

The Female Emotions and Images in Northern Shaanxi Folk Songs

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Abstract

Northern Shaanxi Folk Songs are an indispensable part of the lives of Northern Shaanxi people. To date, more than 8000 Northern Shaanxi folk songs have been collected and recorded from various sources such as old newspapers and folk song collections, inheritors of folk songs, etc. These document the love, emotions, and attitudes of Northern Shaanxi people toward life. Women are the central figures in songs shaped by a society where they were considered inferior to men and constrained by strict feudal norms. This study analyzes anthologized lyrics to explore the female images and emotions expressed in Northern Shaanxi folk songs. This research focuses on Northern Shaanxi Folk Songs and employs a combined method of qualitative analysis (through narrative and discourse analysis of the song lyrics) and semi-structured interviews. I argue that love plays a dominant role in northern Shaanxi women's lives. However, regarding these women's devotion to the revolutionary cause, they are qualified with the Chinese saying that women can hold up half of the sky. The image of women in Northern Shaanxi folk songs is positive. The songs provide valuable resource materials for understanding women in Northern Shaanxi Province and the land these people live in.

Keywords

Northern Shaanxi Folk Song, Women, Emotions, Images

1. Introduction

Folk songs are an important resource depicting human life. In particular, they act as powerful tools for expressing human emotions. Northern Shaanxi folk songs are storehouses of local dialects and cultures. They are comparable to living fossils of generational lives in local areas and therefore symbolize Chinese folk music.

They crystallize the spirit, thoughts, and emotions of the Northern Shaanxi people. In this region, folk songs can be heard everywhere and at any time: on the mountains when a herder is grazing the sheep, at home when a party is being held, in courtyards when the Spring Festival celebration occurs, on the street when certain celebrations advance, during wedding ceremonies when relatives and friends cheer and create a festive atmosphere, or en route to and from the field or the workplace. To date, over 8000 Northern Shaanxi folk songs have been collected and recorded from various sources such as old newspapers, folk song collections, and inheritors of folk songs, among which approximately 80 percent relate to romantic love (Yang, 2016). Hegel (1979) described love in his book *Aesthetics* as follows: “Love is particularly beautiful in women because all of their spiritual and daily lives are concentrated on love, or love is the promotion of all of their lives. Only in love can women find the support of life; once they suffer misfortune from love, they will be extinguished like a flame in the first gust of wind. Women are portrayed as essential supporters in Shaanxi folk love songs”. Northern Shaanxi women can be tender and enslaved by love but can also be strong and rough, as exemplified by their devotion to revolutionary causes. Northern Shaanxi folk songs record these women’s sorrows, happiness, affection for men, personal growth, devotion to national causes, and, in fact, every facet of their lives. This study examines female emotions and images extant in Northern Shaanxi folk songs.

2. The Creation Background of Northern Shaanxi Folk Songs

The unique geographical conditions and historical background in Northern Shaanxi gave rise to unique female images and emotional expressions, which are analyzed here. Numerous scholars have made contributions to such an analysis. Liu Xiaohong and Cheng Lu (2022) argued that one should use geography, folklore, and archaeology as references to trace the source of the distinctive Northern Shaanxi folk songs. Their study finds that Northern Shaanxi lies in the marginal zone of the Eurasian continent, which stretches about over 8000 miles from Daxinganling in China’s northeast to the Danube River in Europe. This area witnessed the migration of Han people, who were conquered and exiled by the contemporary northern Huns and Mongols. Northern Shaanxi region has experienced three major migrations one after another. In the mid-Han Dynasty (202BC-220AD), over 700,000 people migrated, marking the first northward shift of the farming line. The second shift occurred in the Sui (581AD-618AD) and Tang (618AD-907AD) Dynasties. The former dynasties promoted agriculture, and numerous Jimi Prefectures were established on the Loess Plateau for Turkic, Uyghur, and Tangut tribes, with agricultural and nomadic areas coexisting. The third shift took place in the early Ming Dynasty (1368AD-1644AD), with the Ming Great Wall serving as the demarcation.

The migrations and fusions of ethnic groups such as the Di Rong, Xiongnu, and Tangut influenced the local culture and values and also affected the image of women in folk songs. In some folk songs, like “I Am Just like a Little Card” (Zhang, Song,

& Song, 2015), women are described with bold and unrestrained personalities, reflecting the characteristics of ethnic integration. In history, a lot of men in northern Shaanxi were forced to go out for business and war due to being located on the frontier of war, leaving women behind shouldering the responsibility of rearing the whole family, and thus women's images of firmness, perseverance and longing for the return of their loved ones were displayed. One of the most popular northern Shaanxi folk songs, which is Going Beyond the Western Pass (走西口 in Chinese), is just the description of such case (Gibbs, 2021).

