

The Poetic Cohesion of Chinese National Identity: A Study of Xinjiang Poetry and Writing during the Anti-Japanese War^{*}

SHENG Xuelian, ZHOU Xiaoyu
Hexi University, Zhangye, China

During the War of Resistance Against Japan, poetry in Xinjiang actively participated in the grand narrative of national salvation. This article systematically studies the writing of “consciousness of the Chinese national community” through historical investigation and close textual reading, revealing the mechanisms of its three-dimensional construction: in terms of creative subjects, displaced literati, local poets, and writers from Northeast China each contribute to a sense of community through dual perspectives, empathetic responses to trauma, and reflections on homeland and nation; in terms of artistic expression, poetry forms a unique poetics through geographic imagery, aestheticization of the united front, and narratives of suffering; in terms of ethnic representation, minority writers integrate ethnic traditions with patriotic sentiment, achieving a transformation from policy recognition to emotional identification. The study further explores how this writing transcends a single ethnic perspective to construct a paradigm of collective identity that shares the fate of all ethnic groups and its underlying mechanisms.

Keywords: Xinjiang poets, literary salvation, Chinese national community, life experience

During the Anti-Japanese War, Xinjiang’s strategic significance became prominent. It was not only an international gateway for aid to China and a rear area for multi-ethnic resistance, but also gathered a large number of cultural elites such as Mao Dun and Du Zhongyuan, which promoted the flourishing of local wartime literature and art. Poetry creation in newspapers and journals like Xinjiang Daily and Literary Monthly flourished, becoming an important part of the poetry of the rear areas. During this period, Xinjiang poetry achieved dual breakthroughs in content and form: it integrated the traditions of vernacular new poetry and classical poetry, developing popular forms such as recitation poetry and ballads, and strengthened the propaganda and mobilization function of poetry. These works were not only a literary manifestation of the sense of community among civilians but also an important practice in constructing the spiritual homeland of the Chinese nation. However, existing research is limited by the perspective of elite literature and an inland-centered viewpoint, paying insufficient attention to the anti-war poetry of Xinjiang, especially lacking comparative studies across regions and languages. This paper, based on primary sources, focuses on the communal writing of multi-ethnic poets and attempts a preliminary exploration.

The Multiple Dimensions of Life Experience and the Formation of Community Consciousness

This chapter will primarily analyze how three types of creators—the displaced literati, native writers, and

^{*} **Funding Projects:** 2024 Gansu Province University Faculty Innovation Project “Research on the Writing of ‘Shared Destiny of the Chinese Nation’ in Xinjiang Poetry” (2024A-142).

SHENG Xuelian, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Graduate Supervisor, School of Literature, Hexi University, Zhangye, China.
Zhou Xiaoyu, Master of Literature, School of Nursing, Hexi University, Zhangye, China.

writers from Northeast China—transform and elevate their personal traumas, exile experiences, and memories into a sense of identity and responsibility toward the larger Chinese nation, thereby revealing the multiple pathways and intrinsic forces through which community consciousness emerges during a particular historical period.

The “Combativeness” and “Enlightenment” of Displaced Intellectuals From a “Dual” Perspective

