another hallmark of the mass songs, Xian wrote in the key of E natural minor (giving the piece a Russian flavor). He organically combined the march form with a lyrical style, lending the piece a romantic color.¹⁶ Written in binary form, the first part of the song evokes the natural world of Taihang Mountain. The use of the tonic G coinciding with the lyrics "kanba" (look) and "tingba" (listen) produces a resolute affect and underscores the lyric's message of resistance characterized by the anti-Japanese flame and the mother urging her son to fight the enemy. In the second part of the song, a quick, march-like tempo punctuated by dotted rhythms and syncopation creates the image of partisan forces galloping after their Japanese foes (He 2002, 112).

In terms of its artistic achievement, "Zai Taihangshang" marked one of the high points of the National Salvation Song Movement. But by the summer of 1938, if Xian Xinghai's experience is representative, divisions had emerged within the movement, reflecting the deterioration of the United Front. Writing in the spring of 1940 from Yan'an, Xian recalled his experience in Wuhan with mixed feelings. On the one hand, the work had been exhilarating; Xian derived great satisfaction from organizing performances and song rallies, and bringing choruses to schools and factories, and the year he had spent in Wuhan was one of his most productive. On the other hand, despite his progress, Xian began to chafe under Nationalist government controls imposed on cultural workers in the Third Bureau: "The controls, censorship and banning of certain songs made it impossible for songwriters and composers to give full play to their forces. I gradually felt there was little to do." Xian recalled that he kept himself busy teaching songs during the evenings but idled the day away in his office: "There was a fat man who had to nap every afternoon and his snores would shake several rooms, making us laugh. But was this lifestyle fitting for the War of Resistance?" (Xian [1940] 1989, 104).

Bureaucratic supervision and enmity toward Xian Xinghai (perhaps caused by envy) left him isolated and resentful. By the fall of 1938, numerous song groups that Xian had helped establish were being disbanded. The National Song Association (Quanguo geyongjie xiehui), which represented over a dozen song groups, was replaced by a new government-controlled National Music Resist-the-Enemy Association (Quanguo yinyuejie kangdi xiehui). According to Xian, the new song groups “did not welcome the cadres of the prior groups, nor did they sing my songs or many of the national salvation songs; rather, they saw me as an object to be scorned, someone who clearly expressed the opinion of the ‘noisy faction’ (*naozongpai*).” Exactly why these rifts occurred is unclear from Xian’s account, but he does suggest that the old divide between leftist musicians and conservatory-trained musicians had resurfaced when his efforts to create a China Music Day to commemorate Nie Er’s death were rebuffed by those who sought to honor the Shanghai conservatory composer Huang Zi, who had died in 1938. As a result, Xian’s productivity fell, and he sank into depression. Eventually, after receiving an invitation from the faculty at the Lu Xun Arts Academy and guarantees that his artistic freedoms would not be curtailed, Xian, accompanied by his newlywed, Qian Yunling, ventured to the Communist base. He would compose some of his major works in Yan’an during the late 1930s, most famously the “Yellow River Cantata,” “Production Cantata,” and the beginning of his “National Liberation Symphony” (see figure 15). These compositions were most important for their melding of native Chinese folkloric style and European concert music to create a new Chinese music.¹⁷



Figure 15. Xian Xinghai rehearsing “Yellow River Cantata” in Yan’an. *Source*: Xu and Yu (2009, 190).

Balujun jinxingqu

Lyrics by: Gong Mu

Eighth Route Army March

Music by: Zheng Lucheng

tempo di marcia

向前向前 向前! 我们的队伍——向太阳, 脚踏着祖国的

9
大—— 背负着民族的希望, —— 我们是一支不可战胜的力

18
量。 我们是善战的健——儿, 我们是人民的武——装,

27
无 从畏惧, 决 不屈服, 坚 决抵抗, 直 到把日寇 逐出国 境,

34
自 由的旗 帜 高高飘 扬 听! 风在呼 啸 军 号响; 听! 抗 战

43
歌 声多—— 嘹 亮。 同 志们 整 齐步 伐 奔 赴解 放的 疆 场, 同 志们

51
整 齐步 伐 奔 赴敌 人的 后 方, 向 前, 向 前! 我 们的 队 伍 向 太 阳, 向 华 北 的

58
原 野, 向 塞 外 的 山 岗。

Figure 16. Excerpt from “Balujun jinxingqu” (Eighth Route Army march), the fourth movement of Zheng Lücheng and Gong Mu’s cantata, “Balujun dahechang” (Eighth Route Army cantata), 1939. Source: Wang Y. H. (2000, 2: 451).