During Qing Dynasty, Northern Shaanxi featured royal roads and canals on the Yellow River, which served as a bridge of positive cultural communication between China and Europe. Thus, Northern Shaanxi folk songs can be considered arising from a mixture of diverse and advanced cultures. Northern Shaanxi includes two prefectures, Yan'an and Yulin. This area was home to a number of different ethnic groups, such as the baidi, tubo, and tujue (Zhou, 2015). Civilization and the cultivation of culture began early in Northern Shaanxi Province: the earliest emperors, Emperors Yan and Huang resided there. They are believed to have been the progenitors of Chinese civilization. The ruins of a 4300-year-old city, "Shimao", located in the far north of northern Shaanxi, were excavated in Shenmu County in 2019. The Shimao excavations provide powerful evidence that over 4000 years ago, inhabitants of the Northern Shaanxi region already existed (Jarus, 2018).

Multinational language elements of northern Shaanxi culture can also be found in northern Shaanxi dialects (Liu & Cheng, 2022). In the Northern Shaanxi dialect, gua (/gua/ literally, "wind") refers to running or walking quickly. "Gua" to the next village means "run to the next village. This is a dialectical relic of the tribal nationality in current Inner Mongolia. The Northern Shaanxi area joins the Loess Plateau and the Mu Us Desert. This was a warm, semi-arid and continental monsoon climate zone. The temperature difference between morning and night in this area was significant. Sandstorms occur frequently in spring, and the annual average rainfall can reach no more than 400 mm (China Weather Net, 2023). The interweaving of civilization and difficult natural conditions led to unique sources for Northern Shaanxi folk songs, which also constituted audience sources.

Another factor that makes Northern Shaanxi folk songs outstanding and popular relates to the strong connections between these songs and China's earliest poem collection, *Shi Jing* (诗经, *The Book of Poetry*). *Shi Jing* pictures the lives of different social classes, including 305 poems, of which 160 are short lyrics about romantic love. The collection spans 500 years (from the 11th to the 6th century BC) and paved the way for the emergence of Chinese realism. Three main literary devices are traditionally recognized as being modeled of the *Shi Jing*, namely Fù (赋, narration), Bǐ (比, metaphor) and Xīng (兴, affective image). Fù refers to a writing technique that describes or narrates something directly (Lan, 2020: pp. 40-41). For example, "July" in *Shi Jing* elaborates on the farming activities of each month. It shows the whole year's labor life of farmers. "In the seventh month, the

Fire Star passes the meridian; in the ninth month, clothes are given out.”, which depicts the seasons and corresponding affairs in detail and aims at creating artistic conception, expressing emotions, or enhancing the atmosphere, in addition to stating the events themselves. For example, in “Peacock Flies Southeast” from the Yuefu Poems, during the narration of the tragic love story of Jiao Zhongqing and Liu Lanzhi, the technique of Fù is used to intensify the tragic atmosphere and at the same time expresses many complex emotions such as the criticism of the feudal ethical code (Yao, 2024). Bǐ (比, metaphor), refers to the device of comparing one thing to another to make the sense easier and clearer to understand. For example, in the poem “Large Rats” from *Shi Jing* (Zhang, 2017), “Large rats, large rats, do not eat our millet”, the exploiters are compared to large rats, vividly expressing the hatred towards the exploiters. Xìng (兴, affective image), usually placed at the beginning of a poem, is often used to create a setting that evokes images related to the poem’s primary theme, for instance, in the poem “The Ospreys” from *Shi Jing* (Zhang, 2017), “The ospreys are calling on the islet in the river”, first describes the ospreys chirping merrily by the river, and then leads to a man’s admiration for a fair maiden.

As one of the birthplaces of the Chinese nation and culture, Northern Shaanxi spawned abundant folk songs created and recited by laborers from core feelings. These songs primarily adopt the creative techniques of Fù (赋, narration), Bǐ (比, comparison) and Xìng (兴, affective image), which aid in vividly documenting occurrences in northern Shaanxi territory.

