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Revolutionary Theatre, Temple Fairs, and Traditional Culture in Wartime Shaan-Gan-Ning*

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Introduction

In this paper I examine the overall impact of the New Yangge Movement in the countryside of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region during the War of Resistance Against Japan. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership promoted the new yangge, a form of traditional song-and-dance current in northern China, ostensibly at least because of its potential as the basis of a mass movement in culture.[1] Like other mass movements launched by the Party after 1942, it was intended to contribute to a basic transformation of popular culture not just in a few favoured areas, but throughout the Border Region, in all the towns, villages and hamlets under the control of the CCP. This is particularly important because, in accordance with Rectification ideology, the emphasis during the period after 1942 was on effective policy implementation rather than ideological purity, on practice rather than theory, on the actual transformation of Chinese society rather than the elaboration of high-sounding programmes. This, one suspects, was the real content of the 'Sinification of Marxism' that Mao Zedong had called for in 1938.[2]

This perspective raises a host of questions, none of which can be reliably

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1 On yangge, a traditional form of song-and-dance frequently performed in processions during the New Year period, along with folk plays, see David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 141-213.

2 See ibid., pp. 49-51.

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answered without a comprehensive assessment of all the available evidence. To what extent did the Yangge Movement in the years 1944-46 actually fulfill the policy objectives outlined in 1942 and 1943? How deep into the countryside was the new culture spread? What differences in implementation were there from locality to locality, whether in political organisation or forms of performance? Did the new yangge ever really become a mass movement, whatever the meaning of that term? Were the peasants actually capable of creative participation in cultural life organised and presented in this form? If so, which peasants? To what extent did yangge aid in the transformation of village culture in the widest sense? How representative were the model troupes of the grass-roots situation as a whole?

These are all macro questions, and reliable answers would be hard to provide for any society in the midst of revolution. In this case the problem is exacerbated by the size of the Border Region – some 440 kilometres north-south by 380 kilometres east-west – and the complexity of the patchwork of local cultures within its boundaries. Oddly enough, little attention has been paid in the post-1949 Chinese press to the New Yangge movement in the rural areas: until quite recently, published reminiscences have concentrated on life in the capital Yan'an, the activities of professional troupes, and the involvement of prominent artists. Our sources of information are therefore almost exclusively of two types: contemporary newspaper reports (mainly in *Jiefang ribao*, hereinafter JFRB), and a handful of work reports by leading cultural cadres.

Zhang Geng's Assessment of the Yangge Movement in Shaan-Gan-Ning

Among the latter, apart from reports delivered at the First National Congress of Writers and Artists in 1949, we have also Zhang Geng's near-contemporary assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the Yangge movement in rural Shaan-Gan-Ning (hereafter SGN).[3] This is found in his introduction to the third volume of his 1946 collection of yangge plays,[4] written shortly after his arrival in Zhangjiakou along with the rest of a sizeable contingent from the Lu Xun College of Arts (Luyi). For Zhang and many others, the Yan'an period had already ended with the departure of this Luyi North China Work Team (Luyi Huabei gongzuotuan) from Shaanxi in September 1945.[5] This collection thus served as a kind of grand review, with the

[3] Zhang Geng was the theatre scholar in charge of drama teaching at Luyi, and was tasked with a coordinating role for theatrical activities.

[4] Zhang Geng, *Yanggeju xuanji* ([Zhangjiakou]: Changcheng congshu, 1946), vol. 3, Preface pp.1-5. Orig. pub. *Beifang wenhua* 1:6 (16 May 1946), pp. 23 ff. under the title 'Guanyu yangge yundong'.

[5] Zhong Jingzhi, *Yan'an Luyi – wo dang chuangban de yisuo yishu xueyuan* (Beijing: Wenwu

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third volume devoted specially to the Yangge movement in the villages and plays by artists from among the masses. Zhang Geng provides a fairly sober assessment of the overall impact of the movement in SGN and also some useful bits of information not available elsewhere. As one of the leaders in charge of Luyi's yangge activities at the operational level, Zhang was in a position to know as much as anyone. Just what kind of information he had at his disposal is not clear, but it seems from his account that the Party's cultural leadership in SGN may have undertaken some kind of overall assessment of the Yangge movement, most probably sometime in mid-1945.

Zhang Geng's assessment of the overall impact of the movement is all the more convincing for being suitably modest. He noted that the creation of new yangge plays by village troupes was still very much a rarity, compared with the performance of old yangge, and the geographical base of the new yangge was still small. The place of old art in the villages was still dominant almost everywhere, and there were many places where people had not even seen new plays, far less performed in them. There were other places where peasants had heard of new yangge, but did not know how to perform it. Even the situation with New Year amusements was not as bad as village art during the rest of the year: at temple fairs, particularly, the predominance of old opera was still more or less absolute, in spite of the efforts of new drama troupes.[6]

This situation Zhang ascribed to a number of factors:

1) The movement for new yangge had started too late, and was only really under way in the last year of the war. 'Art workers came too late to the realisation of how really to serve the masses.'
2) The new yangge based on the 'twisting step' current in Yan'an was applied mechanically to areas where it was not suitable. Once peasants realised they could continue to perform their own locally current style and still perform new yangge, they became more enthusiastic.
3) There were manpower problems. Basically, there were just too few art workers in the field to reach very far into the countryside.
4) Peasants hesitated to perform new yangge before they had seen performances of it.[7]

Zhang was particularly at pains to discount peasant conservatism as a reason for the limited spread of the new yangge. This suggests that peasant refusal to perform the new yangge was at least a topic of conversation among the Party's cultural workers. Resistance, as we shall see, is likely to have been communal in some cases, and to have come from the heads of local temple associations.

What lies behind this picture? Zhang Geng gives no figures for the numbers and

chubanshe, 1981), pp. 44-46. The North China contingent was led by Ai Qing and Jiang Feng, and left Yan'an on September 12. Those going to Kalgan included Zhou Yang, Sha Kefu, Xiao San, Zhang Geng and Lü Ji.

6 Zhang Geng, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

7 *Ibid.*

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locations of troupes, and none are available from any other CCP source. It is however possible to check Zhang's conclusions against contemporary reports in JFRB and other SGN Party newspapers. An independent analysis of this body of information tends to confirm the accuracy of his assessment.

Coverage in JFRB

Even in the pages of JFRB there is a general absence of any overall figures for numbers of performances, numbers of troupes, location of troupes, and types of plays performed. My method therefore has been simply to survey all available coverage for the period February 1944 to April 1946, and collate all the information that could be extracted from it. By including in this survey the news shorts on the bottom of page two, so to speak, as well as the feature articles, I expect to minimise the danger of concentrating too much on the success stories. Because of the new yangge's place in the Eleven Movements, it has also been necessary to scan a wide range of other cultural news.[8]

Even so, this method immediately raises the question of how representative newspaper coverage actually was. The number of reports coming from each county, for instance, is highly uneven: there are few reports from outlying counties such as Yanchang, Wubu, Chishui, Huanxian, Wuqi and Yanchi. Is this difference in coverage an indication of the situation on the ground, or is it a reflection of some other factor in the reporting system, like distance from Yan'an or from subregional government seats? One possibility of course is that the newspaper simply had fewer correspondents in some counties, and that the unevenness in coverage was a function of this. Fortunately we are in a position to check this possibility, as statistics on the number of correspondents in each county were published for the period in question.[9] This information is summarised in Table 1.

Although there was a predictable concentration of correspondents in Yan'an, the general picture that emerges is of a reasonably even distribution of correspondents from county to county, varying from a minimum of ten in Jingbian to a maximum of forty-nine in Suide. There is no clear correlation between the number of correspondents in each county and the number of reports on yangge activities. Indeed, some of the counties reported to be most active, such as Mizhi and Jingbian, had relatively few correspondents. Some correspondents may have been much more active than others – most of them were amateurs – but at least we can rule out the possibility that levels

[8] The Eleven Movements were a set of policy objectives promulgated by Party Central in Yan'an in mid-1944, covering a wide range of initiatives intended for implementation at the village level, such as literacy classes, newspaper reading groups, and medical clinics.

[9] JFRB 23 Jul 1944, p. 4, 'Benbao bianqu tongxunyuan fenbu tu'.

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of activity reported in each county are a simple reflection of the number of local newspaper correspondents.

There are a number of other possibilities to consider: one is that the real unevenness in newspaper coverage was below the level of the county. Even in late 1945 the Suide *Kangzhanbao* complained that there were only a few districts in Mizhi that had correpondents.[10] Another is that local-level units chose to vary their emphasis on policy implementation in accordance with local conditions. It is possible that some county governments simply placed the reform of local yangge troupes relatively low on the list of their priorities. Such a decision would result not only in a lower level of activity, but also in a lower level of reporting. This is not unlikely, particularly as yangge was never a central task like agricultural production or the collection of grain tax, and local-level units would usually have been given more leeway in assigning priority to it. From the point of view of the local government unit, it would make sense as a bureaucratic strategy to report to higher levels some activity in every policy area, but only to invest large amounts of resources in a project and report assiduously if one planned to capitalise on it, for instance by becoming a model unit in that particular policy area. There were always other possible strategies, like developing winter schools, newspaper-reading groups, or hygiene campaigns. If this was in fact the way things operated, we would expect to find either fairly low levels of reporting, or reporting at a substantially higher level. Coverage does in fact seem to be skewed in this way, with high levels of reporting for Mizhi, Qingyang and Jingbian. Even within a single county the reporting is sometimes highly concentrated in this way: in Yan'an the activities of the Wu Manyou Parish Yangge Troupe were reported in no less than five articles in JFRB.

How many troupes were there performing the new yangge? In spite of the extent of coverage in JFRB – over one hundred articles on yangge over the 1944-1946 period – figures for the overall number of yangge troupes are thin on the ground; the focus in newspaper reports is almost always on the activities of specific troupes. Our only remedy is to count up all the troupes mentioned by name in JFRB. The results of such an exercise are also shown in the above table, and yield a total of 118 troupes. The question then arises, what proportion of the total number of troupes would these represent? In only one case do we have an overall figure for the total number of troupes in a county: this is for Quzi in East Gansu, where JFRB reported a total of twenty-eight shehuo troupes.[11] Of these, the Popular Education Bureau (Minjiaoguan) in Quzi exercised some form of leadership over nine troupes, seven in the countryside performing half-old and half-new plays, and two in the city area performing in 'old forms'.[12] The number of Quzi troupes mentioned by name in JFRB, three, is roughly

[10] *Kangzhanbao* 5 Sep 1945, p. 2, 'Mizhi quxiang tongxun yi pubian fadong'.

[11] JFRB 20 Feb 1945, p. 2, 'Quzi zai chunjie zhong, chuyan xin shehuo'. All of these troupes had gone to the county seat to perform during the Lantern Festival of the 15th of the first month.

[12] JFRB 7 Sep 1945, p. 2, 'Quzi minjiaoguan bangzhu qunzhong, gaizao shehuo neirong, taojing he

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Table 1 Newspaper Coverage of the Yangge Movement (February 1944 – April 1946)			
County	*No. of JFRB Correspondents*	*No. of articles*	*No. of troupes mentioned*
Yan'an Subregion			
Yan'an shi	24 + 51		
Yan'an xian	31	9	4
Ganquan	28	6	6
Gulin	11	4	5
Ansai	35	3	3
Fuxian	19	6	3
Yanchang	21	1	4
Yanchuan	31	2	3
Zichang	24	4	6
Zhidan	35	3	3
subtotal			**37**
Suide Subregion			
Suide	49	4	6
Mizhi	12	8	10
Qingjian	31	2	2
Wubu	37	1	1
Jiaxian	46	5	5
Zizhou	40	3	5
subtotal			**29**
Guanzhong Subregion			
Xinzheng	26	4	3
Chishui	37	1	2
Chunyao	48	2	5
Xinning	12	1	3
subtotal			**13**
East Gansu Subregion			
Qingyang	15	7	9
Heshui	32	1	1
Zhenyuan	20	2	2
Huachi	18	2	2
subtotal			**14**
Sanbian Subregion			
Dingbian	18	4	6
Jingbian	10	8	2
Wuqi	11	1	1
Yanchi	14	1	2
subtotal			**11**
Total		**100**	**118**

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half of the total number of 'reformed' yangge troupes operating under government direction, and an even smaller proportion of the total number of troupes in the county. Other available figures for the level of yangge and dramatic activity in the countryside indicate that the proportions in the Quzi case may not be unrepresentative of the level of coverage in other areas.[13] If that is right order of magnitude, we can, on the basis of the 118 troupes mentioned in JFRB, extrapolate figures of 275 to 350 for the number of troupes performing the new yangge or new plays, and just over 1000 for the total number of yangge troupes in the Border Region.

There is however reason for caution. The numbers of troupes mentioned may not reflect relative levels of activity. Also, as I have argued elsewhere, local reports in Party newspapers were often less impersonal than they appear: newspaper correspondents were sometimes principal actors in the developments they reported.[14] Newspaper reports were, among other things, bargaining chips in the nexus of patron-client relationships within the Party organisations, a way for local-level cadres to reward local activists, build a local constituency, provide support for the policies of a superior, or make a name for themselves. By the very nature of things such considerations are usually hidden from our view, since the personal and particularistic nature of such ties, while in harmony with traditional Chinese political behaviour patterns, was contrary to the explicit Party norms of objectivity and rationality. In the case of the Yangge movement such an intimate connection between reporter and developments reported is evident only in the case of the reports filed by members of the Luyi work Team in East Gansu.[15] However, to the extent that such considerations have influenced the reporting process, they would make any objective assessment of yangge as a mass movement very problematic. What follows is therefore in an important sense provisional.