Communist Military Anthems

It would fall to Zheng Lücheng, a Korean national inspired by Xian Xinghai, to compose music honoring the Eighth Route Army and continue the martial music tradition. Born to poor farmers in South Chölla, Zheng came to China in 1933 at the age of fifteen. Zheng first studied in Nanjing at the Korean Revolutionary Cadre School established by the Korean Heroic Corps, an underground Korean nationalist organization led by Kim Won-bong. After completing his studies there in 1934, Zheng participated in clandestine anti-Japanese work and took voice lessons in Shanghai with a Russian instructor. In early 1937, Zheng joined the Korean Liberation Federation (Chaoxian jiefang tongmeng), and when the war broke out, he threw himself into propaganda work in the National Salvation Movement and met Xian Xinghai. After studying at the Lu Xun Institute of Arts in Yan'an, in 1939, Zheng became a vocal instructor there and in the propaganda department of Kangda, the War of Resistance Military and Political University (He X. 2002, 109; Chen Z. 2005, 141).¹⁸ Zheng recalled:

At that time the mood of everyone singing was full of vim and vigor.... Each time we went to hear a report, five or six to ten thousand people would assemble in the square thirty minutes to an hour before the report to learn songs.... When over ten thousand people sang it was truly earthshaking. There was singing before class and meals. The troops on the march also sang, students sang, cadres sang, commoners sang... Yan'an was not only the sacred site of the revolution, but a true city of song. (Chen Z. 2005, 119)

That fall, inspired by a performance of Xian Xinghai's "Yellow River Cantata," Zheng collaborated with the poet and former Zuolian member Gong Mu in writing a cantata honoring the heroism of the Eighth Route Army. Among the six movements, the fourth, "Balujun jinxingqu," was the most popular (see figure 16).¹⁹ The "Eighth Route Army March" achieved a breakthrough in combining martial qualities of the army song (the bugle motif, 2/4 march rhythm, use of syncopation) with a national (*minzu*) style. This style was expressed in this song with a ternary form common to folk songs known as *tou, shen, wei* (head, body, and tail). Each line invoked the folk music structure of a similar first part but changed latter half (*tongtou bianwei*) (Liang 2006b, 137). Zheng was especially adept at creating musical images and movement to denote martial music. The opening two measures, with their repeated high C note, acted as a bugle call and set a rhythmic motif (consisting of a dotted eighth, a sixteenth, and two eighth notes) for the entire piece. They accompany the words "march ahead" (*xiangqian*),

repeated three times to compensate for Gong's opening lyrics, which Zheng felt lacked sufficient vigor. This rhythmic motif returns in the third phrase of the second musical period, accompanying the lyrics "Valiant, unyielding, forever resisting" (Wucong weiju, jue bu qufu, jianjue dikang). These three measures (27–29) adopt an ascending sequence that culminates in the first climax of the song. The motif returns at the start of the third section of the piece, coinciding with the lyrics "Comrades, march in step..." (Tongzhimen zhengqi bufa). In measure 54, the interval of a sixth corresponding to the lyrics "tongzhi" recreates the bugle sound and leads to the second climax. The song's coda (starting seven measures from the end) repeats the original motif theme and lyrics "march ahead," thus unifying the entire song. The song ends with the lyrics: "Our troops [march] toward the sun, march toward the open country of North China, and march beyond the mountain sentries of the Great Wall" (Women de duiwu xiang taiyang, xiang huabei de yuanye, xiang saiwai de shangang), emphasizing the indomitable force of the Eighth Route Army restoring the nation's borders.