During the latest round (2015-2021) of general investigations of Northern Shaanxi folk songs, led by the Yulin municipal government and northern Shaanxi folk song lovers, over 3000 songs were documented and edited into two books: *Northern Shaanxi Tao Tsing* (chanting folk tales to accompany simple percussion instruments) and *A Complete Collection of Northern Folk Songs* (Xue, 2021). Women are central to these Northern Shaanxi folk songs, which makes them an invaluable reference in documenting their emotions and images. As a local resident, I have been participating in and observing local performances, both large and small, for a long time. Based on my personal experience, I analyzed 11 folk songs, which have frequently appeared on various occasions and are highly representative and popular. Therefore, they have been selected as the objects of this study. A qualitative matching method was adopted. Narrative and discourse analysis methods were used to analyze the data obtained from the songs. The researcher also instituted a semi-structured interview with a professional scholar, Lǚ Zhengxue, who works at Yulin College.

3. Female Images and Emotions in Northern Shaanxi Folk Songs

Women play a pivotal role both in family and society and are fully represented in northern Shaanxi folk songs. Therefore, this section presents a vivid image of women found in such songs.

3.1. Women Are Hardworking and Diligent

Like women in other parts of China, the vast majority of women in northern Shaanxi did not have educational opportunities until the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and hence they engaged in farming or family care.

In the past, northern Shaanxi residents engaged in subsistence work to obtain food or daily necessities, such as vinegar, tofu, and silver. The following folk song depicted the wife helping her husband make dòufu—beancurd:

开言我把老婆子叫，老婆子 The first person that I think of is my wife, my dear!

豆腐咋拐不下，该怎么？ dòufu is hard to roll, how can I?

开言我把老婆子叫，老婆子 The first person that I think of is my wife, my dear!

你给咱揉来，我点它。 You'll rub dòufu! I'll brine point it!

开言我把老头子叫，老头子 The first person that I think of is my husband, my dear!

你给咱到街上，去卖它 You'll set off to the street! Sell it!

开言我把老头子叫，老头子 The first person that I think of is my husband, my dear!

卖的那钱儿，都攒下 Sell dòufu! Save all the money!

开言我把老头子叫，老头子 The first person that I think of is my husband, my dear!

你给咱到街上，买犁耙 You'll set off to the street! Buy a plow harrow!

(Lǚ, 2009)

Such songs show that women love and are loved by their husbands. Despite a life of suffering, they try to create fun and happiness through life's struggles.

Men often must leave home for long periods to make a living. Because of the scarcity of money or food resources, they bring snacks with them. Women's fate depended on the men. The woman, therefore, vented their grievances.

金鸡叫了头一餐 The golden pheasant is crowing for the first time,

我给我的哥哥推炒面 I'm turning a millstone for making dried flour snacks for my sweetheart!

白天推磨心胆寒 I felt nervous when turning the millstone in the daytime.

到夜晚把磨栓 I had to put the millstone aside by the evening.

三转五转推不下个面 I was just circling around the millstone with too little being done!

十转头上搅动一圈 I stirred the crushed flour after 10 times circling.

粗箩筛来细箩掸 I sifted the flour again and again.

害怕我男人说不然 I was afraid of dissatisfactory words from my man!
 三升炒面二百钱 My man will take three liters of dried flour snacks and twenty taels of silver!
 钱儿用完吃炒面 Eat the dried flour snacks when using out the silver.

(Lǚ, 2009)

Such songs described the reality of feudal society, where some women were inferior to their husbands despite being forced to exert extreme force. To a certain extent, folk songs consist of historical representations.

The following song shows women's lives will be stretched by romantic love. In this song, it can be felt how delightful this woman is when she is greeted by love although suffering tedious labour. Consider, for example, the joyful voice of this woman.

崖畔上酸枣红艳艳

Wild Jujube on the Hillside

清早摘瓜过前湾，
 崖畔上酸枣红艳艳。
 拦羊的哥哥打下它，
 扑拉拉拉
 落下一铺摊，

Early morning, I went out to get gourd,
 I saw wild jujube on the Hillside so red and wet.
 A shepherd beat the bush, and got the fruit down,
 So much and so lovely
 All on the ground,

落下一铺摊。

All on the ground!

我悄悄地走过去，
 把酸枣放嘴边，
 (哎呀)酸不溜溜甜，甜不溜溜酸，
 酸不溜溜甜，
 甜不溜溜酸。
 害得我丢了柳条蓝蓝，
 丢了柳条蓝蓝。

I neared on my tiptoe,
 And picked one up,
 And tasted it.
 Oh, so sweet and sour,
 So sour and sweet.
 Then I ran away,
 And left my basket.

摘瓜回头过前湾，
 寻上了我的柳条蓝蓝。
 不知道为啥还没丢(哎哟)
 酸枣儿装了个满
 酸枣儿装了个满

When I returned from the field,
 I tried to find my basket,
 Why? It's still there!
 But look, it's filled with wild jujube,
 Filled with wild jujube!