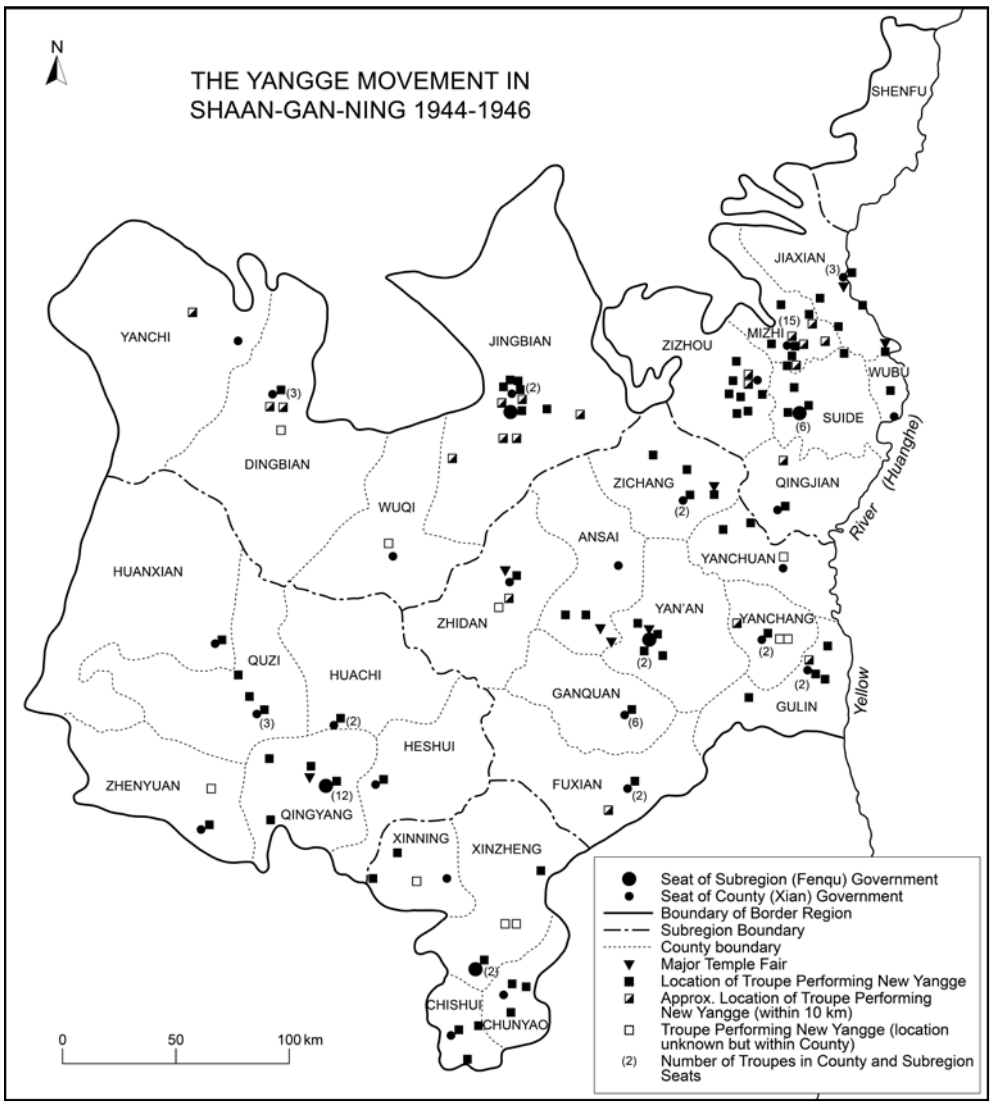
daibi'.

13 According to a survey undertaken by the Culture and Education Congress, there were 994 yangge troupes in SGN. There was also an average of something like 50 'self-amusement groups' (zileban) per county: see Wenjiaohui yizu, 'Zileban', in Zhou Yang, ed., *Minjian yishu he yiren*, pp. 67, 69.

14 D.L. Holm, 'Hua Guofeng and the Village Drama Movement of the Northwest Shanxi Base Area, 1943-45', *The China Quarterly* 84 (Dec 1980): 679.

15 Li Gang on Quzi, JFRB 20 Feb 1945, p. 2; Lei Ting three articles on Qingyang and Zhenyuan, Jan-Apr 1945. On the Luyi gongzuozu in East Gansu, see Liu Hengzhi, 'Xiang qunzhong xuexi', *Qunzhong yinyue* 1983, 10, 27-28.

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Spatial Relations and the Cultural Ecology of the NewYangge

So much for the reported numbers of new yangge troupes in each county, as listed in the above table. This is only a first approximation, however, as aggregate figures tend to obscure as well as reveal basic patterns. Patterns of activity below the level of the *xian* are of particular interest. Were troupes performing new yangge evenly spread throughout the countryside, or concentrated in or around the county seat?

These questions really imply a host of others, all related to the cultural ecology of the new yangge. Clearly, measuring 'penetration' or 'coverage' of a mass movement

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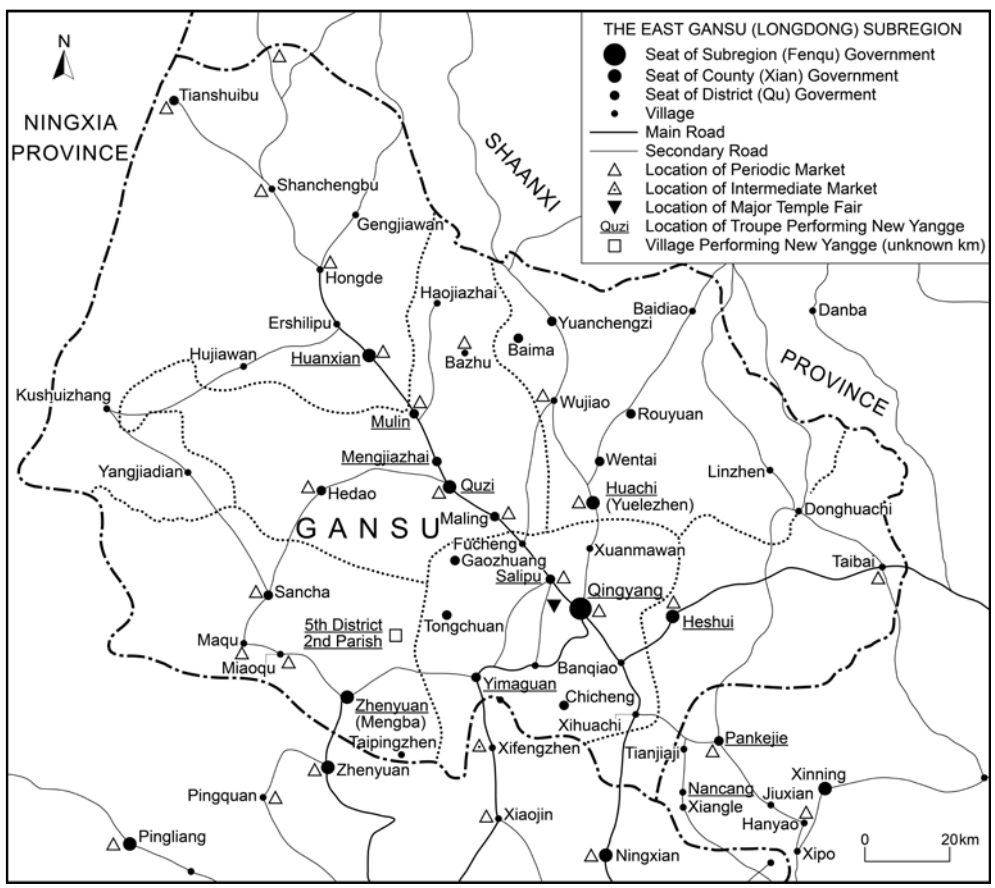
is more than a matter of measuring a simple variable like the distance from the county seat, although that may be important. What we really want to know is, what kinds of villages (or towns) performed new yangge? Ideally we would want to know the location of new yangge activities in relation to any or all of the following: seats of local government, main roads and secondary roads and tracks, rural markets, temple fairs, schools, and factories.

Social factors such as the location of labour heroes and model units, old self-amusement bands, and the distribution of literary skills are also relevant. All this raises the possibility of relating the performance of new yangge to the kind of location analysis developed for Chinese society by such scholars as G. William Skinner and Gilbert Rozman.[16]

[16] See esp. G. William Skinner, 'Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China, Part I JAS 24.1

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It is not surprising that there is insufficient information on many of these points to subject all the above variables to statistical treatment. It has been possible however to locate some 82 per cent of the villages and towns mentioned in JFRB as performing new yangge: the results of this exercise are presented in the accompanying maps. A rough picture of the relative concentration of activity in seats of local government can be gained from Table 2. This indicates that new yangge activities in 1944-46 were indeed concentrated near government offices, with an average something over half (54 or 57%) the reported activity based in county or district seats. On the other hand, some 62% (or 57%) of reported activity was based outside county seats. In comparison with the longstanding inability of Chinese imperial governments to maintain any effective administrative presence below the level of the *xian*, this in itself is sufficient to indicate that the CCP government communications network was operating at much higher than traditional levels of efficiency. Regional variations are also noticeable: in East Gansu



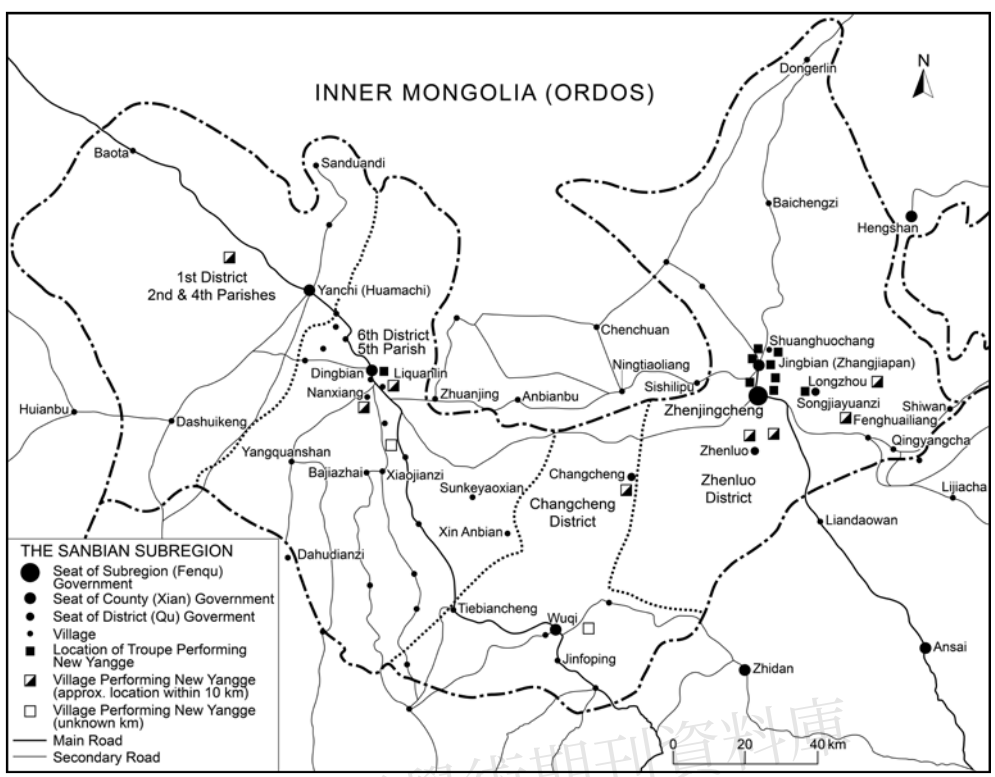
(Nov 1964): 3-43; Part II JAS 24.2 (1965): 195-228; and Part III JAS 24.3 (May 1965): 363-399; Gilbert Rozman, *Urban Networks in Ch'ing China and Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), esp. chapter 2, 'Spatial Divisions and Social Structure', pp. 59-104.

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in particular new yangge seems to have been highly concentrated in the county seats, whereas in Suide and Sanbian the movement seems to have been more evenly spread, with a higher level of activity throughout the countryside.

What did this actually mean on the ground? A more detailed indication of the geographic spread of the new yangge movement, as well as its level of concentration and social basis, is to be found in Table 3 below. This table summarises an analysis of troupe locations according to two variables: relative size of settlement; and location in relation to government centres, main roads, and markets.

Some explanation however will be necessary in order to relate these figures to Rozman's hierarchy of central places and Skinner's analysis of rural marketing networks. The North Shaanxi-East Gansu area was not like the heavily populated plains of central Shaanxi or North China, flat and reasonably homogenous. It was predominantly a region of loess hills, where patterns of communication were largely determined by the prevailing landforms and watercourses. Much of the North Shaanxi area was sparsely populated – except for the Suide-Mizhi area – with main roads and most of the larger towns and villages concentrated in the main river valleys. In the south, however, from Fuxian to Guanzhong and Xinning in East Gansu, long flat ridges (*liang*) and flat tablelands (*yuan*) dominated the landscape. The pattern of settlement was different there, as both settlement and transport were more convenient on the



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ridge tops than in the river valleys.[17] In contrast, the Sanbian region was dominated by the camel caravan route linking Peking with Central Asia that ran along the flat arid country just south of the Great Wall: this region was characterised by small scattered villages and relatively large trading cities like Dingbian and Zhangjiapan which served as entrepots for this inner-Asian trade.[18] The relative remoteness or accessibility of villages performing the new yangge must be assessed in relation to these factors.

Another major factor influencing the geography of the Border Region and the distribution of new yangge troupes in the countryside was the contrast between agricultural regions and areas under secondary forest. There were large areas within the Border Region that at the end of the 1930's were not cultivated at all, or if they



[17] *Shaanxi sheng Yan'an diqu dili zhi*, ed. Shaanxi shifan daxue dilixi 'Yan'an diqu dili zhi' bianxiezu (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1983), pp. 31-37.

[18] See e.g. Kangzhanbao 17 Oct 1944, p. 2, 'Dili changshi: Sanbian fenqu'.

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were, only along the main river valleys in scattered hamlets. Some of these lands had passed out of cultivation during the Muslim wars in the 19th century, and by the 1940's were given over largely to oak and cypress scrub.[19] Villages were small and scattered throughout this region, which encompassed all of Ganquan, most of Fuxian and Xinzheng, the southern half of Yan'an, the western half of Gulin, southern Ansai and Zhidan, the eastern halves of Huachi, Heshui and Xinning, and East Gansu to the west of Quzi.[20] These areas had provided good cover for guerrilla operations during the early Soviet period of the 1930's, and in the production drives of the middle 1940's they afforded the space and fallow land for Eighth Route Army garrisons to open up extensive tracts to cultivation, after the fashion of the *tuntian* system.

New yangge activities in this region were often concentrated in county towns or a few other central places. In Ganquan, for instance, six troupes are mentioned, all based in the county seat; half of these were Eighth Route Army troupes. Activities were similarly concentrated elsewhere in the scrub belt – in Heshui, Huachi, and possibly in Xinzheng. Yangge in Fuxian and Xinning seems to have been confined to the agricultural areas: in Fuxian the south central part of the county and in Xinning the unforested western half.

Even in the agricultural areas there is another peculiarity of rural society in SGN that must be mentioned: that is, the lack or relative lack of a network of standard marketing areas of the kind described by William Skinner. Whether for reasons of geography or local history – especially the depredations of the Muslim rebellion and the early 20th century military alarums – periodic rural markets were few and far between. Existing markets were mainly at a level corresponding to intermediate marketing settlements elsewhere, or level six central places in Rozman's hierarchy.[21]

There was in other words no nexus of rural markets catering directly to the economic needs of villagers throughout the countryside. The lack of such an infrastructure was made good partly by temple fairs and partly by the activities of itinerant pedlars, who would buy goods at markets or in town shops and make the rounds of the villages, shouldering a carrying pole loaded with rural consumables such as matches, needles and cotton cloth. Party policy in the mid-1940's tended to reinforce this pattern: one of the surviving yangge plays provides evidence that the Party encouraged the activities of pedlars − under the auspices of rural cooperatives − as an alternative to direct marketing by peasants.[22]

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19 'SGN bianqu senlin kaochatuan baogaoshu' (Sep 1940), in *Kangzhan shiqi SGN bianqu caizheng jingji shiliao zhaibian* (henceforth *Caijing zhaibian*) vol. 2, pp. 122-46.

20 Ibid., pp. 116-118.

21 Rozman, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

22 *Huolangdan* (The Pedlar), by the Qiaozhen Parish Yangge Troupe, in Zhang Geng, ed., *Yangge juxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1977), pp. 307-316. For Party policy see e.g. *Bianqu Qunzhongbao* 22 Aug 1944, p. 3, 'Ansai siqu hezuoshe, huolangdan xiaxiang ba hongli songshang sheyuan jiamen'.