By 1939, each of the two main Communist armies had its own specific song that instilled pride among the ranks. The New Fourth Army Song was composed by He Shide, whose experiences during the mid- to late 1930s exemplifies the extent and limits of United Front work among musicians. In multiple venues He Shide straddled the divides between amateur and professional musicians, Chinese and foreigners, Communists and Nationalists. Born in 1910 in Yangjiang County, Guangdong, He grew up in a family of Christian converts (his father, a local schoolteacher, had studied English with an American missionary), which encouraged his musical talents. In the late 1920s he entered Shanghai's Xinhua Art School, where he studied harmony, composition, instrumentation, and Kunqu opera. He also took theory, harmony, and composition courses with Huang Zi and studied voice. His real passion was singing, and he participated in two choral groups directed by Zhou Shu'an, a professor at the National Conservatory.

Despite this professional training, which tended to steer musicians away from political activism, He Shide aligned himself with amateur musicians as he became involved in the National Salvation Song Movement. One of his first compositions, a four-part chorus piece called "Qingnianmen qilai" (Arise, youth) that he wrote in 1934, was indicative of his desire to use music as a weapon to raise Nationalist consciousness. The following year, after meeting Mai Xin, He began teaching songs at the Yangpu Hudong Workers School and trained song movement cadres. He acquired a national reputation when he led and conducted the song group

Hongzhong yueshe in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Nanjing. At the Nationalist capital He directed the choir in front of the Sun Yat-sen tomb, a performance that was filmed and broadcast nationally. When the war broke out, He aligned himself with leftist musicians, and on August 8, 1937, he directed a mass song rally with over fifty choral groups organized under the umbrella group the Shanghai Citizens National Salvation Song Association (Shanghai guomin jiuwang geyong xiehui). Within weeks, He and Meng Bo had organized the Propaganda Team of Shanghai Singers for the Resistance (Kangdi houyuanhui Shanghai geyong jie guonei xuanchuantuan) and began to propagate songs in the interior. By early 1938, when the group reached Nanchang, He joined the New Fourth Army, which had established its liaison headquarters in the provincial capital. He Shide's role was to assist the New Fourth Army's war zone relief team in developing its music work. Concurrently, He worked for the Jiangxi Youth Relief Group, an organization sponsored by the provincial governor Xiong Shihui. Despite cultivating a friendship with Jiang Jingguo, deputy director of the Provincial Peace Preservation Corps, He Shide's activities, such as entering territory of the former Jiangxi Soviet, raised questions and concerns that He was "using GMD funds to do CCP work" (Lin H. 1994, 125). In February 1939, facing increased restrictions on his work in Jiangxi, He accepted orders to leave for Yunling, the southern Anhui headquarters of the New Fourth Army, where he helped establish the Army Political Department Cultural Group (Jun zhengzhibu wenhuadui) (Lin H. 1994, 123–125).

The idea for the New Fourth Army Song came almost fortuitously in March 1939, soon after He Shide's arrival in southern Anhui, which coincided with that of Zhou Enlai. Yuan Guoping, director of the Army Political Department, proposed that He Shide sing to welcome Zhou. He Shide recalled the scene:

I stood atop a table and sang "Ge babai zhuangshi" (Song for the eight hundred warriors). When the comrades realized General Chen Yi was in the audience, they welcomed him to sing the "Marseillaise." He laughed, arose, and sang it in French. After the meeting, Chen Yi expressed his desire that the New Fourth Army have a military anthem that the entire force could sing to unify thought and help our forward march. (He S. 1988, 80)

He Shide composed the anthem using Chen Yi's free verse poem "Iron Soldier" (Tiejun). Similar to other march songs, "Iron Soldier" featured lyrics that exuded confidence in the army's

proWess, and the theme of national liberation was suggested by the army's movement along the rivers of southern and central China.