我心里正盘算

As I was thinking about it,

那羊儿叫咩咩 I heard sheep bleating,
(哎呀)酸不溜溜甜, 甜个丝丝酸 And how nice it smells!

(Wang, 2009)

Daily life becomes a kind of artistic stage. The areas along the banks of the Yellow River in northern Shaanxi are suitable for growing fruits such as dates and jujube. Music is produced spontaneously and from the bottom of heart based on the women's life experiences and their love for harvesting jujubes. Northern Shaanxi folk songs capture the voices of women and present a musical "meal" for the audience through refinement of the women's inner sentiments and physical labor.

Northern Shaanxi folk songs excel in describing labor scenes in which women harvest both fruit and joy while dripping with sweat. In the following song, it appears that the women's softness is blowing in the wind and their joy is spreading from the field.

种柠条 Growing Caragana Microphylla

阳婆婆上来一杆杆高 The sun has shed its light to the whole caragana microphylla.
风尘不动天气好, What a lovely weather without wind or sand!
肩背籽种手拿上锹, With the seeds on my back and with the spade in my hand,
我引上妹妹种柠条 I'll take my sweet heart to grow caragana microphylla.

手握铁锹把腰弯 I bend down with the spade in my hand,
妹妹的衣襟襟把籽儿撩 My sweetheart is carrying the seeds in her front folded jacket bottom.

坑坑挖齐籽儿点好 Holes are dug out and seeds are buried inside.
越种越觉得劲头高 We work harder hoping a good harvest.

(Lǚ, 2009)

The thematic range of northern Shaanxi folk songs related to the work scene is not vast. Regarding women, they usually appear alongside their husbands. After examining the eight relevant songs in *The Folk Songs of Northern Shaanxi* and *Voice from the Northwest*, except for two songs with short lyrics, six feature the husbands as central figures.

People's daily activities and emotions provide inexhaustible sources for the folk songs (Jiang, 2016). My analysis of the songs shows that a woman's fate was tied to that of men, ranging from major events to minor daily chores, with the women's

lives ranging from lucky to miserable. In any case, women struggle, labor, and act as aids to their husbands.

3.2. Women Are Bold, Direct and Simple

Northern Shaanxi people struggle against inhospitable natural conditions and do not have limited time to nurture affection, especially in relation to their romantic dreams (Ji, 2018). Therefore, in northern Shaanxi folk songs, it is common for women to boldly, directly, and simply express emotion.

From the early Qing dynasty (1644-1911) to the beginning of the People's Republic, men in northern China were forced by poverty and frequent drafting to journey beyond the Great Wall to find work in Inner Mongolia. Over time, folk songs and operatic performances emerged that treated the separation of these men from their loved ones as they traveled on this historic migration known as "going beyond the Western Pass" (走西口) (Gibbs, 2021). The following famous northern Shaanxi folk song Going Beyond the Western Pass elucidates an image of simple, direct and bold women and uses Bǐ (比, metaphor), through which danger and abandonment were understood. These were cultural "ways of understanding and accounting for everyday phenomena and perceptions of reality" that Brian King and others refer to as "folk models" (ibid.). Given this longstanding migratory trend, many folk songs have been produced based on this historical background. In the *700 Pieces of Northern Shaanxi Folk Musical Essence*, eight songs entitled Go Beyond the Western Pass appear. The lyrics of the eight songs differ. In this study, I used a popular analysis method, considering the rhythm of the poems. I use the Chinese expression of "Xikou" instead of the English translation of "Western Pass."

走西口

Go to Xikou

哥哥你走西口	My dear! You are starting off to Xikou.
妹妹(呀)犯了愁	I'm so sorry for you.
提起哥哥走西(哟)口	When it comes to my mind,
小妹妹泪长流	My tears roll down. Woe!
哥哥你走西口,	My dear! You are starting off to Xikou.
妹妹我实难留,	I have to say goodbye to you.
手拉着哥哥的手	I'm taking my dear's hand,
送哥哥到大门口,	Until out of the gate.
送出(了就)大门口,	My dear! You are starting off to Xikou.
小妹妹我不丢(这)手	I'll not let go of your hand.
有两句知心(的)话	Bear in mind

哥哥你要记心头	My worries and blessings for you:
走路要走大路	You'll walk on the main road.
万不要走小路。	Never choose the minor ones.
大路上那个人马多	With people and animals on the main road along with you,
来回你(就)解忧愁	You'll be less worried, but more pleasurable.
哥哥你走西口	My dear! You are starting off to Xikou.
万不要交朋友	Don't get attention of other girls.
交下的(那个)朋友多(哎)	I'm afraid you'll leave me behind
你就忘了奴。	Once you have girls around you.
哥哥你走西口	My dear! You are starting off to Xikou.
不要忘了奴。	Be sure not to forget me.