During the War of Resistance, the Xinjiang poetry scene attracted a number of literati from the interior regions. They can be roughly categorized into three groups: first, Communist Party members sent by Yan'an, invited by Sheng Shicai, to assist in developing Xinjiang and consolidating the united front against Japan; second, prominent literary figures such as Mao Dun, famous newspaper publishers like Sa Kongliao and Shi Mei, and artists like Yu Cun and Zhao Dan, who traveled to the frontier to spread the spirit of resistance; and third, former members of the Northeast Volunteer Army and their families. Most of these displaced individuals personally experienced the fires of war, or suffered the atrocities committed by the puppet regime, leading to a profound understanding of the national crisis that left the country vulnerable; some witnessed the varying attitudes and awareness of people toward the resistance in different regions and environments during their journeys; others perceived the suffering of the nation and the hope for their people through what they heard and saw. Their horizons were broadened, their understanding of life deepened, and their ideological awareness heightened. Upon arriving in the frontier, faced with vastly different natural landscapes and cultural environments, they realized the urgent necessity of ideological enlightenment in the rear areas, which also ignited their creative passion. Consequently, their poetry underwent a conscious transformation, moving away from indulgent personal expression toward actively rallying for the national liberation struggle, producing numerous works rich in both combativeness and enlightening value. Examples include Feiyi's "Three-Dimensional Defense Line in the Rear", all written in an impassioned tone resonating with the theme of resistance and awakening public consciousness. In "The End of September Wind", Nuta urgently calls out: "Do not forget—our brothers / are still suffering under the enemy's torment / Do not forget—that on the land of Northeast / countless calamities spread everywhere". Li Guangxin, in his creation "Support for Becoming Anti-Japanese Fighters", fervently exclaims:

compatriots, compatriots!
 Don't neglect anymore, don't linger anymore.
 We suffer the sorrow of the fall of the country under the iron hooves,
 Hurry up and cheer up!
 Waiting to fly with a helping hand,
 We are in the same boat as them,
 ...
 We need to be their assistants.
 The only purpose is to fight Japanese imperialism. (Nu, 1942)

Although the poem lacks elaborate diction and the charm of poetry, it overflows with deep emotion, carries an uplifting tone, and embodies the heartfelt patriotism of ordinary people, making it highly moving. The cold-blooded poem "Let Our Blood Flow" uses passionate vows to inspire compatriots:

Only the whole nation is more united...
 Tell the sons and daughters of China again!
 We are all descendants of one ancestor,
 Great cause, glorious victory in the War of Resistance,
 It will not fall from the sky easily.
 We need to fight to the death.

Right now...
 It is also a time to shed blood and sacrifice for the motherland.
 Our sisters and brothers,
 Don't be afraid!
 What we have is blood.
 Gather together!
 Like the raging waves of the Pacific Ocean! (Cold-Blooded, 1939)

"We are all descendants of the same ancestors". Such enlightening lines of poetry aim to evoke a sense of national community on both blood and cultural levels, inspiring feelings of kinship. This expression of using personal blood to achieve the nation's rebirth resonates with many wartime poems of the same period and typically reflects the era's characteristic of wartime poetry serving national salvation.

"Trauma" Literature of Local Poets Empathizing With the Mainland

Local poets in Xinjiang connect the memory of local hardships in modern times with the "psychological trauma" of the nationwide resistance war, using imagery such as "wounds" and "desolate gardens" to achieve a spatial and emotional dialogue with anti-war literature from other regions. For local writers, the unique geographical and cultural environment of their homeland provides a rich and dynamic source of creativity. Although Xinjiang is far from the battlefields of the War of Resistance Against Japan, its literature is not an "isolated island"—since modern times, this land has experienced turmoil, and all ethnic groups have suffered the pain of a shattered homeland. Therefore, poets write about their longing for peace, forming an empathetic narrative in response to anti-war poetry from the hinterland, with "wounds" and "trauma" becoming shared symbols of historical memory across ethnicities.

A Xinjiang folk poem, "A Leaf on the Urumqi River", writes: "Urumqi River! A torrent formed by the convergence of fourteen ethnic groups, a force resisting tyranny! May your waters flow into the Yellow River, the Yangtze River, and reach even farther seas" (Chen, 1941, p. 188). The poem uses the imagery of rivers, with the waters of the Urumqi River flowing into the mother river, symbolizing not only the close connection between the frontier and the interior but also, on a spiritual level, creating a vision of a shared destiny for the Chinese nation. The frontier is not merely a distant borderland; it is part of the country's heartland, connected, and intertwined with its lifeblood, where the strengths of various ethnic groups have blended together into a unified force within the vast currents of the Chinese nation.

