

The Role of Troupes during China's the Second Sino-Japanese War-Illustrated by the Transformation of Shanxi Small Flower Opera from Folk to Nationalism

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Abstract

This research explores the transformation of Shanxi's Small Flower Opera from a folk-art form to a nationalist cultural narrative during China's Second Sino-Japanese War, driven by the establishment of state-run troupes. The research problem focuses on understanding how these troupes facilitated the shift from folk to national discourse. Two research objectives guide the study: examining why China utilized troupes for this transformation and analysing the methods they employed. Using a case study approach and historical document analysis, the study gathers data from government reports, troupe records, and memoirs, employing content analysis to extract key themes. The findings reveal that troupes served as manifestations of state presence, enabling ideological dissemination, cultural integration, and social mobilization. The troupes not only transformed the artistic content of Small Flower Opera, removing feudal elements and incorporating nationalist themes, but also bridged state power with local communities, uniting diverse social groups including peasants and intellectuals. Ultimately, the study underscores the pivotal role of troupes in embedding state ideology within folk culture, making them instrumental in China's wartime cultural strategy.

Keywords: cultural transformation, small Flower Opera, state ideology, state presence, troupe

Introduction

In the 1930s, apart from Western ballet and modern dance, as well as dances like tango and waltz—which the Chinese referred to as social or ballroom dances—Chinese people had little understanding of their own traditional dances (Gao, 2011). Chinese folk dances, often incorporating flirtatious body movements between men and women, were confined to rural areas and ignored by official authorities (Liu & Gong, 2023, p.20). However, in 1937, after the outbreak of China's Second Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese government began to use folk art as a tool for political propaganda and for mobilizing the masses to join the resistance (Wilcox, 2018). Folk culture thus became a vehicle for nationalist discourse. Through the establishment of troupes, China transformed folk culture to serve its political agenda. The founding of the troupe is actually a manifestation of *State Presence*. The theory of *State Presence* primarily explores the relationship between the state and society, emphasizing the presence and manifestation of state power within the social sphere. Specifically, the state exerts influence on civil society through various means such as policies, laws, movements, behaviors, rituals, settings, and more. Meanwhile, civil society adopts certain methods and strategies to respond to this *State Presence* (Migdal, 1988). After the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, the strategic advantage of Zuo Quan County in Shanxi Province—easily defensible by Chinese forces

yet challenging for the Japanese to capture—was recognized by the Chinese government. Consequently, the military command center was established in Zuo Quan County (Gao, 2014). Prior to the war, the Small Flower Opera had already existed for nearly 600 years (Gao, 2014). Against the backdrop of national need, this historically rich and widely appreciated folk dance naturally became an ideological tool of priority for the government. Because Zuo Quan County gained national-level political significance during the war, the Small Flower Opera also attained national artistic recognition.

In order to play the role of art in propaganda. Shortly after the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese war, according to the decision of the China Military Commission, an army-mounted propaganda team was set up in each army, and the name used for external propaganda was determined: the propaganda team of the National Eighth Route Army headquarters was *Mars Troupe* (火星剧团), the 115th Division was *Warrior Troupe* (战士剧团), the 120th Division was *Combat Troupe* (战斗剧团), and the 129th Division was *Pioneer Troupe* (先锋剧团). In September 1937, after these troupes entered Shanxi with the army, they immediately launched activities to publicize politics and mobilize to participate in the war. At the same time, the first propaganda team established in Yan 'an, where the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China is located, also arrived in Shanxi in late September. Among them, *Mars Troupe* (火星剧团) and *Pioneer Troupe* (先锋剧团) entered Zuo Quan County with the stationing of the headquarters of the Sino-Japanese Army and the 129th Division in Zuo Quan County (Cultural Policy Research Center of Shanxi Provincial Department of Culture, 2017, p.176).

With the appearance of these troupes on the Zuo Quan County, Zuo Quan County first established the first national performance troupe--*Mobilization Troupe* (动员剧团). In May 1938, *Taihang Mountain Troupe* (太行山剧团) was born. In August 1938, the *Pioneer Troupe* (先锋剧团) of the National Revolutionary Committee of Zuo Quan County and the *Sacrifice the National Salvation League Troupe* (牺盟会剧团) of Zuo Quan County were established. At that time, the troupes stationed in Zuo Quan County included the *Eighth Route Army Headquarters Experimental Troupe* (八路军总部实验剧团), *Yan 'an Lu Xun Art Troupe* (延安鲁迅艺术剧团), *Peking Opera Troupe* (京剧团) and *Lu Xun Troupe* (鲁迅剧团).