On the glorious northern expedition we reached Wuchang,
 Victories won in the bloody combats.
 As the only army fighting on Luoxiao Mountain,
 We lived up to our glorious precedents.
 By the head of the Yangzi and along the Huai,
 We gallop freely and quickly.
 Far behind enemy lines we have always been victorious,
 Our battle cries resound across the heavens.

Recognizing that most of the New Fourth Army instructors were from the rural south, He Shide composed a first draft in the style of a southern folk song. Although his fellow cultural workers found the melody pleasant and easy to sing, they felt it “lacked power and grandeur (*xiongzhuang*) and failed to convey a militant spirit. The New Fourth Army was at war with the brutal Japanese invaders and in this life or death struggle for our nation's survival, our ‘army song’ needed to be solemn, powerful and grandiose, forceful, and militant.” (He 1988, 81). To better convey its martial spirit, He revised the first part to add a bugle tune made up of a broken major triad. He starts phrases in the first and second parts on the downbeat to emphasize both solemnity and the army's heroism, as in the phrase “Resist a thousand times, we must bravely charge” (*Qian bai ci kang zheng, yao ying yong chong feng*). The underlined words—“thousand (times) resist,” “must charge”—correspond to the downbeat, signifying the song's ideological message. He uses contrasting notes of shorter duration in the third and fourth parts of the song and starts phrases on the upbeat to suggest animation and movement. The final climax is achieved through the use of sequences that correspond to the lyrics “We are the iron New Fourth Army” (women shi tie di xin si jun) (Zhou C. 2003, 116–117).²⁰

Communist organizing helped ensure the popularity of this innovative march. After a performance for Chen Yi and other New Fourth Army leaders to mark the anniversary of the party's founding, the Army's political department ordered He Shide and members of his cultural troupe to teach the song to literature and art cadres who would then transmit it throughout the army. Within weeks, every New Fourth Army soldier had learned He Shide's military anthem. Two organizations were key to the transmission of songs within the army. The first, the New Fourth Army War Zone Relief Team (Xinsijun Junbu zhandi fuwutuan), combined each army unit's relief and propaganda teams with a core unit of artists recruited in the fall of 1937 at

Nanchang. Totalling over two hundred members (subdivided into male, female, and youth teams), the Relief Team engaged in mass work (for instance, propagating rent reductions), performance, and the training of some four hundred arts cadres over the course of the war (Li S. 2004, 110). The second, the New Fourth Army Central Training Cultural Team (Xinsijun jiaodao zongdui wenhuadui), led by He Shide in April–May 1939, provided the foundation for training cadres specializing in drama and music. Building on the drama training class affiliated with the New Fourth Army Central Training Unit (Xinsijun jiaodao zongdui) formed in the fall of 1937, He Shide’s organization provided supplemental training for cultural workers and recruited youth who had come from occupied Shanghai as well as areas in Zhejiang and Anhui still nominally under Nationalist control. The Cultural Team was organized into two platoons of seventy members, each of which was further subdivided into four classes for men and three for women. Members received rigorous training in politics, in the military, and in their artistic specialization. He Shide became the chief instructor of the music curriculum, which included music theory, voice, conducting, and composition. Vocal practice was mandatory and soon became part of army camp routine after morning calisthenics. Participants also performed songs each time an assembly was held at army headquarters. Within two months, though, the Cultural Team faced pressure to disband from the Nationalists, who argued that “the army is not a cultural unit.” In partial compliance, the New Fourth Army maintained the structure of the Cultural Team but placed it under the Second War Zone Relief Team (Junbu zhandi fuwutuan erdui) (Li S. 2004, 112). The work of developing cadres specializing in the arts also continued when the Central China branch of the Lu Xun Academy of Literature and Arts was established at Yancheng in northern Jiangsu in January 1940. (Later that year, He Shide became chair of its music department.)