(Wang, 2009)

In this song, the woman directly expresses her worries and expectations about her sweetheart. Women in northern Shaanxi folk songs stay with their parents after birth, marry, often in their teens, and stay with their husbands for the remainder of their lives. Therefore, they were most likely illiterate. Typically, the terrain of northern Shaanxi consists of rolling mountains and hills cut by gullies or valleys, which pave the way for residents to travel through the mountains (Ji, 2018). Households are widely separated. There is no industry. Therefore, aboriginality is an important trait. Under these circumstances, women gain many advantages from being bold and direct. The female image as bold, direct, and simple is illustrated even more clearly in another song.

一对对鸳鸯水上漂 Lovebirds Float on the Water in Pairs

男：一对对那个鸳鸯水上漂	Boy: Lovebirds float on the water in pairs;
人家该那个都说是咱们两个好，	We're said to be in love.
你要是有那心思咱就慢慢交，	If I'm to your taste, let's move forward.
你要是没那心思呀就呀么就拉倒。	If not, just forget about it.
女：你说那个拉倒就那拉倒，	Girl: Forget about it, you said. That's ok.
世上的那个好人就有那多少，	So many I see are good for love, though.
谁要是有了良心咱就一辈辈好，	If you put me in your heart, we'll be together for our whole life;

谁没有良心就鸭鹊鹊掏。 If you don't, your heart will be taken away by sparrows.

男：你对我那个好来我知道， Boy: You are so good to me, I know.
就像那个老羊疼了羊羔， As the lamb's mother loves her kid.
墙头上跑了马呀还嫌低， I stand high to see you, but I'm still anxious.
我忘了我的娘老子我忘不了个你。 I love you more than I love my mom and dad.

女：想你那个想成个泪人人， Girl: Miss you so much that I can not hold my tears.
抽签那个算卦还问了神神。 I draw lots and visit a seer to pray for you.
山了在水了在呀人常在， Others are merrily living their life,
咱二人甚时候把天地拜。 When should we wedding?

(Wang, 2009)

As stated above, love was an essential topic of northern Shaanxi folk songs. Subsequently, the sung genre, "two-person operas" (errentai 二人台) developed into a popular performance style. "Two-person operas" are performed by one male role and one female role (originally only performed by men) often staged at temple fairs and other regional events. In this song type, the second and fourth parts consist of the woman's response to the man's statement, and they show the attitude toward love. Responding to the man's statement, "not, just forget about it," the woman shows no hesitation in demonstrating her attitude: "Forget about it, you said. That's ok. So many, I see, are good for love. If you keep me in your heart, we will be together for our whole life; if you do not, your heart will be taken away by sparrows." This is a very bold, direct, and simple statement considering that the culture of female subordination to males lasted for several thousand years in China.

This song adopts the writing devices Bǐ (比, comparison) and Xīng (兴, affective image). Lovebirds symbolize faithful love in Chinese culture; therefore, they are compared to love and function as a way of introducing love. The entire song is characterized by simplicity, both in female characteristics and related themes.

The female characteristics of boldness, directness, and simplicity in northern Shaanxi folk songs are even more prominent in the "mountain songs" (山曲), a point clarified by Lǚ Zhengxuan in an interview (February 20, 2022, 2:30 pm). He stated that women could express their powerful emotions more directly in "mountain songs."

Mountain songs are usually sung in the wild characterized by a loud, clear melody and free style. Mountain songs can emanate emotions with explosive power. Such songs are not performed using lower-to-higher musical scales but begin with high-pitched voices. The content of these songs is improvised by the singers; they sing whatever comes to mind. The simplicity, authenticity, and directness of expressing feelings and emotions illuminate the performance's ardent ambience.

The tune of mountain songs is long, which harmonizes with the expanse of open country and slow-pace of life (Yang & Yin, 2020). The following song exemplifies the mountain songs by describing a bold and direct woman.

火辣辣山曲又带一点酸

This Mountain Song Is Desirous and Acid

火辣辣山曲又带一点酸

This mountain song is desirous and acid.

不酸不辣不解馋

I can not enjoy myself to the full, if the song is not desirous, not acid.

捏了一把我心抖颤

My heart is punching when kneading his hand with my fingers.