Driven by the construction of the national troupes, peasants are gradually keen on this matter. Many rural areas in Zuo Quan have established amateur troupes (Cultural Policy Research Center of Shanxi Provincial Department of Culture, 2017, P220). According to a report issued at the meeting of the leading organ for the unification of art established by the military command center to which Zuo Quan belongs:

现在有近200个左右的剧团，包括将近3000名的演员，其中以左权县农村剧团为最好。一些农家出身的老太婆、小孩子、青年妇女参加几个月的剧团已经能演复杂的剧、唱复杂的歌谱，并且能自编自演，改造旧剧。在左权县还有妇女组织的剧团，今年（1940年）5月左权县30个剧团大会演，大大鼓舞了群众 (Zuo Quan County Historical Office, 1987, p.174). *There are now nearly 200 or so troupes, including nearly 3,000 performers, among which the rural troupe of Zuo Quan County is the best. Some old women, children and young women from peasant families have been able to perform complex program and sing complex songs for several months, and they can write and perform themselves and transform traditional program. In Zuo Quan County, there were also troupes organized by women, and in May this year (1940), 30 troupes of Zuo Quan County performed together, which greatly encouraged the peasants (Translated by Meng Qingyi).*

The arrival of these artistic troupes has made early preparations for the transformation of Small Flower Opera from a folk discourse to a national discourse. Driven by the national power--troupes, Small Flower Opera began the process of being transformed. Althusser argued that the state maintains ideological hegemony through non-coercive institutions such as education, culture, and media (Althusser, 1971). In wartime China, troupes served as a quintessential ideological state apparatus—they employed artistic performance as a medium to embed nationalist discourse into folk culture, thereby reconstructing the political function of traditional culture. This reconstruction was not a mere cultural substitution but rather an appropriation and transformation of folk symbols under the exigencies of war. This duality reveals the dynamic process of state presence: through the institutional framework of troupes, the state not only embedded itself in local cultural

practices but also reinforced its legitimacy through the reproduction of ideology.

To solve this research problem, the researcher proposed two research objectives. The first is to explore the reasons why China decided to use the troupe as an organizational form to transform dance. The second is to analyze the specific methods used by the troupe to transform dance. Under the transformation of the troupes, Small Flower Opera has changed from a folk discourse to a national discourse. Through the realization of the above two research objectives, the research problem of this study has been answered.

This study holds significant value as it highlights the critical role of troupes in transforming Chinese folk arts into nationalist cultural tools during the Second Sino-Japanese War. It offers a nuanced understanding of how cultural practices can be shaped by state influence, contributing to the discourse on *State Presence* in civil society. By analyzing the transformation of Shanxi's Small Flower Opera, the research sheds light on the intersection of politics, culture, and performance, emphasizing how art can serve as a medium for ideological dissemination, social mobilization, and cultural integration. This study not only enriches historical and cultural scholarship but also provides insights into the broader implications of state intervention in cultural practices, making it a valuable reference for researchers in cultural studies, performing arts, and political history.

Methodology

To study the role of troupes during China's Second Sino-Japanese War, this research first employs a case study approach, using the transformation of Shanxi's Small Flower Opera from folk to nationalism as an example to explore the role of troupes in addressing the research problem. Secondly, this research adopts a historical document research method, extensively collecting historical documents related to the subject, including but not limited to government reports, troupe records, actors' memoirs, news reports, policy documents, and more, from that period. The collected documents are systematically classified, organized, and summarized to trace the development and role of troupes during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

The methodology of this study is grounded in the *State Presence* theory (Migdal, 1988), which examines how the state manifests its presence within the social sphere and exerts influence on civil society through policies, laws, rituals, behaviors, and social mobilization. Guided by this theory, this study analyzes how the state embeds itself into the social structure through theatrical troupes as a medium to achieve political propaganda and cultural integration.