These organizations helped make songs a staple of everyday life among Communist soldiers. Wu Qiang, a writer who worked for the New Fourth Army’s political division, notes the key role played by cultural cadres in creating a world of song:

Each morning every company would sing. Each company and food unit had their club with a cultural instructor. The clubs were the organizations and locales where cadres and soldiers implemented political and cultural activities. The cultural instructor’s main task was to instruct cadres and soldiers in singing. Each time there was a large assembly, the sounds of song would rise one after another. As soon as one song was over, there would be a call for “another one” and then again

“one more!” This type of “drawing out the songs” (*lachang*) made the entire meeting place awash in a sea of joyous song. (Wu Q. 1988, 30)

Denouement of the National Salvation Song Movement

By the summer of 1939, Liu Liangmo was cast out of the song movement, a casualty of the Communists’ success in organizing and training cadres and Nationalist reprisals against the Communists. Nationalist authorities suspected that cultural activities were being manipulated to Communist advantage and curtailed Liu’s work for the YMCA Soldier Relief Board. This marked the end of the song movement on a national scale and ruptured links between the Nationalist armies and the song movement.

After having risked their lives to save the YMCA building and evacuate thousands of wounded soldiers during the Nationalist scorching of Changsha on November 13, 1938, Liu and his team of relief workers decided to move into Zhejiang, dividing into three groups that would work in western Zhejiang, Jinhua (along the southeastern front lines), and southern Anhui in the Communist base area. Liu used his connections with the economist Xue Muqiao, who served in the New Fourth Army, to place several of his relief workers (Ding 2009, 106). Although Liu was sympathetic to socialism, recommending for instance that relief team members (typically young students in their early twenties) read Ai Siqu’s *Dazhong zhexue* (Mass philosophy) and Mao’s essay “Combat Liberalism,” he sought to retain his organization’s independence from either political party (Zhang B. 1994, 91).

By early 1939, Liu had set up camp in Jinhua with thirty relief workers. Every two weeks, one relief member recalled, they would perform songs near the Nationalist government and army offices. Using national salvation songs, which Liu would practice with his relief workers every morning, the group members did grassroots work—visiting factories, schools, and the military instruction group of the Tenth Army. Zhou Enlai’s late February visit to Jinhua and his meeting with Liu heightened Nationalist suspicions. (In fact, Zhou urged Liu to establish Jinhua as a liaison station between the New Fourth Army and Shanghai.) In June 1939 military police surrounded the soldier relief branch’s lodging and searched the premises.

Two options remained for Liu. Yuan Guoping invited Liu and his team to work in expanding the New Fourth Army Cultural Team. But the Communist offer also came with a rebuke—Liu had erred by introducing his relief team members into the New Fourth Army without proper vetting. Were Liu’s team to join the New Fourth Army, they would have to do so

as individual members and renounce their association with the soldier relief branch. Liu refused, as his Christian faith took precedence for him over loyalty to any political party. The second option involved setting up a new base of operations in Fuyang, 50 kilometers southwest of Hangzhou, under the patronage of Zhao Longwen, commanding officer of the First Detachment of Zhejiang's National Resistance Self-Defense Corps. Without knowing that the GMD had prohibited activities by the relief team and ordered his arrest, Liu set out for Shanghai to enlist Song Qingling's support for his organization. Upon reaching Ningbo, Liu was placed under house arrest and released only after the intervention of American YMCA staff. A few months later, Liu left for the United States, where he would promote the song movement to overseas Chinese and enlist Paul Robeson's help to galvanize support for the Chinese resistance (Shen 1994 418; Ding 2009, 108–109; Howard 2012, 25–27). He would not return to China until 1949.

Conclusion

The harassment of Liu Liangmo suggests why the Nationalist government, in stark contrast to the Communists, failed to develop a song movement within the ranks of their own military. During the National Salvation Song Movement between 1935 and 1939, Nationalist soldiers who encountered Liu's relief teams or the war zone troupes welcomed the patriotic songs and were active participants in singing the nation. But by 1941, when most troupes and relief corps had been effectively disbanded, the music faded away.²¹ The Nationalists lacked an organizational structure within the military that could use the arts to promote political indoctrination. Apprehension that songs, despite their overwhelmingly patriotic content, contained subversive messages or pointed social criticism, and that singing involved mass participation, precluded the song movement from taking hold within the Nationalist army. The Nationalists also lacked a cadre of musicians. Although Nationalist theater troupes formed in the summer of 1938 to do propaganda work in the war zones brought musicians, such as Mai Xin, into the Nationalist armies, the vast majority of these musicians were affiliated with the CCP, which had established party branches and underground cells in each of the theater troupes (Xiang 2002, 364-365). It is telling that, by the Civil War period, Nationalist army companies were appropriating leftist musicians' songs as their own military anthems. Much to their surprise, Eighth Route Army troops heard their own military anthem being sung by Nationalist troops as they approached the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region.²² There is no documented evidence that