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Table 2: Location of New Yangge Troupes in relation to Administrative Centres				
Subregion	*County Seat*	*District Seat*	*Village*	*Total*
Yanshu	15	7	15	37
Yan'an	(10)			(47)
Suide	11	9	20	40
Guanzhong	3	2	11	16
East Gansu	19	2 (+4)	4	25 (29)
Sanbian	5	0	14	19
SGN (Total)	53 (63)	20 (24)	64	137 (151)
%	38.7	14.6	46.7	100
% counties + districts	53.2			
% districts + villages	61.3			

Evidence is incomplete, but what periodic markets did exist were often concentrated in administrative centres. In 1943 markets were established in Wuqizhen and at Malan in Guanzhong: these markets it seems were the only ones in their respective counties.[23] In Huachi there was one market at the county seat of Yuele, established in 1941, compared with a peak of six markets during the Qing.[24] In the more developed Suide-Mizhi region there were, in the four counties of Suide, Mizhi, Jiaxian and Wubu, altogether ten periodic markets operating in 1944: the distribution of these places is shown on the accompanying map.

From this we can see that even in this highly populated area, the distance between periodic markets was at least twelve and very often as many as twenty-five kilometres. Logically the effect of this would be to divide the countryside into villages close enough to such market towns and xian seats for peasants to make frequent and convenient trips to market, and villages further away, where peasants would make infrequent visits to the market, rely on itinerant pedlars and local temple fairs for some other exchange needs, but otherwise live in rural isolation.[25]

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23 *Caijing zhaibian* vol. 4, pp. 400, 402.

24 *Huachi xianzhi*, ed. Huachi xianzhi bianxie lingdao xiaozu (Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 1984), p. 228. There had been six village markets at the beginning of the Qing, but these had been abolished during the Tongzhi reign period. Markets had been established by the Shaan-Gan Soviet authorities in 1934 and again in 1937: the latter had failed because of 'lack of people and paucity of goods'.

25 For a description of a journey to market in Bao'an (later Zhidan) county during the 1930s, see Li Jiantong, *Liu Zhidan* vol. 1 (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1979), pp. 19-20.

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For the Suide-Mizhi region at least, there is also a high correlation between marketing and administrative centres: the marketing towns were frequently also seats of district government. This is in contrast with the situation elsewhere in China, where the marketing network often cut across administrative boundaries.[26]

Where does the new yangge fit into this picture? The evidence, based on a rough-and-ready assessment of village size and convenience of location and relation to markets and main transport routes, is given in statistical form in Table 3.

Table 3: Location of New Yangge Troupes, by Settlement Type

	SD	YA	GZh	EG	SB	Total
county seats	11 (29)	15	3	19	5	53
large villages						
market towns	1	0	1	0	0	2
district seats	7	6	1	2(+4)	0	16 (20)
market town & district seats	2	1	1	0	0	4
other large villages	3	3	1	0	0	7
small villages						
near xian	3	2	0	1	6	12
near large villages	8	2	2	1	2	15
remote villages	2	3	3	0	1	9
location unknown	3	5	4	2	5	19

SD = Suide YA = Yan'an GZh = Guangzhong

EG = East Gansu SB = Sanbian

These figures require some comment. First, even in the Suide-Mizhi area, there is a predictable concentration of new yangge activity in the larger and more conveniently placed villages – often district seats and market towns in the valleys and along the main transport routes. Secondly, there is a high correlation of new yangge activity with the network of rural markets, with new yangge troupes reportedly based in five out of the ten market towns cited in our sources. This figure might have been higher of course if

[26] As noted by Skinner, *op.cit.*

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JFRB coverage had been more extensive; as mentioned above, there are reasons for supposing that the underlying level of real activity may have been about twice as high as our figures. On the other hand, it is also possible that the CCP authorities did not go out of their way to establish a new yangge troupe in every market town.

Thirdly, district seats were clearly an important focus of activity in the local Yangge Movement. Most district seats by 1946 would have had a troupe performing the new yangge. Even this was quite an achievement. To take the Suide subregion as an example again, the total number of districts in these five counties was around 43 (Suide 13, Wubu 6, Mizhi 14, Jiaxian 10).[27] The above figures indicate that the movement fell somewhat short of the goal of having one new yangge troupe in every district.

Finally, we find a preponderance of the small villages with new troupes located near these market towns and district seats, and a relatively small number of really remote villages. In my view there are a number of possible reasons for this. One is that the nearby villages were simply more accessible to the outside world and therefore were more open to influences from above. Another is that the performance of new yangge may have been part of a pattern of entrepreneurial activity for these villages, much as specialising in the production of particular handicraft items might be. In the New Society, of course, the objective of such activity would not just be financial gain but also heightened status and the acquisition of political capital. A similar pattern of incentives had operated after all in the old society: it was traditional for instance for peasant troupes to make the journey to the xian seat at the New Year and pay their respects to the representative of state power there, the county magistrate. To the extent that this was so, traditional yangge may also have been similarly concentrated around level-six central places.

The location of model villages reveals a similar dynamic. In the Suide subregion, Haojiaqiao in Suide for instance was a small village located four kilometres from the nearest large village and main road and roughly seven kilometres from Suide. Songjiashan in Jiaxian was a hill village some four kilometres from the nearest big track – seemingly a poor location – but it was situated midway between two neighbouring towns of Taozhen and Dianzhen and within easy travelling distance of both of them. In other subregions the picture is not dissimilar. In Chunyao, the model village of Baiyuancun was a small village on the edge of the table-land four kilometres from the market town of Liulin. Nancang in Xinning was also a hill village, but it was on a flat ridge overlooking the market town of Xiangle, three kilometres away; the village was also conveniently placed on a major track leading up to the town of Panke fourteen kilometres north. In East Gansu, Huang Run's troupe lived in small villages near Sanshilipu, itself a market town on the main road fourteen kilometres away from the subregional capital Qingyang. Only Tuorxiang in Zizhou and Nanzhuanghe in Yan'an county seem to be less conveniently located: Tuorxiang

[27] JFRB 6 Dec 1941, 'Bianqu ziliao: Bianqu ge xian qu xiang hukou tongji'.

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in Zizhou county was a district government seat some twenty kilometres away from the *xian* capital. Nanzhuanghe in Yan'an county, the seat of Wu Manyou Parish, was located up a tertiary valley eight kilometres from the district seat of Liulin. The thirteen kilometre trek to Yan'an however did not prevent Wu Manyou from taking his troupe into Yan'an to pay New Year's respects to the Party leadership.[28] In any case, Wu Manyou's village happened to be situated on one of the main transport routes between Yan'an and Nanniwan. Of course, it made sense from an administrative point of view to have model villages located within a convenient distance of centres of government. This often meant, however, that model localities were frequently cultivated as such.[29] Effectively this meant that the odds were stacked against communities less favourably placed – a consideration which may eventually have had a profound effect on peasant attitudes towards Party-sponsored models.

I tentatively conclude from a survey of the available evidence, that Zhang Geng's assessment of the overall impact of the Yangge Movement in the SGN countryside is substantially correct. Even allowing for under-reporting, however, we can also confirm that the impact of the movement was quite considerable in some areas, and that it did become a mass movement of sorts. Given time and continued bureaucratic attention, it is likely that the influence of the new yangge would have spread further up the hollows. In 1945, however, the task of bringing enlightenment to the vast rural hinterland was hardly even begun. There must indeed have been many parishes and even districts from which the new yangge was entirely absent. Some idea of why this would have been so can be glimpsed in the above analysis. The new yangge remained a phenomenon of the *xian* and district seats, the market towns, larger villages, and other communities within convenient distance of them. This was the situation after two years of policy implementation. Very shortly thereafter, the disruption of the Civil War put an effective end to this experiment. Whether or not the new yangge would have spread in time to the poorer and more remote areas is an open question. It is at least possible that the forces of peasant conservatism discussed by Zhang Geng, plus adverse reactions to the conduct of model emulation campaigns, may have set certain limits in any case, regardless of the amount of administrative effort invested in the project.

The Troupes: Social Background

Available information on model troupes and 'yangge heroes' indicates that the 'peasants' who participated in yangge troupes in the countryside were a far from homogenous social class either in income, educational level, religious background or

[28] JFRB 6 Feb 1945, p. 2, 'Wu Manyou xiang, chengli yanggedui'.

[29] Holm, 'Hua Guofeng', pp. 681-2.

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in family connections. Evidence from a number of localities indicates the importance of craftsmen and small shopkeepers among the activists in yangge troupes. Certainly quite a few folk artists will have had a background similar to that of the 'old artist' Li Bu for instance, who had at various times been a builder's labourer, a poor peasant farmer, an itinerant beggar, an actor in a professional opera troupe, and an opium-smoking 'layabout'.[30] Merchants were also important as patrons and participants in yangge troupes in the larger towns like Yan'an and Zhangjiapan.[31] In Yanchang as well the chairman of the Chamber of Commerce took a leading role in the City Residents' Combined Yangge Troupe.[32]

Levels of artistry varied considerably between individuals and between localities. Yangge, although a folk art, was hardly for that reason a simple pastime in which everyone could participate by virtue of being a peasant: the availability of a dancing master was usually critical.

Another important participant was the local primary school teacher, whose participation in a yangge troupe allowed access to written media: scripts of new plays from Yan'an, newspaper reports, and perhaps − in the other direction − favourable mention in the local Party newspaper.[33] A considerable number of reports on troupes in rural areas testify albeit indirectly to the importance of this 'village intelligentsia'. In Fanjiahe in Yanchuan, for instance, the primary school teacher Fan Yuan was instrumental in setting up the 'self-amusement group' which gave performances of Qinqiang in nearby villages.[34] In Wuqi, an aged schoolmaster who taught in an old-style private school was an important recruit to the yangge troupe organized by the cultural labour hero Liu Baotang. Because of Liu and his knowledge of the old opera, his troupe was not only able to produce their own new lyrics and patter-mouth verses for the New Year performances, but also, after consultation with the district government, to contract for the performance of all the district's 'agricultural plays' (*nongxi*).[35] In Shajiadian in Mizhi County it was the teacher at the lower primary

30 Ding Ling, 'Minjian yiren Li Bu', in Zhou Yang, ed., *Minjian yishu he yiren*, pp. 11-14.

31 JFRB 6 Mar 1945, p. 2, 'Jingbian Zhenjingqu juxing yangge huiyan, er wu xiang zuihao de de hongqi liangmian, yanchang yu bianju mofan Feng Mingshan deng dejiang'.

32 JFRB 21 Jan 1945, p. 2, 'Yanchang jiji choubei chunjie xuanchuan'.

33 Apart from JFRB and Bianqu Qunzhongbao, there was a range of fifty mimeographed subregional and county-level newspapers in SGN. For a survey, see JFRB 17 May 1945, p. 4, 'Bianqu jiefangqu de xiaoxingbao'.

34 JFRB 17 Feb 1945, p. 2, 'Yanchuan Fanjiahe cun ziyuan zucheng zileban, shizi yanxi kanbao peihe jinxing'. Fanjiahe was however somewhat atypical. A single-surname village, it had set up a primary school and a literacy class just after the revolution in 1935, and by 1938 had gained a reputation as a 'culture village'. It had been singled out for praise in the Yan'an *Xin Zhonghua bao* in 1938, and again in 1940 in the newly-established *Yanchuan bao*.

35 JFRB 23 Mar 1945, p. 2, 'Wuqi wenjiao yingxiong Liu Baotang zuzhi zileban baocheng nongxi, fan mixin, jiang weisheng, jiao ren xue hao'. There were nine performances of these

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school who organised local militia, garrison troops and primary school pupils to form the local yangge troupe.[36]

In county seats there was a different mixture. The City Residents' Yangge Troupe in Gulin, for instance, included among its seventy-seven members officials and service personnel from the government offices, primary school students, and a large number of city-dwelling peasants, craftsmen and merchants.[37] Not surprisingly, the combination of office workers and masses was the rule wherever Party or government offices were located. In the village of Hezhuangping north of Yan'an, for instance, villagers combined with functionaries from the Central Management Department.[38] In nearby Shigeta, the local masses joined up with the Central Hostel (Zhongyang zhaodaisuo) to perform yangge plays on hygiene.[39] Rural factories and local army garrisons were often similarly involved in local yangge activities.

Yangge Troupes and the Schools

The organisational nexus between yangge troupes and schools was a particularly close one. New yangge after all was intended to become an educational medium in New Democratic society, and so it is not surprising that there was sometimes considerable overlap in function and personnel between the troupes and the schools.

The system of education in Shaan-Gan-Ning comprised a small number of middle schools, mainly in the county seats, and primary schools of two types: the higher primary schools (*wanxiao*) and the far more numerous ordinary primary schools (*puxiao*). The former were typically found in the county seats and larger market towns, the latter also in the villages. Starting after 1942 there was also what amounted to a private sector, consisting of schools run by the people with government support (*minban xuexiao* and a whole range of less formal institutions catering for the educational needs of adults in the villages: winter schools (*dongxue*), newspaper

nongxi in all, all given in the sixth lunar month and each lasting three days. They are said to have been given "for superstitious reasons": they were probably dedicated to the Dragon King (Longwangye) as part of petitions for rain.

36 JFRB 6 Feb 1945, p. 2, 'Fuxian deng xian jigan ziweijun dongxun zhong, toudan mailei you shizi nao yangge'.

37 JFRB 23 Mar 1945, p. 2, 'Chunjie xuanchuan huodong yihou, Fuxian jiguan zuzhi yeyu jutuan, Gulin jiang chengli qunzhong julebu'.

38 JFRB 31 Jan 1945, p. 2, 'Zhongguanju diyi baoguanchu, tong qunzhong hezuo pai yangge'.

39 JFRB 16 Feb 1945, p. 2, 'Wenyu duanxun'. Here the masses performed the big yangge dance and also their own 'little number', 'Blackboard Newspaper' (*Heibanbao*). This indicates a division of labour similar to that discussed in Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*, pp. 259-261.

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reading groups (*dubaozu*), and literacy classes (*shiziban*).[40] Of them, winter schools, so called because they held classes during the winter agricultural slack season so as not to interfere with the requirements of farm labour, were the most ambitious and the most often connected with yangge activities in the villages. Utilising the existing network of schools had considerable advantages for the organisation of the New Yangge movement.

The provision of winter schools and other forms of informal schooling was another one of the planks in the post-1943 Eleven Movements, and by 1945 there were large numbers of these schools in the countryside. In Sanbian, an area of scattered villages and small population, there were 419 winter schools and newspaper-reading groups in the three counties of Jingbian, Yanchi and Wuqi alone, with a total of 4,349 students: this was an estimated three per cent of the total adult population.[41] In East Gansu subregion there were over 700 winter schools, which were gradually being turned into community primary schools and newspaper-reading groups. By combining yangge and winter schools in various ways, authorities could not only avail themselves of a pre-existing, ready-made organisational structure, but could also tap the literacy skills of teachers and students.