In terms of data analysis methods, this research utilizes content analysis to conduct textual analysis of the collected historical documents. Based on the two research objectives of this study, analytical explanations and descriptive narratives are extracted. These contents reveal the reasons for establishing troupes as the organizational form for Small Flower Opera during the Second Sino-Japanese War, as well as the specific methods employed by the troupes to transform dances. The operational process of content analysis follows these steps: *First*, data coding: The researcher conducts open coding on passages in the literature that address the reasons for identifying the troupe by its name and strategies for dance transformation, generating initial labels based on the theory of *State Presence*—state intervention mechanisms and cultural transformation pathways. *Next*, category induction: Through axial coding, state intervention mechanisms are categorized into two analytical dimensions—organizational substitution and ideological integration—while cultural transformation pathways are specified as movement symbol reconstruction. *Finally*, cross-verification is performed among different data sources to ensure consistency. When additional literature no longer yields new coding categories, the thematic refinement is deemed complete.

Results

Research Objective 1: Explore the reasons why China decided to use the troupes as an organizational form to transform dance.

First, the civil society of the past is no longer suitable for the environment of war. Troupe organizations have replaced civil society.

In December, 1942, at the symposium of the cultural circles of the military command center where Zuo Quan is located, Li Xuefeng, a military political commissar, pointed out: 农村剧团可以说是群众文艺运动新形式的萌芽，它有过渡形式的作用，值得我们很好的去注意和培养 (Yi & Yang, 1989, p.113). Translated

into English is the rural troupe can be said to be the bud of a new form of mass art movement, which has a transitional function and deserves our good attention and training (Translated by Meng Qingyi). With the headquarters of the Eighth Route Army and the troupe of the 129th Division stationed in Zuo Quan, in order to quickly and fully organize the peasants to participate in the war, under the unified leadership of the state, the art workers and cultural workers of these troupes set off a cultural upsurge of the Sino-Japanese War. In the past, non-governmental organizations used to entertain peasants were obviously not suitable for revolutionary propaganda and mobilization. As a result, non-governmental organizations were replaced by the rapidly established national troupes. The name of the Small Flower Opera before the outbreak of the war was *Wen She Huo* (文社火) (Li et al., 2014). This was a form of integrated performing art combining singing and dancing. *Wen She Hou* was traditionally organized by the she (社), grassroots in rural China with feudal and patriarchal characteristics (Li & Liu, 1992, p.1). As a result, activities of the She (社) carried strong elements of superstition. However, the outbreak of the war rendered the existence of feudal organizations untenable (Gao, 2004). Choreographer Huangfu Shuyu recalled:

抗战开始就只有村政府没有村社了，所以这次排演也不在社房，而在小学校（旧称酒房院），小学教师成为主要力量。在抗战前村政府不管群众文娱活动、小学教师也没有这个任务，我在隘口和麻田当过教员，就没有管过这事。抗战期间是党和政府管宣传，政府有教育科、县委有宣传部，各教会还有宣联会，这是一个大变化，领导力量大大加强了(Gao, 2004, p.523). After the start of the war, village governments replaced the She (社), so performances were no longer held in She (社) but in village schools. Primary school teachers became the main driving force. Before the war, village governments did not involve themselves in organizing cultural or entertainment activities, nor was this part of teachers' duties. I once worked as a teacher in Aikou and Matian and had no such responsibilities. During the war, however, propaganda was led by the Party and the government, with educational departments, county propaganda offices, and cultural federations playing key roles. This marked a significant shift, greatly strengthening leadership in this area (Translated by Meng Qingyi).

The state's strengthened control over the choreography of Small Flower Opera allowed state-led troupes to replace the previously grassroots *She* (社) organizations. The groups responsible for its choreography transitioned from grassroots entities to state organizations, shifting its cultural narrative from a folk-art form to one rooted in nationalism.

Second, China's adoption of the troupe as an organizational form is a strategy to integrate the ideology of more Chinese, including intellectuals. Although during the war, China's main solidarity was the workers, peasants, and soldiers, who made up the majority of China's population (Mao, 1991, p.381).