亲了一个嘴嘴我惊了一身汗 I was startled to sweat when having a kiss with him.

(Long, 2015)

This mountain song shows the aspects of the spiritual life of northern Shaanxi women. Their lives are inseparable from the folksongs and male company. Only when the songs fully express their desire for men, will they feel perfectly content. When seeing a man to her taste, a woman does not withhold her emotions, but directly entwines his hand with her fingers and kisses him, which was offensive to moral rules before the liberation of China in 1949. At this time, women could not publicly discuss the topic of lust, which could result in a charge of lust, and they were supposed to remain chaste (Sun, 2011).

Of all the songs examined in *The Selected 700 Pieces of Northern Shaanxi Folk Music* (Li, 2014), none relate to sophisticated women; all appear with the opposite image.

3.3. Women Are Rebellious

After Chinese society was transformed from a female-dominated matriarchal clan structure to a male-dominated patriarchal clan structure, China transitioned to a slavery society and then a feudal society, where women were subordinated to men and they had to follow the strict social norm of “being obedient to their fathers before marriage, being obedient to their fathers after marriage and being obedient to their sons after their husbands’ death.” In addition, women were imprisoned by the “Three Virtues and Five Virtues, Three Obediences and Four Virtues”; therefore, they enjoyed no social status and rights (Ma, 2012). Where there is depression, however, there is rebellion (Fang, 2007). Since humans became cultured and civilized, women began to fight for their rights and to be heard, although their voice remained weak and their participation circumscribed. In *Stories of Immortals*, compiled by Gan Bao, a famous historian and writer of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (25AD-220AD), the story of a girl raising silkworms offers an initial reflection of women’s pursuit of social rights (Wang, 2006). It has been shown that in the *Shi Jing*, the poems of love account for one-third of the total, which greatly impacted social conceptions of Chinese women in later generations. In *Shi Jing*, women are bold enough to pursue love, are loyal to love, and long for a harmoni-

ous marriage (Xin, 2021).

There are numerous northern Shaanxi folk songs on the theme of women's rebellion against societal prejudice and depression.

"Blue Flower" reigns supreme among classic northern Shaanxi folk songs. It tells a true story in which Blue Flower is betrothed to the good-for-nothing son of a landlord's family by her parents against her will. She runs away with a beloved shepherd boy on her wedding day. The lyrics for Blue Flower are as follows:

兰花花

Blue Flower

青线线的(那个)蓝线线，蓝格莹莹的彩； Deep blue threads, well, blue threads, all look brilliant;
生下一个兰花花，实实在在地爱死个人。 Blue Flower is born to the world so lovely and wet.

五谷里的(那个)田苗子儿， Of all the crops in the field, well,
数上高粱高； sorghum grow the tallest;
一十三省的女儿(吆)， Of all girls from thirteen provinces,
数上(那个)兰花花好。 oh, Blue flower is, well, the prettiest.
正月里(那个)说媒， In the first month, well, she sees matchmaker
二月里定， in the second month, she's engaged.
三月里就交大钱， In the third the down payment given
四月里迎。 and the next she's taken in.

三班子(那个)吹来， Three troupes, well blow the trumpets,
两班子打， and two beat the drum and gong;
撇下我的情哥哥， She is transported into Zhou's
抬进了周家。 without seeing his true lover.

蓝花花(那个)下轿来， Now, Blue Flower is, well, off
东望西照， and looks around—what does she see?
照见周家的猴老子好像那一座坟。 She sees Zhou as if seeing a tomb.

你早早(那个)死来，早撒手， "Damn on you, well, and you must die soon, no more!
前晌你(那个)死了， You die in the morning,
后晌我蓝花花走。 well, and I will go in the afternoon!"

手提上(那个)羊肉， Then with mutton in hand and,

怀里揣上糕， well, millet cakes under her arm,
 拼上性命我就往各个家里跑。 She is running away direct to her lover's home!

我见到我的(那个)情哥哥有说不完的话； She sees her lover and, well, has so much to say:
 咱们两个死活(哟)常在一搭。 "Dead or alive, oh, together we must always stay."

(Wang, 2009)

A typical writing technique for northern Shaanxi folk songs is the use of auxiliary words. Throughout the song Blue Flower, "well" appears ten times and "oh" appears twice. The auxiliary words like "well" and "oh" intensify certain emotions. "Oh," and "well" in the second line of the second verse express the amazement and wonder at the beauty of Blue Flower, and in the meantime, these two auxiliary words leave a large space for the readers' imagination regarding Blue Flower's uncertain future. "Oh" in the last line of the song shows Blue Flower's mixed feelings of being afraid of probable misfortune and being determined to unite with her beloved boy no matter what price she has to pay for her disobedience (Zhang, 2017).