any Nationalist armies developed their own march songs or military anthems, and if they did, it was never on the massive scale of the Communist armies.

To be sure, once the war broke out, many prominent musicians took refuge in Nationalist China and the wartime capital of Chongqing. Some were instrumentalists, like the violinist and composer Ma Sicong, who felt as a practical matter that their compositions could not be adapted to military use because of the lack of instruments or military bands. On a philosophical level, Ma wrestled with the question of the artist's role in society, whether to serve the collective good (and thus compose mass songs) or to treat art as a form of individual expression (and thus continue composing chamber music). Ma explained why he had written relatively few patriotic songs:

For many years my work involved researching and creating chamber music, but composing chamber music and songs was quite a different matter. Chamber music is appropriate to express the individual's feelings and mood. I stress technique and structure and my overriding goal is to create a new and beautiful artistic work that is provided with new technique, new harmony, and new atmosphere. Since War of Resistance songs are made for the people to sing, the people are also the object of the composer. (Ma [1939] 2007, 8) (see figure 17)



Figure 17. Ma Sicong (front row on left), his wife and pianist Dong Guangguang, and members of his string quartet before a performance in Guilin, 1942. *Source*: Li L. (2009, 361).

The converse of equating the production of national salvation songs with the public good was that those who produced other types of music or art songs (lieder) were deemed elitist. This was the charge that Xian Xinghai leveled against musicians in Nationalist China:

We lack songs for workers, farmers, women, children, and wounded soldiers, because most composers are unwilling to go among the people. They still maintain the past “dignity of the musician,” believing that a pure art divorced from the people will express their honorable and noble quality. To overcome this [attitude], composers must enrich their lives. (Xian 1938, 31–32)

Xian encouraged his fellow musicians to shun the professional ethos cultivated by the conservatory and the “ideology of pure art” (chun yishu zhuyi).

It would be an oversimplification to accept Xian’s condemnation of those musicians with more professional expertise as elitist. Two prominent composers, Xiao Youmei and Huang Zi, both of whom held leading positions in the National Conservatory, were tarred with this brush by leftist musicians, even though they were among the first composers of Resistance songs after the Manchurian Incident. And He Lüting spent much of his life advocating for the need to synthesize “Red” and “expert” in the music field. But it is true that a majority of the leftist composers who sought to promote a spirit of nationalism and break down class barriers in the process had received informal musical training and maintained a distance from the National Conservatory. Both the New Fourth and Eighth Route armies developed music for a national defense by accepting scores of these songwriters and musicians into their ranks. Tragically, death struck many of the most prominent leftist musicians in the prime of their lives as they sought to bring music to the front lines during the war. In 1939, when he was only twenty-nine years old, Zhang Shu died in an air raid on Guilin. Ren Guang at the age of forty-one was killed by an artillery shell during the New Fourth Army Incident. Already overworked and in poor health by 1940, when he left Yan’an for the Soviet Union to compose the score of the documentary film *Yan’an and the Eighth Route Army*, Xian Xinghai died of pulmonary tuberculosis in 1945 at the age of forty. Two years later, the thirty-three-year-old Mai Xin was gunned down by bandits while doing propaganda work for land reform in Rehe (Inner Mongolia). Dead but not forgotten, these composers’ wartime music continues to be sung by their fellow cadres and soldiers.