Troupe, as a traditional Chinese opera performance group, appeared in China probably during the New Culture Movement against feudal culture initiated by China intellectuals in the early 20th century. At that time, the art circles and young students in China Shanghai, Beijing and other metropolises used western art forms for reference and set up various troupes, which implied their yearning and admiration for new culture (Han, 2012, p.133). However, during the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese government continued to use terminology introduced from the West by intellectuals. While this might seem to contradict the era's emphasis on the proletarian workers, peasants, and soldiers, it actually served to balance the government's preferential policies toward these groups with its rejection of intellectuals. At the end of 1939, Mao Zedong wrote the article *Absorbing a Large Number of Intellectuals* (大量吸收知识分子), severely criticizing the improper attitude of the revolutionary ranks towards intellectuals:

许多军队中的干部，还没有注意到知识分子的重要性，还存着恐惧知识分子甚至排斥知识分子的心理。许多我们办的学校，还不敢放手地大量地招收青年学生。许多地方党部，还不愿意吸收知识分子入党。这种现象的发生，是由于不懂得知识分子对于革命事业的重要性，不懂得为地主资产阶级服务的知识分子和为农民阶级服务的知识分子的区别，不懂得资产阶级政党正在拼命地同我们争夺知识分子，日本帝国主义也在利用各种方法收买和麻醉中国知识

分子的严重性，尤其不懂得我们的党和军队已经造成了中坚骨干，有了掌握知识分子的能力这种有利的条件 (Mao, 1991, p.618-619). Many cadres in the army have not noticed the importance of intellectuals, and they still have the psychology of fearing intellectuals or even rejecting them. Many schools we run are still afraid to recruit a large number of young students. Many local party departments are still reluctant to admit intellectuals to the party. This phenomenon occurs because we don't understand the importance of intellectuals to the revolutionary cause, the difference between intellectuals who serve the landlord bourgeoisie and intellectuals who serve the peasant class, and the fact that bourgeois political parties are desperately competing with us for intellectuals. Japanese imperialism is also using various methods to buy off and anesthetize China intellectuals, especially that our party and army have created a backbone and have the favorable conditions to master the ability of intellectuals (Translated by Meng Qingyi).

Although the revolutionary goal at that time was to unite the broad masses of workers, peasants and soldiers, it did not mean to exclude intellectuals. The performance group was transformed into a troupe, and the content of the performance was mainly to show workers, peasants and soldiers and the art created for them. On the premise of adopting the experience of intellectuals, this has satisfied the enthusiasm of intellectuals to contribute to the revolution, and also achieved the goal of uniting a large number of Chinese people in the state of war.

Therefore, it does not mean that China pursues Westernism by naming the troupe commonly used by China intellectuals. Ideologically, China government attaches great importance to the study of political theory of troupe members. The government organized troupe members to attend classes and learn political theories such as the *Communist Party Declaration* (共产党宣言). The leaders of China government are also very concerned about the troupe. Zhu De, commander-in-chief of the People's Liberation Army of China, always visits the performers in backstage before watching the performance (Cultural Policy Research Center of Shanxi Provincial Department of Culture, 2017, p.222). This promotes the political consciousness and emotion of the troupe members to stay with the country all the time, and achieves the identity politics recognition. The government of China puts forward that the masses are the source of culture and art, and requires a troupe to always check whether its programs play what peasants think. Troupes should always accept the test of the peasants and regard the peasants as collective critics and directors, so as to truly learn practical things, to achieve the combination of the thoughts of the artistic workers and the peasants, to write more touching works urgently needed by the peasants, and to create more abundant art (Ya, 1944). In this way, these troupes are actively involved in creating art in the service of the workers, peasants and soldiers. As Ruan Zhangjing, head of the *Taihang Mountain Troupe*, said,

我们发现了丰富多采的民歌小曲，这些作品，都在群众的脑子里、口头边、手指上。这些民间的文艺形式，都是反映农村人民生活的。有了这些民间艺术启迪之后，我也借用这些形式编写歌舞、活报剧，群众都喜欢看 (Gao, 2014, p.133). We have found a variety of folk songs, and these works are all in the minds, lips and fingers of the peasants. These folk forms of art all reflect the life of rural people. With the enlightenment of these folk arts, I also used these forms to choreograph dances and opera, which peasants like to watch (Translated by Meng Qingyi).

The troupes created and performed works that depicted workers, peasants and soldiers to show that China was united with the people at large. The troupe will not adopt a negative attitude towards folk culture, and even to some extent have to adapt and accommodate the limitations of folk culture that are difficult to overcome in the short term, so as to achieve extensive and effective social and political mobilization.