In this song, the creative techniques of Fù (赋, narration), Bǐ (比, comparison) and Xīng (兴, affective image) are used. Most parts of this song are narrated using Fù. In the first and second verses, Blue Flower's beauty is shown by brilliant blue threads and sorghum using the technique of Xīng. In the second line of the fifth verse, the Bǐ technique is used to compare Zhou to a tomb, demonstrating how Blue Flower hates Zhou.

Northern Shaanxi folk songs always form part of the lives of the northern Shaanxi people, and their life stories are narrated by folk songs (Ji, 2018). The song Blue Flower exemplifies the loving nature, emotion, and passion of northern Shaanxi women. Through this creative technique, Blue Flower's rebellious spirit of being promised to marry Zhou is vividly revealed.

Northern Shaanxi women's rebellious image can also be seen in another northern Shaanxi folk song, "I Miss You, My Dear."

想亲亲

I Miss You, My Dear

女:山丹丹开花六瓣瓣红,
 哥哥你人好又年轻。

Girl: Morningstar Lyli is red in six petals,
 My dear boy is young as well as kind.

男: 满天天的星星一颗颗明,
 满村里挑准我妹妹你一人。

Boy: Every star twinkles in the night sky,
 And I choose you alone as my girlfriend.

女: 山坡坡(的)长得十样样(的)草, Girl: Ten kinds of grasses grow on the hillsides,

十样样看见哥哥你九样样(的)好。 And nine out of ten shows you're the nicest guy.

男：前半夜我想你吹不熄个灯， Boy: I couldn't put out light before sleep when I miss you?
后半夜想你就翻不了个身。 I couldn't turn over in bed in dream when I miss you.

女：三天(呀)不见哥哥的面， Girl: I couldn't taste the sweetness of sugar,
口含上砂糖也不甜。 During the three days I didn't see you.

男：头一回(那个)我来你不在， Boy: The first time I came, you were not in,
你在(那个)地里挖苦菜(哟)亲亲。 And you were out in collecting bitter herbs.

女：三天(呀)不见哥哥的面， Girl: I couldn't put thread through the eye of needle,
拿起(呀)针来穿不上个线。 When for another three days I didn't see you.

男：二一回(那个)我来你不在， Boy: The second time I came, you were not in,
你妈妈就打我两锅盖(哟)亲亲。 And your mother hit me with a pan-cover.

合：想你想你实想(哟)你， Boy & Girl: I miss you and I do miss you;
想你想你没法比。 I miss you more than anything else,
有朝一日成了家， Once we get married, you know,
咱们两个死活在一起。 We will live and die together.

(Wang, 2009)

This song is composed in an antiphonal style, depicting a girl and boy struggling together against the objection of the girl's parents. It was sacrilege for the girl to be determined to unite with a boy without receiving the parents' permission. The notion and norm that unmarried girls should be obedient to their parents was universally accepted by Chinese feudal society, and the girl was offensive in both her willingness and action. However, she was not hesitant in pursuing her true love; she boldly expressed her strong emotions (in the third, fourth, and fifth verses) and unites with the boy (sixth verse). The girl in the last verse defies the underlying Chinese hierarchical values—women should be listening, weak, and obedient by sternly showing her will to unite with the boy.

In this song, the ordinary life of northern Shaanxi residents makes the girl's endeavor to pursue love more astonishing. Northern Shaanxi life cannot be separated from the Morningstar Lyli (which represents beauty, purity, righteousness and enthusiasm in the first verse), stars at night (in the second verse, which enhances the local people's spiritual life during a time of severe scarcity of both material and spiritual things), candies (in the fourth verse, which was considered the

sweetest thing in contemporary northern Shaanxi), the bitter herbs (in the sixth verse, which are nutritious and medicinal herbs, which, although tasting bitter, protect against illnesses and extreme starvation), and needles and thread (in the seventh verse, which signify the women's qualifications and support of the whole family). From the outside, the girl is represented as living an ordinary life, as other people do. However, she is truly valiant in pursuing true love, regardless of the strict authoritative rules against women and the hierarchical controls on women. The sharp contrast between the girl's pursuit of love and her ordinary life makes her representative of women with rebellious spirits.