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Notes

- 1 For analysis of the Resistance War song lyrics and their symbolism as part of Communist political culture, see Hung (1996).
- 2 Li Yedao suggests Lü’s anarchist leanings with details of his learning Esperanto in 1925 alongside anarchist classmates at the Hunan First Provincial Normal School, a friend’s warning to Lü two years later not to return to the school because anarchists were being arrested, Lü’s enrollment in December 1927 at the Shanghai Labor University, his translation of the article “On Tolstoy” for the anarchist editor Lu Jianbo’s journal, “Wenhua pipan” (Cultural criticism), and a brief teaching stint at a school in Quanzhou, in which the leadership “consisted of Communists and anarchists who engaged in heated arguments.” See Li Y. (2001, 7–13).
- 3 On how the Anti-Japanese War provided writers the opportunity for social engagement and stimulated a new sense of social relations and community, see Laughlin (1998, 91–92).
- 4 Kan (2005) provides the most comprehensive anthology to date, with 3,621 songs based on the lyrics of 1,800 songwriters, but these represent low figures, since numerous songs were lost amid the destruction of war.
- 5 Leftist musicians coined the term “new Chinese music movement” in 1932 to describe their efforts at popularization using the broad laboring masses as the subject matter of songs. But a broader meaning of the term refers to the development of a Chinese music from the late nineteenth century through the twentieth century that appropriated European compositional techniques and musical idioms. See Xiang (2004) and C. Liu (2010).
- 6 For a description of the Lenin clubs and their propaganda activities, including mass singing, see Snow ([1938] 1968, 280–282).
- 7 For the original film performance of “March of the Volunteers,” see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6icFnCSF2yA>.
- 8 Nie had applied to study at the Shanghai-based conservatory and received private piano and composition lessons from faculty member Sergei Aksakov. Nie’s sojourn in Japan was meant to be temporary and a stepping stone to musical studies in the Soviet Union, indicating that he was in no way averse to the formal musical education offered by conservatories.
- 9 Commemorating the anniversary of the December 9th Movement, the students sought to petition Chiang Kai-shek to change his appeasement policy. When Zhang Xueliang

- ordered students to disband, they responded by singing “Songhuajiangshang,” allegedly reducing him to tears (see Han 2011, 31). Written by Zhang Hanhui, a middle school teacher, dramatist, and amateur musician, the song achieves its emotive force by using as musical material the sound of funerary weeping (*kumu*) from Henan, Zhang’s hometown in Ding County. This weeping was probably used in the plaintive singing of the climactic phrase, “Dieniāng a!” (Parents!). Using a binary form, Zhang expresses the beauty of the northeast with an undulating melody in the song’s opening. The second part of the song evokes indignation and despair through modulation from the brighter C major to the moodier key of A minor (or, in terms of Chinese modes, a shift from Gong to Yu). The descending musical line in the song’s coda section also produces a climax of grief and indignation. For a musical analysis of the song, see Song (2006, 92) and Li S. (2006, 443).
- 10 Mai Xin made his mark writing children’s songs, such as “Maer zhen zheng hao” (What a nice steed), as well as lyrics for Xian Xinghai’s popular children’s song “Zhi pa bu dikang” (Only to fear no resistance). For Mai Xin’s views on composing children’s songs, see Mai ([1941] 1984, 89–93).
- 11 Mai’s propaganda work among Nationalist troops followed Zhou Enlai’s August 8, 1938, instructions to the Resistance theater troupes (*kangdi yanjudui*), nominally under the auspices of the Political Department of the Nationalist government’s Military Commission (*Guominzhengfu junshi weiyuanhui zhengzhibu*). Zhou addressed the ten troupes, instructing them to “enter the Nationalist armies, plunge into the war front, and follow the troops. Propagate the Party’s resistance to Japan among the soldiers and civilians in the war zones and occupy the battlefield of cultural propaganda. Develop United Front work... maintain the War of Resistance to the end, and oppose any capitulation propaganda” (Xiang 2002, 364).
- 12 “Jiuguo junge” can be heard at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Lcy_i9ro9M.
- 13 For Kunqu’s influence on this song, see Zhou C. (2003, 50–51). Details of Zhang Shu’s life—his childhood interest in Kunqu and Anhui local opera, musical training at the Shanghai Arts University and National Conservatory, political activism leading to a two-year prison sentence in 1930, membership in the CCP (1933), and musical output—are all documented in Wang X. P. (1994, 1–11).
- 14 “Youjidiuge” can be heard at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdI6YV3LGJ8>.
- 15 This temperament is visible in Xian’s diary entries of 1938, which frequently juxtapose his angst caused by unrequited love with his observations on the destructive force of air raid bombings.
- 16 “Zai Taihangshan shang” can be heard at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KhXCKpqGec>.
- 17 For an analysis of Xian Xinghai’s “Yellow River Cantata” and its role in the creation of a national style of music, see Melvin and Cai (2004) and Yang (2005).
- 18 Zheng resided in Korea after 1945 and assumed leadership positions in the music field, but by 1950 he had returned to Beijing, where he eventually became a Chinese citizen. Zheng worked for the Central Philharmonic Orchestra of China and the Central Song and Dance Ensemble of China. The composer of over three hundred vocal pieces, Zheng’s most famous compositions include “Ode to Yan’an” (Yan’an song), the “Eighth Route