The Uyghur poet Li Mutalifu Zhong wrote: "In the garden of youth, one cannot hear the oriole spreading its wings; the leaves wither and fall, and the branches become bare" (Li, 2013, p. 46). He used the desolate and decaying scenery as a metaphor for a destroyed homeland, expressing the inner pain of the "wounds" inflicted on his motherland by mighty enemies. However, his faith in driving out the invaders and fighting for victory is as firm as described in his writing: "At that time, flowers of battle will bloom on the desolate Gobi, and among these flowers, we will shine with light like the sun. We crossed the mountains of blood and saw a brand-new paradise" (Li, 2013, p. 23). In this patriotic poem "Great China", Nimiqiyi's passionate lines praise the motherland's grandeur: "Great China, my mother / mountains, forests, flowers, seas are all in your embrace / golden lands, wealthy plateaus / your majestic figure reaches the sky". Such "imagery" finds echoes in the poems of contemporary mainland patriotic poets like Mu Dan and Ai Qing. Shifting the tone to a somber and tragic brushstroke, he reveals the immense suffering endured by the Chinese nation: "Invaders stretched out their wolfish claws toward you / dark clouds instantly covered your head / rivers of blood surged / flames of evil

soared” (Nimiqiya, 1981, pp. 2-3), demonstrating the poet’s exquisite skill and deep patriotic sentiment that touches the heart. “Poetry expresses ambition”; the belief in victory in the Anti-Japanese War and the vision for the future inspire and give hope:

In my heart, there is only one motherland, and I would never wish to see clouds pressing upon her head
 I live for you, dear motherland
 and will not bow before the devils who harm you...
 The river of grief and sorrow will eventually flow away without a trace
 hope and truth I must find; (Nimiqiya, 1981, p. 25)
 I am willing to defend your dignity with my life
 If I die, I will surely be buried in your land. (Nimiqiya, 1981, p. 14)

expressing sincere devotion to living and dying with the motherland. These poems, using imagery such as “the prairie’s wound” and “the earth’s trauma”, symbolize the damage to the homeland and the suffering experienced by the nation. The “wounds” evoke empathy that transcends geography and time, becoming a reflection of the collective trauma of the Chinese nation.

The imagery of “wounds” is a cultural symbol shared by many ethnic groups. It transcends ethnic and linguistic boundaries, becoming a common expression of emotion and a symbol of the spirit of resistance among different peoples. In their writings about trauma, poets from various ethnic groups express their hatred of war, their longing for peace, and their concern for the survival of their nations. This sentiment goes beyond ethnic boundaries, becoming an expression of empathy among different peoples. The imagery of “wounds” is not only a symbol of suffering but also a reflection of the spirit of resistance. Through this imagery in their works, poets from various ethnic groups convey their determination to unite and resist external enemies, constantly reminding people to remember history and cherish peace, while also strengthening the awareness of national unity within a shared historical memory.

The “Sense of Identity” and “Spiritual Belonging” in the “Collective Remembrance” of Writers From Northeast China

In the 1930s, some soldiers of the Northeastern Volunteer Army and their families fleeing the Japanese invasion migrated to Xinjiang via the Soviet Union. Although the return journey was uncertain, they always kept their homeland in their hearts. Among them, intellectuals from Northeast China were placed in fields such as education, postal services, and agriculture. Their works deeply reflected their memories of their occupied homeland and their concern for the fate of the nation.

Amidst the upheaval, their longing for the fertile “black soil” of the Northeast grew ever stronger. Though their homeland was engulfed in war, it became a spiritual beacon. Through poetry, novels, and essays, they both recalled the scenery of their homeland and denounced the atrocities of the Japanese invaders, praising the heroes who resisted the enemy in the mountains and rivers. This writing, intertwined with love and hatred, is a heartfelt confession to their homeland and an affirmation of their own identity and spiritual belonging, showing a distinct characteristic of “family and country intertwined.” The landscapes, flora and fauna, and traces of life in their hometown were deeply rooted in their memories, becoming a shared spiritual home. Through the diverse portrayals of different writers, “Northeast China” is presented in the form of collective memory, flowing with a profound spiritual attachment to their homeland. In Hei Tan’s poem “Returning Home”, the first part depicts the Northeast homeland that haunts and captivates the soul:

In the Changbai Mountains, by the Songhua River,
 the dense forests hide my beloved hometown.
 It is our heritage,
 and also the reward for our hard work,
 the diligent toil of our ancestors...
 The brilliant glow of sunset,
 the gentle “trusting wind”!
 Also brings the subtle fragrance of soybeans.
 Among the sorghum plants, the footprints of childhood are imprinted,
 and in my innocent heart,
 the dreams of that childhood were once written. (Hei, 1939a)

Such delicate reminiscences of the scenery of the hometown also flow and flow in Shu Shu’s “Thinking of Hometown”, Wang Zhishen’s poem “My Hometown—Kaiyuan”, and other works, these words are not only individual memories and attachments to the hometown, but also through the construction of “collective memory”, forming a spiritual home that transcends regions, showing a deep cultural identity.

However, Northeast writers are not immersed in the reminiscence of their homeland; they have created a large number of works depicting the painful struggle, groaning, and resistance of their hometown elders under the iron hooves of the Japanese invaders, arousing the fighting spirit and determination of compatriots to defend their homeland to the death. For example, the author Liu Xia’s inner confession: “Quietly invest my small strength into the torrent of the War of Resistance... When the great Chinese nation drives away the beasts, I can return to my hometown (Liu, 1943, p. 38). The hometown is a small family, and the motherland is “everyone”, which is a universal psychological portrayal of the isomorphism of the family and country of Northeast poets. Yao Yu’s “Where to Start” faces the bloody reality:

Our compatriots
 Buried alive in the cemetery dug by themselves
 The shovel is red
 Let the old lady get on the train
 The intestines drag out of the belly
 Bloody...
 The young man who was strangled to death outside the west gate
 shouted angrily, scolded
 It was the time when the north wind was bitter, in the Chinese New Year’s Eve.
 How could I forget, with thousands of sad tears, leaving the northeast, where the growth of the past twenty years and the land are printed with countless footprints...
 There! There are the tombs of our ancestors and brothers and sisters who do not want to be slaves;
 Let’s use blood to collect blood debts! Create a new home of independence, freedom and happiness. (Yao, 1939)

The pain of losing their homeland under the iron hooves of a fierce enemy and the tragic situation of “subjugating the country” are a wake-up call to the urgent reality that the people must “save the country before they can settle down”.

The latter part of He Tan’s “Return to the Homeland” depicts how his former home became ravaged by war. “September 18!¹ September 18 / that cursed time / when the barbarians’ bayonets pierced their chests... / houses burned red with fire, clothes stained with blood / before our eyes flashed a scene of swords and blood...” (Hei,

¹ The September 18 Incident of 1931, in which Japanese imperialism invaded China.

1939a). This stark contrast vividly conveys the era's tragic reality of a "broken country and mountains shattered, family lost and loved ones tormented".

Bu Feng, in "Rehanging the National Flag on the Territory of Northeast China", declared: "The blood of our soldiers at the front / the sweat of our compatriots at the rear / has gradually formed a torrent / this torrent is the strength for avenging humiliation and reclaiming land" (Bu, 1942). This "torrent" converges into the collective power of the "nation". These collective terms such as "compatriots", "brothers and sisters", "sons and daughters of China", and "children" not only express a strong sense of national belonging and reinforce ethno-cultural identity but also build a solid emotional bond, closely linking individual destinies with the survival of the Chinese nation.

"Poetry" Writing the Chinese National Identity of "Consolidating the Home Front During the War of Resistance"

In the poetry of Xinjiang during the War of Resistance, the construction of a "Chinese national" identity became a spiritual mainline running throughout. The political concept of the Anti-Japanese National United Front was transformed into an aesthetic expression with strong emotional appeal, making poetry an important vehicle for rallying public sentiment and boosting morale, shaping the collective consciousness of the Chinese nation through literary forms.