3.4. Women Are Revolutionary

In 1928, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, Liu Zidan and some of his peers established the Red Army and a revolutionary base in northern Shaanxi. The revolutionary atmosphere spread across the entire northern Shaanxi region (Guo, 2023). In 1935, having completed the Long March, the Chinese Party's Central Committee finally arrived at northern Shaanxi and lived there for over 13 years. Northern Shaanxi became a sacred place for the Chinese and held worldwide esteem for its leading position in fighting the invasion of Japanese troops (Yuan, 2020). During the revolutionary tide, women played a half-sky role (Zhong, 2017). This particular setting nurtured northern Shaanxi folk songs that possessed new styles and content. Women appear in these northern Shaanxi folk songs in a new image.

The following song reflects a girl's passion for revolution through her devotion to revolutionary causes.

The Eighth Route Army¹, and its gentle and tenacious troops caused fear among the invading Japanese troops. Regarding common hatred toward the Japanese, northern Shaanxi women were proud of having Eighth Route Army soldiers as their sweethearts. Meanwhile, these women left their homes and began revolutionary lives.

寻汉要寻八路军

The Eighth Route Army Man I Love the Best

吃菜(哟)要吃白菜心(哟儿来吧哟) Take the Chinese cabbage and its best.

寻汉(我)要寻一个八路军(哟), And the Eighth Route Army man I love the best
名望实在好。 For he is the best known and known the best.

三号号盒子红缨(哟儿来吧哟) Take the Maoser pistol and red tassels look the best,
小哥哥出发要打日本(哟), And to fight the Japs the army man set out best,

¹The Eighth Route Army, short for the Eighth Route Army of the National Revolutionary Army and later renamed the Eighteenth Group Army of the National Revolutionary Army, is an anti-Japanese armed force directly led by the CPC and one of the predecessors of the Chinese People's Liberation Army.

小妹子送出村。	And to see you off the village I'll do my best.
枣溜溜(的)马儿(哟),	Take the red horse
银鬃鬃(啷儿来吧哟),	and its silvery mane is the best,
胸前你有挂上望远镜(哟),	And my man dears a pair of binocular on his breast,
哥你多威风。	And how smart you look all the best!
哥哥你放心上前线(啷儿来吧哟),	Go to the battlefield and take care of yourself the best,
小妹子后方闹生产(哟),	And I will go in for production and do it the best,
胜利了再见面。	And the day of victory we'll see the best!

(Wang, 2009)

The first verse shows the girl was eager to have an Eighth Route Army soldier as her sweetheart through the technique of Xing (兴, affective image). At that time, Chinese cabbage was so precious that it became a symbol of the Eighth Route Army soldiers. The second, third and fourth verses use the technique of Fù (赋, narration) to describe the joyful moments when the girl sees her sweetheart off to join the noble cause of driving the Japanese out. The last verse is the song's climax, which displays a girl's strong revolutionary determination.

Following is another song filled with a revolutionary atmosphere that shows the drastic changes that occurred to the women of northern Shaanxi in Chinese history.

妇女姊妹快些来	Women Sisters! Come on! Be Quick!
妇女姊妹快些来,	Women sisters! Come on! Be Quick!
赶快把你们脚放开,	Unfold your bound feet,
剪发放脚人人爱,	Cut your hairs! Unfold your feet! Be a lovely girl!
自由平等来。	We welcome freedom and equality.
尔个的世事翻了个怪,	We are seeing a different era,
我们组织起妇女队,	Let's set up a women team,
妇女队呀本不赖,	Women are excellent in nature,
革命成功快。	The Revolution has seen its fruit.

(Lǚ, 2009)

Before the Red Army came to northern Shaanxi, women in northern Shaanxi folk songs were confined to farming, needle and thread, house chores, and love affairs. The women did not have an independent lifestyle. However, the cause of liberation opened a new chapter for women in northern Shaanxi. Their love toward boys was not only about love but was endowed with new meanings: to work

together to propel society forward. This song moves to an even higher level: women form their own teams and become completely independent persons, which broke the rules that had restrained them for thousands of years. For example, their long hair did not need to be tied up, and their bound feet could be liberated alongside the cause of liberation.

4. Conclusion

Northern Shaanxi folk songs are valuable cultural artifacts that reflect the region's history and traditions. As the primary aspect of Northern Shaanxi folk songs, northern Shaanxi women have a positive image in the sense of propelling society forward. As time passed, the image of northern Shaanxi women changed. Therefore, this demonstrates that northern Shaanxi women vividly reflect northern Shaanxi culture. When women's voices were censored, northern Shaanxi folk songs served as an effective tool to show women's thoughts, passion, love, and bitterness. The women in northern Shaanxi folk songs allow a perception and understanding of this land and the people it.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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