The pattern of activity that emerges from contemporary newspaper accounts is many-sided and indicates considerable integration of education and 'cultural amusements'. For a start, many of the new 'public-household' yangge troupes operating in the countryside were organised by schools. Examples of this can be found all over the Border Region: in Fuxian, where the Number 1 Higher Primary School Troupe was particularly active;[42] in Dingbian, where the Sanbian Public School troupe appeared along with three other troupes in a combined performance;[43] in Qingyang, where troupes organised by the East Gansu Middle School and the East Gansu Higher Primary School were active;[44] and in Zichang, where the Middle School and Higher

[40] On education in SGN see Peter J. Seybolt, 'Yan'an Education and the Chinese Revolution', unpub. PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1969; and Liu Duanfen, 'Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu jiaoyu gongzuo de huiyi', *Shaanxi jiaoyu* 1981, 2, 45-47. More detailed information on the organisation of adult education is found in the three booklets *Dubaozu*, *Shiziban*, and *Dazhong heibanbao*, ed. and pub. Suide fenqu wenjiao dahui, Aug 1944.

[41] JFRB 5 Feb 1945, p. 2, 'Yanchi siqu yixiang dongxue jiaoyuan Liu Zixian, shuifu lao xiansheng yong xin keben'.

[42] JFRB 15 Oct 1944, p. 2, 'Fuxian diyi wanxiao yanggedui, jianli "xuanchuan-lan" shen shou qunzhong huanying'; JFRB 17 Jan 1945, p. 2, 'Fuxian diyi wanxiao xinnian laojun'; JFRB 8 Jun 1945, p. 2, 'Fuxian yi wanxiao, liyong jishi xuanchuan beihuang, xianwei haozhao zai ge jizhen pubian jinxing'; and JFRB 15 Oct 1945, p. 2.

[43] JFRB 25 Jan 1946, p. 2, 'Bianqu ge di paiyan yangge'.

[44] JFRB 10 Jan 1945, p. 2, 'Longdong, Yanchang xinnian dianxun'; JFRB 22 Apr 1946, p. 2, 'Longzhong yanggedui, zai Taohuashan xuanchuan'.

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Primary School troupes took part in temple fair performances.[45] Higher primary school troupes were also active in Ganquan,[46] Gulin,[47] and Linzhen.[48] In Longtou village, Xinzheng county, the ordinary primary school combined with the village club to perform opera.[49] Particularly outstanding in this regard was Mizhi, where yangge troupes were organised in virtually all the schools in the county.[50] In the village of Moshigou, for instance, all the schools, including the winter school, the higher primary, the ordinary primary and the private primary school, had school yangge troupes led by local yangge enthusiasts wielding the umbrella.[51]

A second pattern of activity was for students from the winter schools to participate in yangge performances organised by other bodies. In Yanchang county students from winter schools and militia men made up the backbone of yangge troupes in the villages.[52] In Gaoying district in Qingyang, too, the militiamen all attended winter schools and performed yangge.[53] This was in fact a general phenomenon: yangge, like other government-sponsored cultural activities, often found support among the same group of village activists, the 'new people' of New Democratic society.

It was also not uncommon, therefore, for yangge troupes to take part collectively in winter schools. This was one of the ways in which Huang Run in Salipu, Qingyang, for instance, overcame the lack of literacy in his shehuo troupe.[54] In the village of Fanjiahe in Yanchuan, the self-amusement group combined with the winter school: the main study materials for the school were the newspapers *Yanchuan bao* and *Bianqu qunzhongbao*.[55] In this way, the group not only developed the reading skills of its members, but kept them in touch with current events and developments in government policy. A similar development took place in Linxian in the Northwest

45 JFRB 20 May 1945, p. 2, 'Zichang Yangjiayuanzi miaohui shang, wenhuapeng, wenbingchu, yangge sanzhong xingshi xuanchuan weisheng'.

46 JFRB 2 Jan 1946, p. 2, 'Ganquan wanxiao, Kangshu zidi xuexiao ni zai xinnian, yanchu xuanchuan shengchan laojun de yangge'.

47 JFRB 11 Mar 1945, p. 2, 'Jianxun'.

48 JFRB 19 Feb 1945, p. 2, 'Gulin Jingbian qunzhong, song zhu yang laojun'.

49 JFRB 30 Nov 1945, p. 2, 'Guanzhong fenqu, qunzhong yule huodong kaizhan, ge di xiangji chengli julebu, yanxi changge shuoshu hai bangzhu shizi'.

50 Interviews, Mizhi Cultural Bureau, Jan 1985.

51 JFRB 20 Feb 1945, p. 2, 'Suide fenqu ge di, qunzhong xin yanggedui daochu chuxian, Sishilipu qu jiantao yongjun youkang gongzuo'.

52 JFRB 21 Jan 1945, p. 2 (see note 32).

53 JFRB 4 Feb 1945, p. 2, 'Heshui ziweijun ganbu Lu Jinfa, toudan da wushi'er mi, Yanchang yiqu jigandui xuele wu you nao yangge'.

54 JFRB 31 Jan 1945, p. 2, 'Shehuo huiyi' (Lei Ting).

55 JFRB 17 Feb 1945, p. 2, 'Yanchuan Fanjiahe cun, ziyuan zucheng zileban, shizi yanxi kanbao peihe jinxing'.

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Shanxi base, where newspaper reading groups were set up systematically within yangge troupes and professional theatre companies.[56] In some places, in fact, local activists made plans to turn yangge troupes into winter schools. In Yangjialaozhuang in Zichang, where most of the participants in the yangge troupe were village youth, the troupe was first converted into a newspaper reading group and then, more ambitiously, into a winter school, with the intention of using classroom sessions to draft new yangge and *meihu* plays.[57]

Such indeed was the level of integration between schools and yangge troupes that texts of yangge plays were often used as teaching material. In the Army Dependants' School in Yan'an, yangge plays were used for language lessons and for lessons in social knowledge, while yangge dancing itself was incorporated in physical education classes.[58] In the Yan'an Middle School, a high level of student interest in Language lessons was attributed to the regular reading and performance of yangge plays in class.[59] Yangge plays were also used in the winter schools in Jingbian, Yanchi and Wuqi counties to make lessons more lively,[60] while in Dingbian one yangge troupe from the 6th district composed ballads (*xiaodiao*) for use in a winter school reader.[61] The Political Office of the United Garrisons' Hygiene Department, seeing that orderlies and office workers were never as enthusiastic about participation in culture classes as they were about yangge, also decided to combine the two activities. They scheduled a 'yangge class' for every Saturday, for which the teachers selected suitable plays like 'The Transformation of Zhang Youfu' (*Zhang Youfu zhuanbian*), which was about the political education of an orderly who refused to go to literacy classes. In this way, it was claimed, not only did staff learn to read faster, but they had better retention rates and were more likely to pass on what they had learned to people outside the class.[62]

Conversely, language and literacy classes in schools some times created their own plays. The case of Yangjialaozhuang in Zichang has already been mentioned. In the East Gansu subregion the high primary schools in each county were organized to team up with local 'old artists' to produce texts for new plays.[63]

Combining yangge with literacy classes in schools, therefore, provided a partial

56 JFRB 16 Feb 1945, p. 1, 'Linxian wenjiaohui zong jiehe, minjian jutuan jingyan'.

57 JFRB 26 Nov 1945, p. 2, 'Zichang Jianyucha qu Yangjialaozhuang, yanggedui zhuanbian wei dubaozu'.

58 JFRB 25 Apr 1946, p. 4, 'Haizimen de yangge: Kangxiao yangge huodong de yidian jingyan'.

59 JFRB 25 Feb 1945, p. 2, 'Yanzhong yanggedui yanchu "Zhimian" "Tao gucha" deng'.

60 JFRB 5 Feb 1945, p. 2 (note 41).

61 JFRB 25 Nov 1945, p. 2, 'Dingbian xiangxuan kaishi, chengqu sanxiang ganbu xian zuo fanxing, liuqu sanxiang peihe xiangxuan biancheng yangge'.

62 JFRB 7 Aug 1945, p. 4, ' "Yangge ke" he "Huoshi bao" '. The above-mentioned play is said to have gained currency in Ganguyi in the east of Yan'an county by such means.

63 JFRB 30 Jan 1945, p. 2, 'Longdong kaiban gange xunlianban, peiyang difang yiwei gongzuo ganbu, chuban qunzhong chuangzuo jukan'.

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solution to the chronic lack of literacy skills in village yangge troupes. At least to a certain extent it ensured that village-level troupes could not only have access to up-to-date information on current events and government policy, via newspaper reading, but also have the skills necessary to put together their own short plays based on 'real people and real events' of the locality. Conversely, yangge and the performance of plays were used to liven up classes and add point to the acquisition of literacy.

Achievement of these objectives in the years 1944−46 can only have been partial, given not only the extremely low base level of literacy in the Border Region but also peasant reservations about the way in which winter schools and similar programs were administered. In Fuxian, for instance, peasants were reportedly worried about the financial burden imposed on them by the forty-one people-run schools in the county.[64] In the same county there were other problems with the literacy groups: not only were cruel and unusual punishments inflicted for minor infringements of discipline, but the rate of voluntary participation was low.[65] At least in some areas, the new yangge promoted by Yan'an was almost certainly tarred with the same brush.

The Militia

The people's militia (*minbing*) were an important group in the New Democratic village, comprising at times virtually every able-bodied male in the village.[66] This was true throughout the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region but especially so in the areas near the border with the KMT and in the old Soviet base areas from Huachi to Yaoxian along the Shaanxi-Gansu border. Organised already in paramilitary fashion, the militia were naturally well placed to play a key role in the organisation of the village yangge troupe. Yangge, after all, required a large number of dancers moving in closely coordinated pattern: this required a period of training and, indeed, military precision. Add to this that martial dances such as tyrant's whip and waist-drum and displays of martial arts by the spiritual militia were a common feature of traditional yangge performances, and we have in the mid-1940's what is clearly a neo-traditional pattern of activity.

Militia are mentioned as the backbone of the yangge troupe in a number of localities: evidence for Gaoying district in Qingyang and Yanchang county has already been cited.[67] In the village of Zhoujiagou in Shilipu district, Mizhi, leadership of the

[64] JFRB 3 Feb 1945, p. 2, 'Fuxian minbanxiao, bufen hai zai jiao jiushu'. Twenty-nine of these were old-style *sishu*.

[65] JFRB 28 Mar 1945, p. 2, 'Fuxian zongjie qunian shizi yundong, ziyuan chenglizhe hen da, qiangpo chenglizhe duo shi kong jiazi'.

[66] Harrison Forman, *Report from Red China* (London: Robert Hale, 1946), pp. 201-208.

[67] JFRB 3 Feb 1945, p. 2 (see note 64) and JFRB 21 Jan 1945, p. 2 (see note 32).

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yangge troupe was provided by the chiefs of the self-defense corps (*ziweidui*).[68] In the same district, militia members were called on to perform the military roles in yangge plays performed by local troupes.[69] One can safely infer that wherever the young men of the village formed the basic contingent in the yangge troupe, as in Yangjialaozhuang in Zichang, that militia men were involved, either individually or as a body.[70]

The connection between yangge and the militia was even closer than this, however. The rehearsal period for yangge troupes coincided with the winter training period for the militia. The grand parades and inspections that marked the end of winter military exercises took place just after the Chinese New Year, when the yangge troupes were emerging from their 'nests' to perform. The two types of activity were often combined. Yangge performances by local troupes became a standard feature of the spring militia inspections, as at Qingyang in early 1944.[71] In 1945, the First district in Yanchang held a twenty-day winter school for basic-level cadres and militia, during which exercises in grenade-throwing and bayonet practice were combined with literacy lessons (three to four characters a day) and rehearsal of songs. For the final inspection parade from the district offices to the market town of Heijiabu, the one hundred and seventy participants formed a yangge troupe, which gave displays of military exercises followed by a performance of their own self-produced play in each village they came to along the route. It can be seen in this case that the connection between yangge and militia influenced the form of performance, though in an entirely neo-traditional direction: grenade-throwing and bayonet practice replaced traditional displays of martial arts.

In Jingbian, too, Du Zhidong's troupe used the winter militia training as an opportunity to organise a yangge training class (*yangge xunlianban*).[72] This regimen entailed militia training in the morning of each day and yangge rehearsals in the evening, starting from the 8th of the eleventh month.[73] A similar arrangement was adopted in Qingyang, where a 15-20 day 'winter school' was organised for basic-level cadres and militia under instruction by the local garrison army. Exercises included grenade-throwing, but also tactics of reconnaissance and ambush. Each training squad used the early morning period and the evening to learn characters and rehearse new yangge plays: the Yima district squad also discussed ways of organising the masses to perform new yangge after their return from Qingyang. As a result of these activities, new *shehuo* were organised in the spring of 1945 in each district of Qingyang county,

68 JFRB 20 Feb 1945, p. 2 (see note 51).

69 JFRB 6 Feb 1945, p. 2, 'Qingyang deng xian jigan ziweijun dongxun zhong …'.

70 JFRB 25 Feb 1944, p. 2.

71 JFRB 3 Feb 1945, p. 2 (see note 53).

72 JFRB 19 Oct 1944, p. 1.

73 JFRB 14 Jan 1945, p. 2, 'Du Zhidong hui Jingbian hou, yanggedui gengjia huoyue, meige yanyuan dou xue renzi, wanshang yanxi zaoshang zaolian'.

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with the local militia in the leading role.[74] Editorial comment in JFRB approved of this trend to combine winter exercises with literacy classes and yangge. The militia, it declared, ought to become the main force for the celebration of *shehuo* in the villages. The militia could become the nucleus not only of self-defense in the villages of the Border Region, but of economic and cultural work as wel1.[75]

There was then a striking convergence of the 'spiritual militia' of the traditional yangge troupe and the actual people's militia of the Border Region. This convergence was encouraged by the Yan'an authorities and was clearly, in the form we have seen above, post-revolutionary. This pattern inevitably raises questions, however, about the connection between festivals and revolt in China. Was yangge also connected in any way with the early activities of the communist-led peasant movement of the late 1920's and early 1930's? Evidence from Shaan-Gan and the Shaanbei Soviet bases is very thin on the ground and awaits careful assessment. Recent folklore scholarship from Europe has highlighted connections between festival organisations and patterns of popular protest and rebellion in early modern Europe.[76] A similar connection in the case of the Chinese revolution cannot be ruled out.

The Participation of Women

Participation of women and girls in the yangge troupes throughout the Border Region was one of the policy goals set by the Party for the New Yangge movement. Such participation as we have seen for the earlier case of the Jin-Cha-Ji base in the early war period, was intended as both a symbol and a catalyst for female emancipation in the villages.[77] In the period after 1942 however, when the Party leadship made its historic compromise with traditional peasant sexual morality and the requirements of KMT-area and international public relations, this policy was not pursued with vigour.