- Army March,” the “Korean People’s Army March,” and “Loushanguan,” the latter based on Mao Zedong’s poem.
- 19 The song has been renamed several times. During the Civil War the song was known as the “People’s Liberation Army March,” and in 1988 the song was officially designated as the military anthem of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army. It can be heard at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dirxAZxmiXI>.
- 20 “New Fourth Army Anthem” can be heard at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEkjE9p9fBI>.
- 21 Several of the dozen theater troupes organized in Shanghai by the underground CCP and Zuolian members in August 1937 were renamed one year later and came under the auspices of the Wuhan-based Third Bureau. The Third Bureau in August 1938 oversaw ten Resistance theater troupes (Kangdi yanjudui), four Resistance propaganda teams (Kangdi xuanchuandui), and one children’s drama troupe (haizi jutuan). By the time of the New Fourth Army Incident, most had disbanded in the face of political hostility. Members of the Sixth Theater Troupe, for instance, were arrested on charges of colluding with the CCP to incite a mutiny among the Northeast’s Fifty-Seventh Army in 1940. Only after the intervention of Zhou Enlai were troupe members released and allowed in June 1941 to proceed to the Communist base area in Shandong. The Tenth Theater Troupe faced harassment from the First War Zone’s political department for having interacted with Hebei partisans. After being transferred to the Second War Zone in the summer of 1939, Yan Xishan’s offensive against the CCP forced the troupe to transfer to Yan’an in January 1940. Resistance propaganda teams also encountered strong political headwinds. The Second Resistance Propaganda Team was forced to leave the Southeast War Zone, but not before its leader was arrested and several members executed. The Third Propaganda Team was ordered to leave the Central China war zone after the entire troupe had been placed under house arrest. After the New Fourth Army Incident the remaining theater troupes and propaganda teams were reorganized into six Resistance Theater and Propaganda Troupes (Kangdi yanju xuanchuandui)—numbers 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9. These troupes had a range of experiences and contact with armed forces. The second troupe worked in Shanxi, collecting over five hundred folk songs and performing many adaptations to mobilize the peasantry. By 1944, Yan Xishan’s offensive against the CCP led to the arrest of thirteen troupe members. Of the six troupes, the Fifth Resistance Theatre and Propaganda Troupe maintained the greatest contact with Nationalist troops, providing relief and performances in Burma for over three months in 1944 to both Chinese and American troops. See Xiang (2002, 372, 376–377, 389).
- 22 Sun Liren, for instance, appreciated the Eighth Route Army Military Anthem so much that he had his New First Army use it as an anthem. Another example of the appropriation of Communist-associated songs by the Nationalist armies was the 200th Division commander Dai Anlan’s use of the “March of the Volunteers” as his army song (author’s interview with Xiang Yansheng, June 3, 2013).

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