It can be seen that, Although the intellectual discourse established with reference to Western modern ideology and culture was restricted during World War II, the establishment of troupes—the medium through which Small Flower Opera transformed from a folk discourse to a national discourse—embodies the characteristic of taking proletarian folk culture as its essence while embracing modernism of Western culture.

Research Objective 2. Analyze the specific methods used by the troupe to transform Small Flower Opera from a folk discourse to a national discourse Action refactoring.

With the widespread establishment of troupes, the local rural mass cultural activities have also undergone a transformation, and the people of Zuo Quan have actively participated in the performances of Small Flower Opera, and various purposeful and planned cultural activity organizations have gradually formed. Before that, some groups performing in the folk were unwilling to obey the Communist Party of China's leadership because they were bewitched by Japanese soldiers. But they also became an artistic force for the country. These performers said:

八路军没来以前，敌伪和咱们说八路军看不起唱戏的，过去后不是编到部队里打仗，就是编做宣传队，一天发斤六两小米，不让挣钱。现在看起来，这是骗咱哩 (Shanxi Provincial Department of Culture Cultural Records Compilation Office, 1983, p.448). Before the Eighth Route Army came, the Japanese told us that the Eighth Route Army looked down on those who performed art of peasant culture, and that after becoming a member of the Eighth Route Army, they either fought wars or propagated politics, distributed some grain a day, and were not allowed to make money. Now it looks like this is a lie (Translated by Meng Qingyi).

The troupe also holds considerable authority among the people of Zuo Quan. For example, if there is a contradiction in the life of peasants, they will invite members of the National Troupe wearing the Eighth Route Army costumes to judge (Shanxi Provincial Department of Culture Cultural Records Compilation Office, 1983, p.448). According to Yang Fengming, who served as the director of the Zuo Quan county Cultural Center, recalled:

在根据地、游击区，甚至日军占领区内，不论走到哪里，都可以听到嘹亮的革命战歌，都可以听到振奋人心的街头演说，都可以看到各种形式的抗日标语、漫画。这些都是群众自己办起来的。群众文化宣传活动真正服务于战争、服务于人民群众 (Gao, 2014, p50). In China's military command centers, in places not occupied and controlled by the government, and even in areas occupied by the Japan army, wherever you go, you can hear loud revolutionary songs, you can hear inspiring speeches, and you can see anti-Japanese slogans and cartoons in various forms. These are all things that the peasants themselves have set up. The peasant cultural propaganda activities truly serve the war and the people (Translated by Meng Qingyi).

In the winter of 1939, there was a national troupe called *Taihang Mountain Troupe* (太行山剧团) in Zuo Quan. This troupe has performed in local villages many times and provided some services to people, helping to establish such as national revolutionary rooms, rural clubs, rural troupes, literacy classes, night schools, children's troupes singing, teaching peasants literacy, choreographing and performing theatrical singing and dancing programs, and tutoring artistic talents. These services enlivened the cultural life of the countryside and stimulated the enthusiasm of the people for the war of resistance (Zuo Quan County Historical Office, 1987, p.183). The peasants have watched a lot of the programs performed by professional troupes, and their requirements are also higher, and they want to watch the performances of professional troupes (Zuo Quan County Historical Office, 1987, p.183). Under the influence of *Taihang Mountain Troupe* (太行山剧团), the popular peasant organization in Zuo Quan at that time was the national revolutionary rooms. The national revolutionary rooms organized itself in the village and set up different departments, among which the art propaganda team was the most popular department for peasants. The department includes amateur troupes and various peasant culture activity teams. These teams rehearse during their off-seasons and perform on major festivals (Wang, 2004, p.361). These amateur troupes are the primary school teachers and students in the county. It is the duty of the education department to carry out Sino-Japanese cultural activities without separating culture from education. Teachers in the county are of course propagandists, initiators and popularizers of Sino-Japanese culture (Huangfu & Zhang, 2012, p.24). Every winter and summer vacation, teachers and students have the task of helping the village to carry out various publicity activities (Wang, 2004, p.361).