Nevertheless, some progress was made on the local level. In the Yan'an area it was reported that by the 1945 season young girls and housewives had begun to take part in the Yan'an Townspeople's Yangge Troupe, a body that consisted of over 200 members, including separate Henan and Shanxi contingents. The participation of women was recognised as a new departure and as a sign that yangge was 'in the process of developing'.[78] In Mizhi county, Shilipu and Majiagou reported that 'even

74 JFRB 6 Feb 1945, p. 2 (see note 69).

75 Ibid.

76 See e.g. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), esp. pp. 169-216 and 283-299; and Yves-Marie Bercé, *Fête et Révolte. Des mentalités populaires du xvi^e^ au xvii^e^ siècle* (Paris: 1976).

77 On yangge in Jin-Cha-Ji during the early war period, see Holm, *Art and Ideology*, pp. 122-124.

78 JFRB 25 Feb 1945, p. 2, 'Shimin Beijiao Qiaozhen san qunzhong yanggedui, zai Dongguan

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housewives and older daughters put on rouge and makeup' to participate in the village yangge troupe.[79] A different solution was tried out in Sanbian: the town of Zhangjiapan in Jingbian set up a Zhangjiapan Women's Yangge Troupe, thus organising women separately from the men. This troupe performed plays on topics related to the advancement of women, such as 'Literacy is Good' (*Shizi hao*), which they put on in 1945 for a big festival performance in Jingbian.[80] The troupe was still active in 1946, when they appeared again for a combined performance of ten troupes in Jingbian and performed such numbers as 'The Virtuous Daughter-in-Law' (*Xiao gu xian*) and 'New Zhang Lian Sells Cloth' (*Xin Zhang Lian mai bu*). Literacy seems to have been an important aspect of the troupe's activities: the twenty-odd women participants were also in the Zhangjiapan married Women's Literacy Group.[81]

In other localities the composition of the yangge troupe remained entirely traditional, and women did not participate. In Sanshizhai, a market town in Suide, for instance, the yangge troupe included no intellectuals and no women; the female roles were all men in female clothing (*nan ban nü de*). The little dances (*xiao changzi*) and plays moreover were performed entirely by the old master artists (*bashimen*). The only concession to the new trend towards artistic Realism was that the men were instructed in makeup for the female roles by their wives.[82] In Yanchuan the Fanjiahe Self-Amusement Group was also an all-male organization. Here, however, this was recognised as a shortcoming, and it was reported that members of the group were beginning to teach their wives to read, as the first step towards admitting women members.[83] A common half-way measure was to allow school-girls and younger unmarried girls to take part in performances: in Yan'an the sons and daughters of the Dongguan parish yangge troupe members took part in the dance while the women watched their husbands and children from the audience.[84] Similarly further east, in Qiaorgou, the Qiaozhen Yangge Troupe augmented its complement of peasants and petty merchants with a contingent of children, girls as well as boys, who performed for instance in the play 'Traffic in Marriages' (*Maimai hunyin*).[85] This was no new departure, however: women were traditionally allowed out in public at the time of the lantern festival to look at lanterns and watch the yangge, and there was a long history of using children of both sexes for propaganda dances in the Soviet areas.

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zhuanshu huiyan'.

79 JFRB 20 Feb 1945, p. 2 (see note 51).

80 JFRB 6 Mar 1945, p. 2 (see note 31).

81 JFRB 28 Feb 1946, p. 2, 'Zhenjing qu yangge, qunzhong zibian ziyan'.

82 JFRB 10 Mar 1945, p. 2, 'Suiqu wengongtuan, bangzhu laobaixing paixi, Kangda wengongtuan yan "San da Zhujiazhuang"'.

83 JFRB 17 Feb 1945, p. 2 (see note 34).

84 JFRB 16 Mar 1945, p. 2, 'Yige qunzhong yanggedui de chengzhang' (Dongguan xiang tongxun xiaozu).

85 JFRB 25 Feb 1945, p. 2 (see note 78).

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A number of conclusions can be drawn from available evidence. First, there is no discernible geographical pattern to the incidence of female participation in yangge troupes in Shaan-Gan-Ning. This question was decided at the village level, and it seems to have hinged more on the type of yangge activity that existed in the village than on county or even district-level political leadership. Secondly, troupes composed of political activists – Zhang Geng's first type – were far more open to women than those like Sanshizhai that were controlled by 'old artists'. Thirdly, there was evidently more resistance to the participation of married women and older girls than to that of younger schoolgirls. Overall, the conservatism of North Shaanxi peasants on this issue stands in striking contrast with the relative activism of peasants in the Shanxi and Hebei base areas. Nowhere for Shaan-Gan-Ning do we have evidence of the kind of development that took place in Jin-Sui, where yangge troupes worked out detailed regulations for the participation of women and the relations between the sexes in consultation with local communities.[86]

Finance of Troupes

Money was an all-important consideration for both artistic and non-artistic aspects of the performance of yangge, and particularly in the countryside of North Shaanxi and East Gansu, it was in short supply. Traditionally, money for the performance of yangge was collected by the heads of the village temple association as a levy on all the householders in the village. Outlays could be considerable, especially for more sumptuous performances, and the amount of money a troupe had at its disposal influenced directly not only the details of performance such as costumes and properties but also which genres could be performed. If a troupe travelled to other villages there were also travelling expenses to be defrayed.

Money had been one of the issues behind the 1942 shift in policy away from 'big plays', partly in reaction to the enthusiasm among village drama troupes in Shanxi and Hebei for prestige productions. 'Big plays' were simply too expensive, especially if the props and scenery of European-style 'spoken drama' were also considered. By the same token, Party support for yangge, that is, for 'short-and-snappy' playlets performed in modern dress on contemporary and even local themes, was motivated in part by financial imperatives.

It was never intended that the masses' yangge troupes be financed with public subsidies, and nowhere is there any suggestion that funds on any level were earmarked for this purpose. Nevertheless, there are scattered reports of troupes receiving assistance or prize money from local government bodies. Some indication of the size of budgets available comes from Fuxian, where the head of Taile district made four *dan*

[86] Holm, 'Hua Guofeng', p. 685.

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of wheat available for cultural and educational work within the district.[87] In October 1944 the county government of Jingbian subsidised Du Zhidong's yangge troupe by contributing pork and wheat for the troupe members' rations;[88] during the 1945 New Year other government offices and nearby army units sent foodstuffs and other material goods as 'solicitation' presents, while the county office contributed ¥40,000.[89] This was not a great deal of money, being the equivalent of ¥2.67 at 1937 prices.[90] It formed in any case only a very small proportion of the financial base of Du's troupe, who beginning in July 1944 received their firewood and five *dan* of wheat from the parish temple fund.[91] Du's troupe thus combined new and traditional sources of finance.

Instances such as this are rarely mentioned. In general government at all levels encouraged whatever forms of self-help seemed appropriate. One possibility was for troupe members to establish an agricultural cooperative. Liu Zhiren's troupe in Nancang, Xinning county, developed the idea of '*shehuo* fields', income from which was committed to defraying the cost of performances. In Autumn 1944 they cleared twelve *mu* of wasteland for this purpose, and planned to clear a further twenty-eight mu in 1945.[92] A similar solution was adopted by the yangge troupe of Renjiagou in Linxian on the model of the local militia's 'ammunition fields' (*junhuotian*).[93] For more prosperous troupes, a way of generating extra revenue was to establish a credit cooperative (*xinyongshe*): this method was adopted by the Gulin Municipal Yangge Troupe, who planned to use the interest so generated to establish a local culture club that would operate on a year-round basis.[94] In Yindou district, Mizhi, 20 per cent of the profit from the local cooperative (capital assets ¥144,000) was set aside to establish a district amateur drama troupe to perform at the temple fair in Qingyunshan.[95] In Yan'an, too, the Dongguan parish put dividends from the parish hygiene cooperative towards the expenses of putting on plays.[96]

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87 JFRB 15 Aug 1944, p. 2, 'Fuxian quxiang ganbu de xin banfa, xian chang yangge juben, ranhou an zi qu ren'. At then current prices, this was the equivalent of ¥215,000 (*Caijing zhaibian* vol. 4, p. 438).

88 JFRB 26 Oct 1944, p. 4.

89 JFRB 14 Jan 1945, p. 2 (see note 73).

90 Xibei caijing banshichu, 'SGN bianqu yinhang gezhong tongji biao', in *Caijing zhaibian* vol. 5, p. 182.

91 JFRB 26 Oct 1944, p. 4 (see note 88). The five pecks of wheat were presumably supplied monthly.

92 JFRB 23 Feb 1945, p. 2, 'Liu Zhiren yanggedui wanquan yan xin yangge, huozi shi zhen huozi, dizhu shi zhen dizhu'.

93 JFRB 2 Feb 1945, p. 2, 'Linxian Renjiagou jutuan, zhunbei kaihuang zichou jingfei'.

94 JFRB 23 Mar 1945, p. 2 (see note 37).

95 JFRB 15 May 1944, p. 2, 'Mizhi Yindou qu qunzhong yu xuesheng hezuo, chuangli shengchan yeyu jutuan, jiemu you laobaixing zibian ziyan, jingfei cong hezuoshe hongli'.

96 JFRB 16 Mar 1945, p. 2 (see note 84).

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The use of cooperative funds is perhaps best seen as a modified form of the traditional method of funding, that is, the levy of local residents. There is every indication that this continued to be the dominant way of funding yangge. In Wuqi county, local inhabitants supported culture hero Liu Baotang's troupe in this way, and provided them with the money needed to perform at the district headquarters.[97] In Dongguan parish, Yan'an, it was the parish cadres who were responsible for making the collection (*mujuan*) at a village meeting.[98] In some cases money would be contributed after performances by appreciative audiences. Residents of Xi Songjiayuanzi in Jingbian collected ¥20,000 for a yangge troupe from nearby Zhenluo district after the troupe's performances at the village's temple fair. This sum was in addition to a pre-performance contribution of ¥60,000.[99]

Another traditional custom was the quête. That is, while going the rounds of individual households in the period between the New Year and the lantern festival, the yangge troupe would follow each performance in a courtyard with a demand for money. Party organisers felt that this interfered with the propaganda functions of the yangge troupe, and at least in Jingbian this practice was abolished. Public and private shops reportedly welcomed this measure, and by way of compensation 'consoled the troupe members with cigarettes, melon seeds and dates'.[100] On the other hand, the custom of troupes giving gifts of money in small packets of red paper (*hong fengzi*) to children seems to have continued at least in some areas.[101] This however was a minor outlay.

One of a yangge troupe's major outlays was for musical instruments and costumes. There were some villages at least which did not have these items to hand and had either to make them or buy them in from outside. The number of sets of percussion available put definite limits in some areas on the development of the movement for mass cultural amusements: in Yanchang there were twenty-nine such sets in the county.[102] The problem of supply could only have been exacerbated with the rapid increase in the number of villages putting on performances over the period 1943-46. The cost of a complete set of gongs, drums and other musical instruments for yangge was over ¥20,000 in early 1945.[103] The alternative was to hire the local band of blow-and-beat musicians (*chuigushou*). Such expense could be avoided if other expedients were available. In Chunyao county in the far south of the Border Region, the club at Baiyuancun obtained gongs and cymbals for its opera performances from a local Taoist

97 JFRB 23 Mar 1945, p. 2 (see note 35).

98 JFRB 16 Mar 1945, p. 2 (see note 84).

99 JFRB 5 Jun 1945, p. 2, 'Jingbian Zhenluo qu liuxiang yanggedui, zhongdi zaishu jiejue jingfei'.

100 JFRB 14 Jan 1945, p. 2 (see note 73).

101 JFRB 31 Jan 1945, p. 2 (see note 38).

102 JFRB 21 Jan 1945, p. 2 (see note 32).

103 *Bianqu Qunzhongbao* 7 Jan 1945, p. 3. This at least was the price paid by the Liu Haocheng troupe in Yan'an.

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priest.[104] This transaction was not necessarily an amicable one: confiscation of temple property was a common expedient during the war and temple bells in particular were a convenient source of iron for weapons and agricultural implements.[105] In Dongguan parish, Yan'an, the musical instruments for the parish yangge troupe came from private houses: these included a reed-pipe (*guanzi*), a four-string fiddle (*sixuan*), and small brasses.[106] The parish also commissioned a local carpenter to make four tyrant's whips and two large wooden hatchets and sickles for ¥1000. The father of one troupe member made four waist drums (*huagu*) and a big drum at a favourable price. For costumes, the old men in the troupe glued together their own false beards. The Dongguan troupe thus acquired its own orchestra and its own stage properties.[107] it is quite apparent, however, that Dongguan was in a highly favourable position; there must have been a large number of troupes in the Border Region who had to make do with makeshift instruments and minimal properties.

Temple fairs and markets

The new yangge was not only performed at the New Year. Particularly after the culture and education congresses, an effort was made to widen the occasions of performance. In terms of audience size, some of the most important occasions for the performance of the new yangge in the countryside were temple fairs, agricultural fairs and local markets. Temple fairs often attracted very large numbers of people, allowing Party drama troupes an opportunity to reach large audiences with a minimum of effort, and thereby make the most of their badly stretched and inadequate resources. They also provided an arena in which Party cultural organs could make contact with private old opera companies and do battle with 'feudal superstition' on its own ground.

Temple fairs were particularly important in the social and economic life of the North Shaanxi-East Gansu region, where transport was usually difficult and other avenues of economic exchange – for instance the network of rural markets – remained underdeveloped. Unlike periodic rural markets, which might be held as many as three times a week, temple fairs were held once a year, usually for a period of three days on or around the birthday of the temple god. Nor were they confined to central places, the more conveniently located larger towns and villages: theoretically at least, any

104 JFRB 30 Nov 1945, p. 2 (see note 49).

105 See the yangge play *Liu Shunqing* (1944); repr. Zhang Geng, ed., *Yanggeju xuan* (1977), pp. 162 ff.

106 This combination of musical instruments indicates that the form of little opera current in the village was not *meihu*, but rather North Shaanxi *daoqing*. See Li Huanzhi, '*Meihu daoqing ji* qianyan' (1945), in *Minjian yinyue lunwenji* (*di'erji*), p. 73.

107 JFRB 16 Mar 1945, p. 2 (see note 84).

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village with a temple could mount a temple fair when conditions permitted. According to available statistics, there were 271 towns and villages in the East Gansu subregion holding temple fairs, 67 in the Sanbian subregion, and, counting only the temple fairs that gave performances of opera, 500 in four counties of the Suide subregion.[108] Similarly, there were 72 such temple fairs in the single county of Qingyang in East Gansu,[109] and 30 in the more remote county of Zhidan.[110] These numbers were not the same from year to year: Party commentators noted that with the revival of the domestic economy of the region over the few years up to 1944, temple fairs that had been discontinued because of military disorders or famine in the 1920's and '30's had been mostly restored. Thus there were two villages in Gaoying district in Qingyang that held temple fairs in 1941; by 1944 this had risen to five.[111]

As elsewhere in China, temple fairs were associated with a number of different deities. In Shaan-Gan-Ning the most important fairs were those of the Mother Goddesses (Niangniang), the Dragon King (Longwang), the God of Medicine (Yaowang), the Gods of Oxen and Horses (Niuwang Mawang), Erlang, the God of Fire (Huoshen), Guan Yu (Guandi), and the Buddha (Foye). Altogether there were thirty or forty different cults associated with temple fairs.[112] The main distinction, however, was between 'incense fairs' (*xiangyanhui*), where religious worship was the chief activity, and 'mule and horse fairs' (*luoma dahui*), where economic transactions predominated. It was characteristic of Shaan-Gan-Ning that 'incense fairs' far outnumbered the others: in East Gansu, for instance, the 53 'mule and horse fairs' constituted only 20% of the total. Thus pure economic activity was not very common. Peasants flocked to the 'incense fairs' primarily to burn incense and make vows in the temple, consult oracles, pray for male progeny, rain, wealth, and healing of disease, or to give thanks for prayers answered. They also came however to buy and sell items of daily use, see the crowds, and watch the opera. Performances of opera were sine qua non because they were the chief means of thanking the god of the temple for favours granted and paying respects on the occasion of the god's birthday. In some cases organisers would not hold a temple fair until they could hire an opera company. Opera companies usually

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108 JFRB 9 Nov 1944, p. 1, 'Wenjiao dahui taolun gaizao miaohui jiaoyu qunzhong, ge jutuan yinggai canjia miaohui gongzuo, jinxing xuanchuan jiaoyu'. The 'four counties' of Suide presumably refers to the core area of Suide, Mizhi, Jiaxian, and Wubu.