Duan Sun's "War of Resistance Song" recounts the national anti-Japanese scene and international assistance in a catchy, rhythmic style, and clearly affirms the practical significance of Kuomintang-Communist cooperation. From the "July 7 Incident", it records the hardships faced by the entire nation in the resistance and the humanitarian aid coming from abroad, while affirming the practical importance of unity between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party in resisting Japan: "Kuomintang-Communist cooperation emphasizes goodwill / unity sound / strength strong / hand in hand to resist the war / all parties, selfless, aiming guns outward at the enemy / consolidate our / lifeline / Anti-Japanese National United Front" (Duan, 1939). This transforms political ideas into an emotional identification concerning the survival of the nation.

Folk Battle Ballad "Seeing off Big Brother": It uses the popular folk tune "I See off My Big Brother" with new lyrics for the Anti-Japanese War.

Female singer: I see off my big brother to join the army, bravely going forward to fight the Japanese; I won't cling to him alone, he must risk his life against the devils, ai yo, ai yo. My brother, he must risk his life against the devils!

Male singer: Thank you for your care, sister, for seeing me off to join the army. Wholeheartedly, I'll go to the front line, bravely charging to defeat the enemy. Ai yo, ai yo. My sister, bravely charging to defeat the enemy!

Female singer: I see off my big brother to join the army, to overthrow traitors and the Japanese, determined to fight on the front lines, don't worry about our family; ai yo, ai yo. My brother, don't worry about our family!

Male singer: Dear sister, in my heart, your brother goes out to fight the Japanese; then we'll drive the Japanese away, and later return home together. Ai yo, ai yo. My sister, later we'll return home together!

Female singer: Brother fights the enemy at the front, sister raises funds in the rear, supporting the soldiers at the front, united in heart from front to back. Ai yo, ai yo. My brother, united in heart from front to back! (Battle, 1938)

This folk ballad continues the tradition of folk tunes with the refrain "ài yōu, ài yōu" and repetition, enhancing its spread through a "new wine in old bottles" creative approach, allowing it to maintain vibrant life in the folk sphere. The poem narrates in a cyclical pattern of "farewell-instruction-response," subordinating personal emotions to national interests, transforming family concern into patriotic duty, and mobilizing "rural women," thereby expressing the community consciousness of the shared destiny of the Chinese nation. The work

integrates political aspirations, national righteousness, and literary forms, conveying the spirit of the era through folk channels, depicting a three-dimensional picture of coordinated resistance between the front and rear, achieving an aesthetic elevation from propaganda to national identity, and becoming an important chapter in the collective memory of the nation. Wang Mo's account in "Songs of the War of Resistance" particularly reveals this transformation:

The barbaric and cruel invasion of the Japanese invaders
awakened the slumbering people of our country
educated those who usually paid little attention to national affairs
and united those who had faced each other in battle for twenty years under the Anti-Japanese National United Front.
(Wang, 1939)

The concept of a "community with a shared future for the nation" was successfully transformed from political discourse into public consciousness through folk songs, the art form closest to the people. During the War of Resistance, people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang generously contributed money, actively engaged in fundraising, donated gold, purchased airplanes, provided horses, medicine, gas masks, and other supplies, and carried out cultural support activities for the military. Poets used literary forms to inspire, praise, and reflect the public's patriotic actions such as volunteer performances and donations, weaving the awareness of the Chinese national community into the text, as exemplified by Nu Tao's new poem "We Are in the Rear". It depicts the scenes of the people of various ethnic groups in Xinjiang breathing and sharing destiny with the motherland, aiding the war of resistance:

Soldiers, brothers! You are guarding the cities.
Busy, day after day without stopping,
steadfast and resolute, shells roar through the sky. Planes hum as they patrol over you.
We at the rear are the same,
One vehicle after another, millions of vehicles,
Loaded and sent to the front lines.
One vehicle after millions of vehicles,
Sending them loaded without pause to the front lines every minute and every second.
Thousands, tens of thousands of aircraft,
Equipped and loaded, all flying in the battlefield.
We at the rear are the same.
Poor and wealthy farmers. Farming, farming, harvesting large amounts of food.
We at the rear are the same. (Nu, 1940)

The creation and dissemination of these anti-Japanese war poems closely respond to the ideology advocated by the Communist Party of China, which centers on the overall interests of the nation, and embody the sense of community with a shared future contained in the "Anti-Japanese National United Front". They profoundly interpret the national spirit of the Chinese people, regardless of race, class or religion, standing together with the motherland under the banner of the war of resistance.