Discussion

These amateur troupes transformed Small Flower Opera, shifting its content from depicting romantic flirtations between men and women to suitable material for political propaganda. Huangfu Shuyu, who was responsible for choreography in a Small Flower Opera troupe, said Small Flower Opera had only one theme in the past, which was romantic flirtations between men and women. Songs depicted incorrect relationships between local men and women, using the most offensive lyrics and the lewdest melodies, accompanied by dancing moves like twisting and hugging. If it exposed the evils of the old society, the education it provided people was exactly the opposite (Huangfu, April 20, 1945). During the transformation process, the troupe initially used Small Flower Opera's dance moves directly to perform political propaganda content (Shanxi Federation of Literary and Art Workers, 1959). As described in the article *A Preliminary Summary of Cultural and Recreational Activities in Zuoquan Rural Areas* (左权农村文化娱乐活动的初步总结) on January 20, 1944:

抗战初期，小调内容绝大部分是适合抗战的，同时抗战小调已普遍为各村小花戏所演唱。但在形式上仍旧沿用了过去的（文社火）老场面，出现在街头舞台上，大致都是男女成对，摇巾挥扇，搂搂抱抱。在演出的形式上更高级的发挥了旧形式的淫荡艺术 (Anonymous, January 20, 1944). At the beginning of the Second Sino Japanese War, the majority of the ditties were suitable for the war effort, and at the same time, war ditties had already been widely sung in Small Flower Opera performances in various villages. However, in terms of form, they still used the old scenes and appeared on street stages, mostly in pairs of men and women, waving scarves and fans, hugging and embracing. In terms of performance form, they developed the lewd art of the old form to a higher level (Translated by Meng Qingyi).

Such performances were obviously unsuitable for political propaganda. Later, when transforming Small Flower Opera, the troupe came up with a new idea: new creations must replace the old set, and they could not be simply abolished (Shanxi Federation of Literary and Art Workers, 1959).

For example, there was a Small Flower Opera work called *Four Seasons Production* (四季生产) that depicted scenes of productive labor. The troupe changed the *Hu Suo Step* (哼嗦步), which depicted women walking, to the *Three-Point Step* (三点步) in this work. In the past, due to the feudal custom of footbinding, Chinese women's feet were only three inches long. This caused them to walk in a shaky manner. People on stage created a step called the *Hu Suo Step* (哼嗦步) to imitate this posture (Li & Liu, 1992). To transform this old, feudal-laden movement, the troupe choreographers changed it to the *Three-Point Step* (三点步): first landing on the toes, then the ball of the foot, and finally the heel (Li & Liu, 1992). After the transformation, *Four Seasons Production* (四季生产) had the effect of promoting labor, and the productive labor throughout Zuo Quan County achieved great results (Tang, 2017, p.68).

Through meticulous work division, the troupe had a positive impact on the performance and choreography of Small Flower Opera. Small Flower Opera eliminated movements that were not suitable for the needs of the state, and as a result, it gained the right to national discourse from its folk status.

Conclusion

The intervention of the state forces has transformed Small Flower Opera from a civil state to a national discourse, and this transformation process has benefited from the efforts of the troupes. Troupes represent the direct intervention and control of state institutions over folk culture. The text mentions that during the War of Resistance, the Chinese government established state-run theater troupes, such as the *Taihang Mountain Troupe*, replacing the previous feudal "she" organizations that dominated cultural activities. This transformation signifies the state's deep involvement in folk culture through theater troupes, integrating it into the national political system and exemplifying a direct expression of *State Presence*. The state spreads ideology through troupes. During the Second Sino Japanese War, troupes not only served as artistic performers but also became

tools for political propaganda and mobilization of the populace to participate in the war. The content of their performances shifted to focus on workers, peasants, and soldiers, serving the political goals of the state.

Troupes serve as executors of state policies and cultural integrators. Their transformation of traditional dance performances, such as Small Flower Opera, involved converting folk art forms with feudal content into national and realistic state culture. This transformation reflects both the state's regulation of culture through policies and its ability to enhance ideological control through cultural forms. Troupes demonstrate the state's deep penetration into local areas. Through the establishment of theater troupes, the state not only transmitted cultural and political ideologies but also altered the structures and cultural practices of local societies, as exemplified by village school teachers taking over recreational activities and the spontaneous organization of rural theater troupes mentioned in the text.

Through this article, we can clearly see that theater troupes during the War of Resistance were not merely cultural institutions but also concrete manifestations of "state presence." Theater troupes bore the task of disseminating state ideology. By transforming traditional culture, they enhanced their control over society. Furthermore, theater troupes infiltrated state power into local culture and social structures, becoming crucial bridges between the state and the populace.

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