109 JFRB 6 Oct 1944, p. 4, '"Wenhuapeng" daiti le "Niangniangmiao"' (Ke Fu).

110 JFRB 19 Jul 1945, p. 4, 'Zhidan liyong Liujiaping miaohui xuanchuan shouxiao, huizhong jiang dabu jipin xianqian'. Another article notes there were nine temple fairs in a single district in Wuqi (JFRB 23 Mar 1945, p. 2).

111 JFRB 6 Oct 1944, p. 4 (see note 109).

112 JFRB 9 Nov 1944, p. 1 (see note 108). Typical dates for these fairs were the 18th of the 3rd month, for the birthday of Gao niangniang; the 8th of the 4th month, for the main mother goddess temple fairs (*niangniang miaohui*); and the 12th of the 7th month for the Gaomiao 'incense fair' (*xiangyanhui*) in Salipu, Qingyang.

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performed for two days and three nights, and charged anywhere from ¥225,000 to ¥850,000.[113]

On average each temple fair cost the organisers around five *dan* of millet (or the equivalent of ¥200,000 at 1944 prices[114]), but expenses could be higher. Thus cultural workers estimated the consumption figure for the whole of the Border Region at 'several tens of millions of *yuan*'. Attendances were also high: the total number of people attending fairs each year in Suide county was reckoned at 350,000. Since the county's population was just over 110,000, this meant that each person on average went to temple fairs over three times a year – or else the fairs attracted considerable numbers of outsiders. In Zhenyuan county, East Gansu, for every temple fair held at the mother goddesses' temple in the 5th parish, organisers estimated that women devotees spent ¥3000 on average, mainly on large bundles of incense that were burnt before the main altar. The fact that many of the fairs took place during the agricultural busy season did not seem to deter people from coming, even if agricultural production suffered. Some of the temple fairs were on a particularly large scale, notably those of the Taoist temples at Baiyunshan just south of the city of Jiaxian and that of Taohuashan in Qingyang county: the daily attendance at these fairs was often over 10,000, and peasants and traders gathered from several hundred kilometres around.[115]

Cultural workers had long been aware of the importance of temple fairs, and in spite of their antipathy towards 'feudal superstition', a number of local organisations, like the Popular Education Bureau in Qingyang county, had begun to experiment seriously with temple fair propaganda well before official encouragement was given. In 1944, however, the question received special attention from the Arts Section of the Border Region Culture and Education Congress, and the Party threw its support behind a policy of 'utilizing and reforming the Border Region's temple fairs, so that they became weapons for carrying out mass cultural education work'.

There were several facets to the policy that emerged from these deliberations. First, cultural workers were to foster the economic aspect of temple fairs by selecting temple fairs in suitable locations, encouraging traders, and ensuring that such fairs met the economic needs of the masses. It was anticipated that by acting in this fashion the Party could ensure that temple fairs would not only come to play a larger part in reviving the economy, but that in the process their basic character would be transformed and the 'feudal-superstitious' aspect could be de-emphasised and brought under control. Secondly, the old opera was to be replaced with new opera or yangge. The Arts Section noted that there were still too few government-affiliated drama troupes to cater for existing demand and that temple fair organisers therefore had no

113 The former figure comes from Wuqi (JFRB 23 Mar 1945, p. 2, see note 35), the latter from Mutouyu in Jiaxian (JFRB 16 Jan 1945, p. 2, 'Jiaxian Mutouyu cun, nao yangge xuanchuan shengchan').

114 *Caijing zhaibian* vol. 4, p. 440.

115 JFRB 9 Nov 1944, p. 1 (see note 108).

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option but to hire old opera companies. Nevertheless, opera troupes at the subregional level were henceforth instructed to take the initiative in performing at temple fairs in an organised fashion. Local amateur drama troupes and yangge troupes were also to be encouraged to perform at temple fairs, provided this happened voluntarily and not as a result of undue pressure on troupe members. Similarly, local government cultural organs were encouraged to use other forms of folk art, such as peep-shows, storytelling and illustrated lectures, to reinforce the propaganda messages conveyed by the drama troupes. These efforts were to be linked with the third strand in the policy, which was to use the temple fairs as opportunities for providing medical advice, by setting up medical work teams, veterinary clinics and agricultural advice bureaus where circumstances permitted.[116] Given that a large proportion of the prayers and vows offered to temple gods had to do with childbirth and human and animal illness, medical clinics combined with propaganda on basic hygiene and modern scientific medicine were a sensible response, even if resources did not always permit adequate medical treatment. These recommendations from the Arts Section were later incorporated in a 'Resolution on the Development of Mass Arts' promulgated by the Border Region Consultative Council, which emphasised particularly the role of subregion and county-level drama troupes in this work.[117]

Contemporary newspaper reports indicate that this policy was widely implemented. By 1945 all the largest temple fairs in the Border Region had new-style troupes performing plays and very often various other government bodies and support groups dispensing medicine and medical advice. Smaller temple fairs, mule and-horse fairs and even periodic rural markets were also visited for propaganda purposes. In addition to new opera, new forms of propaganda such as the 'culture tent' (*wenhua peng*) which combined propaganda, peep shows, storytelling and a book-stall, were developed by a number of organisations such as the Popular Education Bureau in Qingyang and the Cultural Association's Arts Work Team, specifically for the temple fair setting.

Drama troupes involved in this work included subregion-level cultural work teams, county-level professional troupes, yangge troupes and local self-amusement groups. The Suide Subregion Cultural Work Corps, for instance, left Suide for Wubao and Jiaxian in late February 1945 for the express purpose of making propaganda at temple fairs. They visited Xiliyu (Xizhen) in late March for one of the largest agricultural fairs in northeast Shaanxi, where they played for six days to audiences that averaged 6000 people per day;[118] they then travelled north to Jiaxian, where

116 Ibid.

117 JFRB 12 Jan 1945, p. 4, 'Guanyu fazhan qunzhong yishu de jueyi'.

118 JFRB 23 Apr 1945, p. 2, 'Suiqi wengongtuan, zai Jiaxian luomadahui yanxi, juxing "Yang wawa" deng meizhan'. Having quickly established contact with the local yangge activists, the Work Corps helped the town set up a 'club', with the yangge troupe as the core element, and helped them perform their own play 'Zhang Dayuan Joins the Army' (*Zhang Dayuan dangbing*)

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they performed for the temple fair in the Taoist temple to the mother goddesses at Baiyunshan, held on the 8th of the fourth month of the old calendar. This was by far the largest temple fair in the region and worshippers came from as far afield as Yulin, Inner Mongolia and Ningxia. Total attendance for four days was estimated at 60−70,000. Another professional troupe, the Battleforce Drama Society (Zhanli jushe) from the Northwest Shanxi base[119] and the Jiaxian Amateur Drama Troupe also gave performances.[120] Also from Suide, the Resistance University Cultural Work Team (Kangda wengongtuan) went out to Lingbaoshan in Suide county to perform at the temple fair there.[121]

Elsewhere in the Border Region, the Northwest Cultural Work Team (Xibei wengongtuan) from Yan'an travelled out to the Second District of Ansai along with work teams from the Border Region Hygiene Office (Bianqu weishengchu) and the Midwives Training Corps (Zhuchan xunlianban). There they performed plays and peep shows at the mother Goddesses' temple fair in Luorping; afterwards they were invited by local temple associations to perform also at Guojiata and Gaoqiaochuan.[122]

These were the 'prestige flagships'. More common were the efforts of local county-level troupes at the larger temple fairs in each county. Typically county governments delegated this work to the yangge troupes in the schools. Thus in Zichang it was the county's middle school and No. 2 Higher Primary School at Wayaobu that provided the dramatics for the temple fair at Yangjiayuanzi on the 19th of the 3rd month.[123] In East Gansu dramatic entertainments for the temple fair at Taohuashan near Qingyang (on the 1st of the 3rd month) were provided by a hastily organised yangge Troupe of forty people from the East Gansu Middle School.[124] Even in the immediate vicinity of Yan'an, it was the Yan'an Municipality Primary School and Medical College Yangge Troupes that performed at the Mother Goddesses' temple fair

for audiences at the fair.

119 JFRB 8 Jul 1945, p. 2, 'Zhanli jushe anzhao qunzhong yaoqiu xuanchuan beihuang, fangshi linghuo shouxiao hen da, liyong "shenxi" xingshi yanchu fan mixin xi'. This company, attached to the 120th Army 'Independence' Brigade, was noted for its use of the form of the 'spirit play' (*shenxi*) for anti-superstition plays.

120 JFRB 8 Jun 1945, p. 2, 'Jiaxian Baiyunshan wanren shenghui shang …'.

121 FRB 27 May 1945, p. 2, 'Lingbaoshan miaohui lao huishou fandui yan xin yangge, qunzhong bu li ta yao kan wengongtuan "Rencai liangwang"'. For a reminiscence of the Suide Subregion troupe's performances at temple fairs, see Li Zuozhu, 'Gan taikou – Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu wenhua shenghuo pianduan', *Shaanxi ribao* 19 Sep 1982, p. 2.

122 JFRB 30 May 1945, p. 2, 'Xibei wengongtuan deng zai Ansai xuanchuan weisheng beihuang'; and JFRB 11 Jul 1945, p. 4, 'Yanggeju zai miaohui shang'.

123 JFRB 20 May 1945, p. 2 (see note 45).

124 JFRB 22 Apr 1946, p. 2, 'Longzhong yanggedui, zai Taohuashan xuanchuan'. The performed the plays 'Going to the Temple Fair' (*Gan miaohui*) and 'The Gods Fear a Beating' (*Shenshen pa da*).

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at Qingliangshan.[125] As most temple fairs took place in the agricultural busy season, it is likely that schools and colleges were chosen for this work in order to avoid taking peasants or government workers in other departments away from agricultural work.

In some cases local drama troupes performed: in Yindou district in Mizhi county, for instance, the district's drama troupe gave performances at the temple fair at Qingyunshan on the 8th of the fourth month.[126] In Zhidan county, the Public Security Office Yangge Troupe performed the yangge plays 'Feng Guangqi' and 'Ma Qishan' to crowds at the Zhidan mule-and-horse fair.[127] And at Xihekou in Ansai, the Cadres' Retirement Home performed a number of plays for the local mule-and-horse fair.[128]

In some cases, however, yangge troupes organised by peasants or townspeople performed at temple fairs. In Jiaxian the Mutouyu Village Club performed new plays nine times at local temple fairs, saving villagers a total of ¥850,000 in hiring fees.[129] In Yanchuan, the self-amusement band of Fanjiahe village in the north of the county performed Qinqiang plays at nearby markets and temple fairs, including that at Hujiacha.[130] More frequently mentioned is the participation of local troupes in street propaganda at local periodic markets: the Pankejie self-amusement group in Xinning county at the market in Pankejie,[131] the Bahecun yangge troupe in Taile district of Fuxian for the market in Yangquan.[132] In the wake of the 1944 policy, however, not all temple fairs continued to stage performances of opera: in some cases the organisers preferred to save their money. Qiaoshang village in Yihe district, Suide, for instance, had previously hired an opera company every year for the Laoye and Mother Goddess temple fairs. When the local primary school was 'privatised' as a 'people-run' primary school (*minban xiaoxue*) following the education policy reforms of 1943−44, the village chose to keep the money collected for the performance of opera and establish an 'education cooperative' in order to finance the continued running of the school.[133] A similar development took place in Liujiaping in Zhidan county, where a credit

125 JFRB 20 May 1945, p. 2, 'Zuori Qingliangshan miaohui shang, xuanchuan beihuang weisheng'. The Higher Primary School also performed at the Qingliangshan fair in 1946 (JFRB 9 May 1946, p. 2).

126 JFRB 15 May 1945, p. 2, 'Mizhi niangniang miaohui shang, Mizhong yanchu "Hushi bainian"'. *Hushi bainian* ('Nurses Pay New Year's Respects') was a Yan'an play from the 1944 season: text pub. JFRB 28 Mar 1944, p. 4.

127 JFRB 10 Oct 1944, p. 2, 'Wenjiao jianxun'.

128 JFRB 30 May 1945, p. 2, 'Lianzheng ganxiusuo, yanchu yangge huobao'.

129 JFRB 16 Jan 1945, p. 2 (see note 113).

130 JFRB 17 Feb 1945, p. 2 (see note 34).

131 JFRB 31 Jan 1945, p. 2, 'Chishui Zaolin cun dengdi, zhunbei chunjie yule'.

132 JFRB 1 Nov 1944, p. 2, 'Fuxian Shixingchang yexiao, paiyan xin xi'.

133 JFRB 20 Feb 1945, p. 2, 'Suide Yihe qu wuxiang Qiaoshang cun, yi niangniang miaohui chang daxi de qian, zuowei yihou minbanxiao de jijin'.

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cooperative was established with initial capital of ¥50,000.[134]

The content of the new plays performed at temple fairs sometimes reflected specific government policy directives – as when the Northwest Work Team went to Ansai following a Northwest Bureau directive to make propaganda for the 'Guard against Drought and Prepare for Famine' (*fang han bei huang*) policy[135] – but more often reflected the basic character of the temple fairs and their audiences. In the case of the large and numerous mother Goddess temple fairs, these audiences were mostly peasant women praying for children, healing of disease, or a bumper harvest: at Baiyangshuwan in Ansai, for instance, most of the worshippers were village women who did not come down from the hills at any other time of the year.[136]

Thus the yangge plays performed fell into two main categories: those on modern methods of childbirth and hygiene, and anti-superstitious plays. Titles included:

1) Plays on medicine and hygiene, such as:[137]

'How to Have a Baby' (*Zenyang yang wawa*), Zichang
'Having a Baby' (*Yang wawa*) Ansai (two locations), Suide
'Fat Babies' (*Pang wawa*), Yan'an
'Treating Typhus' (*Zhi kangcai*), Zichang
'Be Careful about Hygiene' (*Jiang weisheng*), Ansai

2) Anti-superstition plays, such as:[138]

'The Gods Fear a Beating' (*Shenshan pa da*), Qingyang
'The Blind Fortune Teller' (*Xiazisuanming*), Yan'an, Suide
'Going to the Temple Fair' (*Gan miaohui*), Qingyang

Also common were plays about women's issues:[139]

'The Female Top-Graduate' (*Nü zhuangyuan*), Ansai
'Going back to Mum' (*Hui niangjia*), Suide

Troupes also performed new yangge plays from Yan'an:[140]

134 JFRB 19 Jul 1945, p. 2 (see note 110).

135 On the emergency caused by the failure of the spring rains see 'Xibeiju guanyu fanghan beihuang de jinji zhishi' (6 May 1945), repr. *Caijing zhaibian* vol. 2, pp. 208-209.