The anti-Japanese war poetry moved from the study to the streets and fields, achieving extensive social mobilization, confirming the law that art originates from the people, is for the people and is deeply rooted in the people. Today, we should encourage grassroots cultural talents and folk artists to create works reflecting the new era in a down-to-earth way, allowing "cultural moistening of Xinjiang" to take root among the people. At the same time, we should not only rely on traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television, but also make

good use of new platforms such as short videos, social media and online literature, actively plan and disseminate, allowing high-quality content full of the spirit of the times and highlighting mainstream values to occupy the main position of the Internet, and through big data for precise push, cover different audiences, effectively resist vulgar art, and fill the cyberspace with positive energy.

Conclusion

The article, through a review of Xinjiang poets and their works from that period, reveals how literature, against the backdrop of national peril, could unite the people, construct a sense of identity, and mobilize resistance. The unique value of Xinjiang resistance poetry lies in its ability to build an emotional community that transcends region, ethnicity, and class, drawing from the “pluralistic yet unified” experience of life. Exiled intellectuals combined combative and enlightening elements, transforming personal anguish from displacement into a cry for national salvation; local poets, utilizing the imagery of “trauma” and resonating with literature from the mainland, reinforced a collective memory of the Chinese nation through the writing of “wounds”; writers from Northeast China deepened the logic of identification with homeland through “collective remembrance,” making homesickness a spiritual bond connecting individual and nation. Minority writers consciously linked the fate of their own nations with the survival of the country, presenting a moving image of the “flower of unity” blossoming in the borderlands. In terms of artistic expression, poetry transformed political discourse into aesthetic expression through the symbolization of geographic imagery, the modernization of folk forms, and the ritualization of repeated calls, constructing a collective understanding of the “shared fate of the Chinese nation” through tangible artistic images. The creation and dissemination of a large number of ballads and vernacular poems further advanced anti-Japanese consciousness among the populace, achieving a dual breakthrough in the popularization of literature and the construction of national identity.

References

- Battle. (December 7, 1938). Seeing off big brother. *Xinjiang Daily*.
- Bu, F. (September 18, 1942). Rehoist the national flag on the land of northeast China. *Xinjiang Daily*.
- Chen, J. Y. (1941). *A bird's-eye view of Xinjiang*. Shanghai: Commercial Press.
- Cold-Blooded. (February 2, 1939). Spill our blood. *Xinjiang Daily*.
- Duan, S. (February 14, 1939). War of resistance song. *Xinjiang Daily*.
- Hei, T. (October 22, 1939b). Untitled. *Xinjiang Daily*.
- Hei, T. (October 5, 1939a). Return to the old home. *Xinjiang Daily*.
- Li, M. T. L. F. (2013). *Selected poems and writings of Li Mutalifu*. (K. Huoja, S. J. Ma, & F. J. Liu, Trans.). Urumqi: Xinjiang Youth Publishing House.
- Liu, X. (1943). September. *Xinjiang Women*, 2(No. 1 and No. 2), 38.
- Nimiqiyi. (1981). *Selected poems of Nimiqiyi*. (Y. Ge, Trans.). Urumqi: Xinjiang Youth Publishing House.
- Nu, T. (February 6, 1940). We are in the rear. *Xinjiang Daily*.
- Nu, T. (September 12, 1942). Winds at the end of September. *Xinjiang Daily*.
- Wang, M. (February 14, 1939). Song of the war of resistance. *Xinjiang Daily*.
- Yao, Y. (September 18, 1939). Where to start. *Xinjiang Daily*.