136 JFRB 17 May 1945, p. 2, 'Ansai Baiyangshuwan wanren miaohuishang, yanchu yang wawa yanggeju, zhuchanban gongzuozu songgei yingfu weisheng jidaibao'. The Northwest Work Corps observed that women in this area tended to watch opera in the morning, and so scheduled their performances accordingly (JFRB 30 May 1945, p. 2).

137 JFRB 20 May 1945, p. 2 (see note 45); 17 May 1945, p. 2 (see note 136); 27 May 1945, p. 2 (see note 121); 30 May 1945, p. 2 (see note 122); and 9 May 1946, p. 2.

138 JFRB 27 May 1945, p. 2 (see note 121); 22 Apr 1946, p. 2; and 9 May 1946, p. 2.

139 JFRB 27 May 1945, p. 2 (see note 121); and 30 May 1945, p. 2.

140 JFRB 27 May 1945, p. 2 (see note 121); 30 May 1945, p. 2; 11 Jul 1945, p. 4; and 10 Oct 1944,

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'Man and Wife Learn to Read' (*Fuqi shizi*), Suide
'Planting Trees' (*Zai shu*), Suide
'Zhong Wancai Establishes his Household' (*Zhong Wancai qijia*), Ansai 'Man and Wife Refugees' (*Fuqi taonan*), Ansai
'Niu Yonggui is Wounded' (*Niu Yonggui fushang*), Ansai
'Chen Jiafu Returns Home' (*Chen Jiafu huijia*), Ansai
'Feng Guangqi', Zhidan

Particularly in the case of the childbirth plays, new plays were not simply performed in isolation but rather were part of an integrated effort to bring the benefits of elementary hygiene to the attention of peasant women. Thus, frequently medical teams accompanied yangge troupes down to temple fairs. The Northwest Cultural Work Corps went down to Ansai along with groups from the Border Region Hygiene Office, the Midwives' Training Class, and the Border Region Cultural Associations' Visual Arts Work Team. The effort was intensely practical: at Baiyangshuwan in Ansai the Midwives' Training Corps organised an exhibition of posters and diagrams and made up 'umbilical cord' packages, including gauze, cotton wadding and a cloth bandage to give to pregnant women visiting the temporary clinic.[141] The temple fair in Qingyang was attended by groups organised by the local hospital, the bookshop and mass organisations who dispensed medicine, sold cloth for bandages an books on hygiene.[142]

A typical example of this kind of propaganda activity was the temple fair at Yangjiayuanzi, east of Wayaobu in Zichang county. There the county government and Party committee held a meeting beforehand along with the Central Hygiene Medical Team (Zhongwei yiliaodui), the herbal medicines company, the local hygiene cooperative, the Zichang Middle School, the Number 2 Primary School, the Popular Education Bureau, the district-level cadres and the heads of the temple fair society. Publicity was given to the fair in the county newspaper *Zichang bao* and also in local blackboard newspapers: thus in spite of bad weather 7-8000 people attended. Three types of propaganda were mounted by public bodies: yangge, a 'culture tent', and a clinic. The 'culture tent' was complete with a large picture of a fat baby, and posters produced by the Central Hygiene office were handed out, along with written advice on child care. Clay figurines were used to explain modern methods of childbirth. The yangge plays performed were' Treating Typhus' and 'How to Raise Children'. The clinic treated over forty patients by either Western or Chinese means, and dispensed advice to many others.[143]

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p. 2 (see note 127).

141 JFRB 17 May 1945 (see note 136).

142 JFRB 28 Oct 1944, p. 4, 'Qingyang minjiaoguan wenhuapeng de furu weisheng xuanchuan'. The Popular Education Bureau dispensed copies of the Central Hygiene Office's booklet 'Mrs Wang Gives Birth to a Plump Baby' (*Wang dasao yang pangwa*), which conveyed advice about childbirth and infant care in rhymed verse.

143 JFRB 20 May 1945, p. 2 (see note 125).

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The response of rural communities to the provision of new yangge plays for temple fairs was mixed. In Ansai the Northwest work Corps found that the spectators were willing to watch their plays even in pouring rain. The actors solicited the opinions of the audience afterwards and were told that their yangge plays compared favourably with 'big opera', even if the costumes were not as bright as those of 'private opera' (*sirenxi*): the subject matter was contemporary, everyone could understand the plot, and they taught people how to reform themselves (*jiaohua ren*).[144] In other words, audiences recognised the new yangge plays in the same terms as Confucian self-improvement plays. In Jingbian the masses of Songjiayuanzi in Longzhou district refused to hire an old opera company for their annual fair at the temple of the mother goddess. A local opera company made repeated offers of three days and two nights' performance for the rather low figure of ¥30,000, but temple fair organisers refused and instead invited a famous yangge troupe from nearby Zhenluo district to perform, and sent ¥60,000 along as a gift. The yangge troupe members were busy with spring ploughing and at first refused to come, but after repeated entreaties agreed to perform. Once at the fair, they performed twenty-eight plays in three nights and two days, including *Fenhong* (The Cooperative Pays Dividends) and *Quanjia shizi* (The Whole Family Learns to Read). The response was favourable and the inhabitants collected a further ¥20,000 for the troupe's expenses.[145]

Things did not always run so smoothly for the reformers, however. Resistance seems to have come mainly from the traditional village leadership and from the temple association heads in particular. When the Resistance University's Literacy Work Corps arrived in Lingbaoshan in Suide to perform for the temple fair, the organisers insisted that the local masses were still religious, and that the corps should not perform any anti-witch doctor plays or plays about childbirth: rather, they should perform plays extolling the traditional virtues of 'loyalty, filial piety, perseverance, and chastity'. Work Corps leaders, however, stuck to their principle of 'reform the old opera stage' and gave the order to proceed with performances of the yangge plays 'Man and Wife Learn to Read' and 'Planting Trees'. A confrontation ensued:[146]

> Audience reaction was favourable: "We can't understand *erhuang* [big opera] at all, so it would be better just to perform yangge in future." The Organiser countered: "You can't perform yangge − what does that amount to? That bloody nonsense simply insults the gods!" The young men in the audience shouted back, "Why not perform it? Don't watch it if you don't want to. Opera costs money, and all of us paid for that." The organiser replied, "You hand over your contributions to the temple society, and as the head of that society I make the

144 JFRB 11 Jul 1945, p. 4 (see note 122).

145 JFRB 8 Jun 1945, p. 2, 'Qunzhong jujue chang jiuxi, Jingbian Longzhou xiangyanhui shang, qing lai yanggedui'. The yangge troupe in question was that of the 5th and 6th parishes, Zhenluo district. For further reports, see JFRB 5 Jun 1945, p. 2, and 9 Jan 1946, p. 2.

146 JFRB 27 May 1945, p. 2 (see note 121).

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decisions!" Shouts from the crowd: "No good. Everybody's supposed to be democratic now." The temple society head was shouted down, and the Work team went on to perform a number of other yangge plays including *Yang wawa* (Raising Children) and the anti-superstition play *Xiazi suanming* (The Blind Fortune Teller).

Clearly involved here were not just two different generations and political outlooks but two different conceptions of the audience for the plays: for the young men of the village the plays were intended for a human audience and intelligibility was therefore all-important, whereas in the eyes of the temple association head the plays were an offering to the gods of the temple and yangge was not sufficiently prestigious, an entertainment unworthy of the goddesses on such an important occasion.

What in sum can be said about the effectiveness of temple fair propaganda? There were clearly tensions here that were never fully resolved between the new secular outlook and the older attitudes of Chinese popular religion. In the short term, during the closing years of the War of Resistance and the brief interval before the Civil War brought renewed disorder to the region, the chief effect of the temple fair propaganda effort was to make rudimentary medical treatment of basic knowledge of hygiene available for at least some rural women. The effect of such propaganda on patterns of religious worship is less clear: typically temple fair visitors would worship in the temple, burning incense and making vows in the traditional way, before seeing the new style plays or visiting the culture kiosk or clinic. Government cultural workers seem to have accepted this compromise. Nevertheless there are a few indications that some kinds of superstitious practice were discontinued as a result of the government effort. In Salipu, Qingyang county, childless women would traditionally not only burn incense and pray for the birth of a child in the temple of the mother goddess, but would also steal the dolls of cloth or clay left behind as tokens of gratitude by women after childbirth. The belief was that if a woman ate the doll's penis she would then conceive a child. This practice was reportedly discontinued in late 1944, partly as a result of propaganda efforts by the County's Popular Education Bureau.[147]

Content of Plays

How typical of the Yangge movement as a whole was this practical emphasis? What sorts of plays were performed most often? And what kind of 'content' do we find in the new yangge? These are not unimportant questions, since they have a bearing on the kind of face that the CCP presented to the masses, and the basis on which the Party appealed for support. Scholars have argued variously that peasant nationalism or class-

[147] JFRB 6 Oct 1944, p. 4 (see note 109).

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based radicalism was the main basis of communist political power.[148]

Ellen Judd among others has pointed out that the propaganda plays of the Yan'an period are different in subject matter and approach from those of the Jiangxi Soviet period. Whereas in the 1930s most of the artistic production was oriented towards themes of class struggle, the Yan'an period saw an increasing sophistication and a shift to other themes like agricultural production.[149] This can be interpreted as a pragmatic withdrawal from potentially unpopular radical positions.

The usual basis for this view is Zhou Yang's analysis of the content of the fifty-six yangge plays performed in Yan'an in the spring of 1944. His figures are as follows:[150]

Category of Subject Matter	**Number of Plays**	**Percentage**
1. Production and labour (including mutual aid teams, labour heroes, reform of layabouts, army production campaigns, and factory production)	26	46.4
2. Army, People Relations (including: return of deserters, console-the-army and cherish-the-people activities)	17	30.4
3. Self-Defense and Preparedness against traitors	10	17.9
4. The War Effort behind Enemy Lines	2	3.5
5. Reduction of Rent and Interest	1	1.8
Total	56	100.0

It is clear from the above table that plays with the War of Resistance as their main theme were only a small minority. Those reflecting class struggle in the countryside − in the guise of the campaign for the reduction of rent and interest − were even fewer.

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148 See Chalmers Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962).

149 Judd argues that the new yangge had strongly conservative elements. Ellen R. Judd, 'New Yangge: The Case of "A Worthy Sister-in-Law,"' *CHINOPERL Papers* 10 (1981): 175.

150 Zhou Yang, 'Biaoxian xin de qunzhong de shidai', in Ai Siqi, *Yangge lunwenji* (Dalian: Zhong-Su youhao xiehui, 1947), p. 7.

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Two additional considerations modify this picture, however. First, the production of plays and also Zhou Yang's categories were intended to reflect the situation in Shaan-Gan-Ning, a rear-base area that was not in direct contact with the Japanese. If all categories relating to the Eighth Route Army and its war effort are added together (2, 3 and 4), the result is 29 plays or 51.8% of the total. Similarly with the theme of class struggle: category 3 related to the KMT blockade and the activities of KMT secret agents. Party propagandists would argue that since the KMT was a political organisation representing the interests of finance capital, the struggle against KMT incursions was in effect also a form of class struggle. If categories 3 and 5 are put under the same rubric, the result is 11 plays or 19.7% of the total. The main theme of Spring Festival propaganda, as already noted, was social solidarity rather than social conflict, so this figure is on the high side.

Secondly, the Party's view was that all aspects of political work were interrelated in any case. CCP propaganda was as often as possible directed toward specific groups in such a way that it had immediate action-consequences. Thus the peasantry of SGN were expected to make their contribution to the War of Resistance not in general but in quite specific ways: through the production movement, by helping the army, or by helping the local militia guard against secret agents. Finally, we should note that Zhou's list strongly reflects the political campaigns of 1944 and the requirements of Spring Festival propaganda. The mixture of themes clearly would have been different in different media and in different circumstances. Caution is therefore necessary in extrapolating from Zhou Yang's statistics, either to CCP propaganda output as a whole or to the Yan'an period as a whole.

Assessing the content of plays performed in the SGN countryside during the yangge movement is even more problematic. It seems no survey of this kind was ever attempted by the CCP's cultural apparatus, though Zhang Geng does mention that some fifty-odd plays were collected from village troupes.[151] We must therefore rely for an overview on plays mentioned in scattered newspaper reports. There are of course dangers in deriving statistics from such material. Findings can only be regarded as preliminary because the newspaper coverage itself may be biased in some unknown direction. Nevertheless, such an exercise will at least serve as a point of reference and obviate the need to rely completely on subjective impressions.

Newspaper reports also have the advantage that we can measure the actual performances of plays rather than play titles, and thus estimate what was made available to peasant audiences. In some reports we are given a description of the political content of locally produced plays, but in most cases we have only the titles. Fortunately the titles of local productions usually provide an immediate indication of the primary political messages: titles like 'Plant Clover' (*Zhong musu*), 'Root our Superstition' (*Po mixin*), 'Seize Traitors' (*Zhuo hanjian*), 'Congress of Labour Heroes

[151] Zhang Geng *Yanggeju xuanji* vol. 3.

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in Chishui' (*Chishui qunyinghui*), 'The Layabout Zhang Shihua Reforms' (*Zhang Shihua erliuzi zhuanbian*), 'Participate in a Reading Class' (*Canjia shiziban*) and 'Man and Wife Support the Army' (*Fuji canjun*) are typical. Classification is therefore straightforward except in a small proportion (5.6%) of the total.

My findings are given below in Table 4, which classifies the 428 titles mentioned in JFRB between October 1944 and April 1946. The period surveyed covers both the 1945 and 1946 Spring Festivals.

Table 4 Content of Plays Performed in SGN, October 1944 – April 1946

Zhou Yang's Category	*Subject matter*	*Number of Plays*	*%*
1	Agricultural development and policy	38	9.4
1	Agricultural techniques	24	5.9
1	Transport and commerce	7	1.7
1	Cooperatives	2	0.5
1	Spinning and weaving	9	2.2
	Subtotal =		**24.2**
	Women	25	6.2
1	Labour heroes	11	2.7
1	Reform of Layabouts	20	5.0
1	Real people, real events	15	3.7
	Political education, work style	10	2.5
	Elections	4	1.0
5	Class struggle	2	0.5
5	Rent reduction	3	0.7
	Taxes	3	0.7
	Modern Medicine	15	3.7
	Anti-superstition	25	6.2
	Schools and education	27	6.7
4	Resistance war	32	7.9
2	Support-the-Army movement	25	6.2
	Subtotal =		**14.1**
3	Current events	2	0.5
3	Anti-KMT	17	4.2
3	Anti-Traitors	11	2.7
3	Refugees	4	1.0
	Subtotal =		**8.4**
	Historical plays	25	6.2
	Old opera	48	11.9
	Total =	**404**	**100.0**
	Unidentifiable	24	5.6
	Grand Total =	428	

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Categories of subject matter can be compared with those of Zhou Yang's earlier survey:

Category	Yan'an Spring 1944	SGN 1944-46
1	46.4%	35.6%
2	30.4	6.2
3	17.9	8.4
4	3.5	7.9
5	1.8	1.2
	100.0	59.3

The proportions of different types of subject matter are similar, but only about 60% of all 1944–46 plays are to be found in Zhou Yang's categories. Apart from the presence of old opera and historical plays in the sample, the major difference is the 26% of plays devoted to social issues and education. The subject matter here includes basic-level political education, women's rights and 'freedom of marriage', superstition and witch doctors, schools and literacy campaigns, and basics of hygiene and modern medical knowledge. All these cultural and educational issues were part of the Eleven Movements package introduced in mid-1944.

A few additional observations are in order. The first concerns the number of plays dispensing practical information and advice: most of the 'modern medicine' plays – like 'Be Particular about Hygiene' (*Jiang weisheng*) are of this type, but also those in the 'agricultural techniques' category, such as 'Grow Clover' (*Zhong musu*), 'How to Prune Cotton' (*Mianhua zajia daqia*), or 'Killing Cotton Aphis' (*Zhi youhan*): altogether they comprise nearly ten percent of all plays. Plays on other subjects too very often include practical advice. This would seem to indicate that the CCP propaganda apparatus – at least this part of it – was not geared solely to the vague exhortations of agitation, but made a genuine commitment to popular education. Women's issues, too, count for more than just 6.2% in the 'women' category – plays like 'Female Top Scholar' (*Nü zhuangyuan*) and 'Traffic in Marriages' (*Maimai hunyin*). Women audiences were also the main target for plays on spinning and weaving – like 'Spin Thread and Weave Cloth' (*Fangsha zhibu*), 'Spinning and Weaving Hero Liu Ludi' (*Fangzhi yingxiong Liu Ludi*) – and for plays on medical subjects like 'How to Have a Baby' (*Zenyang yang wawa*). Together these three categories come to 12.1% of the total.

Historical plays and old opera also account for a fair proportion of performances. Strictly speaking of course these are not subject categories at all, nor are they yangge plays for the most part. They are included here because they were performed in the context of yangge celebrations. Actual subject matter varied, but often dealt with patriotism and peasant rebellion. Historical plays performed included 'Three Assaults on Zhujiazhuang' (*San da Zhujiazhuang*), a new Peking opera

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produced from Water Margin material on the theme of 'peasant war under the feudal social system'; 'The Opium War' (*Yapian zhanzheng*);[152] 'Taiping Rebellion' (*Taiping tianguo*);[153] and Guo Moruo's spoken drama 'Tiger Talisman' (*Hufu*), rewritten for base area consumption as a Peking Opera.[154] Traditional operas were often presented in revised versions such as the August First Opera Company's 'Shi Dakai' and 'Three Drops of Blood' (*Sandi xue*) – the latter a Qinqiang play revised to emphasise the post-rectification line on doctinairism.[155] The old opera most frequently revised and performed in the Border Region, however, was 'Rebellion at Xuzhou' (*Fan Xuzhou*), also called 'Revolution in Xuzhou' (*Xuzhou geming*). Set at the end of the Yuan dynasty, this play recounts how the magistrate of Xuzhou, Xu Da, was moved to take legal action by the oppression of the common people, and eventually forced to raise the flag of rebellion and overthrow the local Mongol overlords Wanyan Tuo and Wanyan Long.[156] This was a play that could be used with little change to influence popular feeling against the Japanese invaders. Although the matter is too complex to deal with here, generally speaking historical plays and revised traditional operas served to provide general background propaganda related to current events and provide historical depth to the CCP's current political line.

Another problem category in the table is that of 'real people real events'. This is not a subject category either, but a residual category used to indicate that a play was a documentary of unknown subject matter. A figure of 3.7% is certainly too low, and even if this category is combined with the labour heroes and current events plays (6.9%), this still understates the prevalence of documentary drama in the SGN countryside. The explanation is that most documentary plays have found their way into other subject categories.

A more accurate measure of the likely prevalence of documentary plays is the number of plays that were 'self-produced and self-performed' by village troupes. It was of course Party policy for local village drama troupes to 'create' their own repertoire on the basis of local events and personalities. In the present survey there were 144 of these self-produced plays, 35.6% of the total. This figure by itself indicates that the government's policy of encouraging self-production of plays at the village level had met with considerable success. It is comparable moreover with the number of times Yan'an-produced plays were performed in the countryside, which is 135 or 33.4% of the total. Not all the village-level productions would have been documentary; conversely many of the Yan'an plays, too, were about 'real people and real events'. In all, it is not unlikely that yangge plays of the documentary 'real people real events' type

152 JFRB 26 Oct 1944, p. 4.

153 JFRB 19 Mar 1945, p. 4.

154 JFRB 10 Jan 1945, p. 2 (see note 44).

155 JFRB 7 Jan 1945, p. 2.

156 *Qinqiang jumu chukao*, ed. Shaanxi sheng yishu yanjiusuo (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1984), p. 414.

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accounted for something like half the total production.

The yangge plays performed in the countryside, then, included both local productions and plays from Yan'an, in more or less equal proportions. Yan'an plays reached the village troupes through a variety of channels: through imitation of performances by touring professional troupes; through publication of scripts in newspapers such as JFRB and *Bianqu Qunzhongbao*, and in the form of little booklets (*danxingben*) distributed through the Xinhua Bookshop network or local government offices. The latter were published with press runs of around 3,000. Needless to say, not all the yangge plays produced by Luyi or by professional artists in other Yan'an organisations were favoured with publication in booklet form, but only those so authorised by higher Party officials.

One of the problems in evaluating the surviving yangge plays lies in assessing their 'representative nature'. Our survey allows us to move beyond simple assertion and see which plays were in fact most influential at the village level.

The plays most frequently performed by village troupes were various revolutionary versions of the traditional folk plays: 'The Virtuous Daughter-in-Law (*Xiao gu xian*) (mentioned on 8 occasions), 'The Little Cowherd' (*Xiao fangniu*) (3), 'Zhang Lian Sells Cloth' (*Zhang Lian mai bu*) (6), 'The Blind Fortune Teller' (*Xiazi suanming*) (5). Together these plays account for 5.4% of total dramatic activity recorded in JFRB.

Apart from 'The Little Oxherd', there were cheap editions of the scripts of all of these plays, printed in Yan'an, but it is likely that many of the performances in the countryside were independent productions. The number of times such plays are mentioned in JFRB is of course just the tip of a much larger iceberg. Not only this, but the Yan'an productions designed most closely in imitation of such folk plays were the most frequently performed of all plays from Yan'an.

The following table lists plays from Yan'an in order of frequency of performance in the Shaan-Gan-Ning countryside. This assessment is based on the number of performances given a separate mention in JFRB. Again, given that coverage in the newspaper reports was necessarily selective for reasons of space, we can be confident that the rather paltry numbers recorded here indicate much higher levels of underlying activity.

Finally we must remind ourselves that the breadth of coverage in this survey is both an advantage and a disadvantage. Zhou Yang's much smaller survey was restricted to a single time and location, which at least means that his figures reflect 'timeliness' and 'local nature' of Party propaganda more precisely. Here we have an aggregate for the whole of the Border Region over a period which includes two distinct political situations, namely the last year of the War of Resistance and the first six months of the uneasy peace before the outbreak of full-scale civil war.

The result however is a rough indication of the relative popularity and influence of individual plays and different kinds of dramatic production. Particularly striking

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Table 5　Plays from Yan'an – Frequency of Performance 1944-46

Title	No. of mentions in JFRB
'Man and Wife Learn to Read' (*Fuqi shizi*)	10
'Planting Trees' (*Zaishu*)	10
'Man and Wife Pay New Year Respects' (*Fuqi bainian*)	5
'Niu Yonggui is Wounded' (*Niu Yonggui guacai*)	5
'Three Assaults on Zhujiazhuang' (*San da Zhujiazhuang*)	5
'Xu Haishui Roots out Traitors' (*Xu Haishui chujian*)	4
'Blood and Tears Hatred' (*Xueleichou*)	4
'The Hardened Bandit Zhou Zishan' (*Guanfei Zhou Zishan*)	4
'Blackboard Newspaper' (*Heibanbao*)	3
'Forced up Liangshan'(*Bishang Liangshan*)	3
'Back to Mum's House' (*Hui niangjia*)	3
'Good Crops' (*Hao zhuangjia*)	3
'Plant Potatoes' (*Shanyaodan*)	3
'Man and Wife Console the Army' (*Fuqi laojun*)	3
'Chen Jiafu Goes Home' (*Chen Jiafu huijia*)	3
'Protect the Peace' (*Baowei heping*)	3
'Pulling Queues' (*Tuo bianzi*)	3
'Having a Baby' (*Yang wawa*)	3
'Brother and Sister Clear Wasteland' (*Xiongmei kaihuang*)	3
'The River God Takes a Wife' (*Heshen quqi*)	3
'Zhang Pimo Roots out Traitor' (*Zhang Pimo chujian*)	2
'Plant Cotton' (*Zhong mianhua*)	2
The Pedlar's Carrying-Pole (*Huolang danzi*)	2
Reduce Rent (*Jianzu*)	2
The Woman Top Scholar (*Nü zhuangyuan*)	2

is the popularity of the Luyi 'model folkplays' 'Man and Wife Learn to Read' and 'Planting Trees'. These plays were performed all over the Border Region, by a wide range of both peasant and 'public household' troupes. In light of this evidence it is hardly surprising that these two plays became absorbed into the repertoire of North Shaanxi yangge troupes and were performed along with traditional folk plays on an equal basis, some up to the present day.

Conclusion

This paper presents an evaluation of contemporary evidence for the

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geographical coverage and overall social penetration of rural society by CCP drama troupes during the period 1944-1946. It also looks at evidence for the kinds of messages which the Party was directing at rural audiences during this period.

Such an assessment is best done through contemporary newpaper accounts because other sources of information tend to privilege the privileged – that is, to publicise well-known artists, well-positioned wealthier villages, and so on. As a first step, the geographic spread of newspaper correspondents and news reports is assessed, and an estimate is made of the actual overall level of dramatic activity in relation to newspaper reporting.

In the next section I re-envision the concrete quality of the geographic space that was SGN. Far from being a uniformly 'red' area, equally under the control of the CCP army and government, the government presence was highly uneven, and constrained by the terrain, the patterns of human settlement, and the spatial organisation of society as it then was. My conclusion here is that theatrical activity and new yangge were somewhat concentrated on and around district seats and major market towns, though villages along main roads and within convenient distance from administrative centres also appear in the reports.

I then look at the social composition of the troupes, not just in terms of farmers versus other occupational groups, but also access to people with reading skills. Here, the reports give evidence of participants from a range of backgrounds and levels of literacy or musical skill. The sections that follow look at the participation of women, the ways in which dramatic activities were combined in various ways with schools and literacy classes, and coordinated with the training of local militias.

Beginning in 1944 the CCP established a theatrical presence at temple fairs, horse-and-mule fairs, and rural periodic markets. Rather than simply perform dances, yangge and opera, Party troupes also coordinated with medical teams, agricultural extension teams and others to target practical issues of concern to the rural population, and bring some of the benefits of modern science to village people in remote areas. It seems to have made particular efforts at these temple fairs to provide medical advice to village women. In choosing which plays to perform, or which new ones to rehearse, it generally made efforts to harmonise its messages and style with those of rural society, and to avoid any doctrinaire themes that led to confrontation with local people or temple elders. Even so, there is some evidence of generational conflict among the villagers themselves. One of the problems that emerged was that performance of yangge plays were sometimes deemed by temple elders to be entertainment unworthy of the gods. At this stage, during wartime, the Party was prepared to adopt a policy of live and let live. The initial result was a form of village culture in which new plays and old plays were performed side by side. Over the longer term, an amalgam emerged in which new plays sponsored by the Party were incorporated in local repertoires. This combination of old and new was still in place when I conducted my fieldwork in the villages of North Shaanxi during the 1980s.

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抗戰時期陝甘寧邊區的新秧歌、廟會與傳統文化

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二十世紀四十年代中後期，中國共產黨在陝甘寧邊區的廣大鄉村，開展了以秧歌、歌舞、小戲爲主的大規模群眾性戲曲活動。這一群眾性活動，覆蓋地區廣泛，幾近擴及邊區每一村落。本文通過分析當時的各種資料，特別是各地報紙的新聞記載，印證了以下事實：即此戲曲活動的推展，雖稍偏重於縣、區行政中心周圍的村莊，但新秧歌隊的活動，實已深入諸多鄉下集市、騾馬大會、及香煙大會。自一九四四年始，共產黨即積極動員農村劇團及秧歌隊，於各地廟會演出。而在廟會活動中，這些演出團隊不僅表演秧歌、戲曲，還爲解決農民關心的實際生活問題，與醫療隊及共產黨組織的其他助農團隊協同工作。戲曲表演團隊通常會努力使其表演內容及表演形式，符合當地的風俗人情，以避免任何可能出現的糾紛及繼而引發的與當地耆老的衝突。在戲曲推展活動中，表演團隊採用了陝北秧歌、陝北道情、郿鄠戲、秦腔及京戲等多種適合當地民情的曲種。通過上述推展活動，共產黨在落實其文化政策的工作中，取得了如下初步成果：即在農村地區促成了新舊戲曲共存的局面；而此推展活動的長期成果則是：新秧歌及其他共產黨推動的一些新戲曲劇目，終被納入邊區農村每年表演的活動中。

關鍵字：新秧歌　廟會　中國共產黨文化政策　民間歌舞　革命戲劇

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Revolutionary Theatre, Temple Fairs, and Traditional Culture in Wartime Shaan-Gan-Ning

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During the mid-1940s the Chinese Communist Party established a theatrical presence in the countryside of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region. Its geographic coverage was inevitably somewhat concentrated in areas near county and district administrative centres, but it also targetted rural markets, horse-and-mule fairs, and temple fairs. Beginning in1944, the Party made a concerted effort to establish its presence at temple fairs. Rather than simply provide performances of dances, yangge and opera, Party troupes also coordinated with medical teams and other CCP-sponsored operatives to target practical issues of concern to the rural population. In doing so, it generally made efforts to harmonise its messages and style with those of rural society, and to avoid any controversial themes that led to confrontation with local power-holders. In terms of theatrical forms, the Party troupes used whatever fitted the local circumstances, including yangge but also forms of little opera like North Shaanxi daoqing and Meihu, and big opera forms such as Qinqiang and Peking Opera. The initial result, at this stage in the implementation of Party cultural policy in the countryside, was a cultural amalgam in which new plays sponsored by the Party were incorporated in local repertoires.

Keywords: North Shaanxi Yangge temple fairs CCP cultural policy song-and-dance revolutionary theatre

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