Chinese Communism is stereotyped as strident and colorless. However, the Communists acknowledge the role of Eros in society and during certain periods enlist its popular expression to devise strategies of social change and economic development. Communist theory, at least the Maoist version, may be summarized in the following propositions: economic development hinges on young people’s commitment to certain cultural or political values. Commitment entails the attachment of political values to psychological impulses. The successful management of economic factors involves the management of psychological impulses through such media as popular culture. Hence, during the radical phase of China’s economic development known as the Great Leap Forward (1958–1960), the Communists encouraged song writers to express values that would promote compliance with Great Leap goals. A number of song writers utilized popular metaphors of sexual love to express revolutionary values and goals.

The Great Leap Forward aimed at rapidly expanding production by mobilizing all available muscle power, especially that of women, to build an agricultural infrastructure (reservoirs, canals, fields) that otherwise would have taken decades to construct. The mobilization was coupled with the move to amalgamate disparate villages into a nationwide system of agricultural communes. The movement was criticized outside China as a colossal economic failure, although many Western critics now concede the long-term success of China’s collective economy (see Dernberger 1977). Success was due in part to the values Communists promoted and to the ways they promoted them. The Great Leap was not simply orchestrated from the top. It was inspired also from the bottom.

In 1958, the Communists mobilized writers, teachers, and students to arouse the people...
to use their traditional prosodies, local vernaculars, and popular wit to compose verses expressing the values and goals of collectivization. The rural song fests and poetry contests netted thousands of volumes of verse published at the local level and an additional seven hundred volumes compiled by prominent scholars for nationwide distribution (Hsu 1964:440).

One of these volumes, the one on which my study is based, is entitled Hung Chi Ko Yao (Songs of the Red Flag). The three hundred songs in this volume were selected by Kuo Mo-Jo and Chou Yang on the basis of their political value and aesthetic appeal. Kuo and Chou arranged the songs into four sections. The majority of songs are 172 "Agrarian Songs." The remaining 128 songs are evenly divided among "Industrial Songs," "Party Songs," and "Patriotic Songs." Each song is further identified by its native place or national minority origin. My study focuses on the twenty-two "Agrarian Songs" that express erotic motifs or describe relationships between boys and girls leading to marriage.

the sociocultural background

Love songs are among the most ancient expressions of Chinese folk art. They are renowned among hill people, Han and non-Han. Among the Confucianized lowlanders, erotic values found little room for expression and were purged from the social structure. At the heart of Confucian society was the family, a self-contained, self-perpetuating religious and economic institution modeled on the relationship between father and son. Generational continuity and role fulfillment were emphasized over conjugal affection and personality development. Women were brought into a family for the purpose of bearing its offspring, and they were literally bound by their feet to the domestic sphere. Men were somewhat freer to pursue their amours outside the social structure as long as they did not threaten the economic well-being of their families.

In this century, the attack on the Confucian treatment of women and the young became a pivotal point in the national revolution. Liberation from the corporate family facilitated identification with a larger community and ultimately with a nation-state. At the heart of this movement was the struggle to make Eros a component of social structure, specifically, to make erotic love the basis for marriage.

Much of the early revolutionary activity aimed at discrediting and destroying the Confucian family system. Impulse release, personal liberty, and sexual equality were given cultural legitimacy in the rise of a vernacular literature and a national folklore movement. Poets began using the spoken vernacular to compose more explicit erotic images than ever before (Hsu 1964:xxii). Young folklorists recorded and published the earthy, often obscene, songs of mountain folk whose lifestyles exhibited the kinds of interpersonal liberties that violated Confucian proprieties (see Li 1970).

The early period of the national revolution primarily affected the tiny urban classes. The use of purely sexual motifs in the new culture to discredit the old culture added to the confusion and aimlessness that characterized the pre-Communist period. For, as Ai-Li Chin (1970:120) put it, "the Chinese self was accustomed to finding meaning in terms of well-defined sets of relationships rather than in terms of the individual." Professor Chin, therefore, suggests in her study of Communist short story characters that they "do not find in romantic love or eroticism any meaning of personal assertion or self-indulgence."

After 1949, the national revolution was led exclusively by the Communist Party. According to Communist terminology, this was the period of "national reconstruction." For purposes of my study, this was the period when a new set of relationships was created in which the erotic impulse was given a legitimate role in society and was oriented toward constructive revolutionary goals.
The first revolutionary acts by which the Communists consolidated their new order were land reform and enforcement of the Marriage Law, which extended the goals of the national revolution into the rural areas. Communists used marriage reform to liberate young people from their families as part of the move to create larger-scale, nonkin-based economic organizations. The revolution hinged on the ability of young people to associate freely outside the family. Therefore, the Communists promoted organized group recreation. As C. K. Yang observed in the early 1950s:

Group games, and above all, group singing were conducted by the cadres, especially among the young peasants. Although the initial reception was not enthusiastic, members of the Youth League and Young Pioneers were getting used to them, being especially attracted by the mixing of the sexes in the group games and singing. It was apparent that Communism had set in motion a new force which could be exploited to change the life of the community (Yang 1965, II:191).

The Great Leap and its songs

This “new force” was set in motion during the collectivization movement ending in the Great Leap attempt to alter the landscape through the massive employment of human muscle power. During the earlier stages of the cooperative movement (1953–1958), village land and labor were pooled in various combinations. In the final communization phase, the lands of disparate village cooperatives were incorporated into a new, communal pattern of land tenure. Agricultural labor was employed on a rational basis with little regard for traditional kinship and village bonds; and female labor was intensified in the fields.

The disruption of age-old patterns met with resistance on all fronts. The natural landscape resisted pick and shovel. Obdurate peasants were not easily convinced of the need to alter basic patterns of family life for the sake of long-term benefits. The revolutionary potential of the peasant classes is a perennial question in Marxist theory and praxis. However, most revolutionaries know that the young and the female are among the least committed to old forms and are more innovative and impulsive than their elders. The Great Leap love songs represent one attempt to channel that youthful and hitherto underemployed feminist energy into constructive economic activities.

The Great Leap love songs are courting songs. At the most concrete level, courtship communicates to youth and women the personal benefits of collectivization. For example, courtship symbolizes the equality of the sexes by giving women the power to flirt, to resist, or to acquiesce, or more generally, the power to make decisions. The vitality and tenacity of women are unleashed as women acquire socially active and competent roles. Courtship releases the young of both sexes from the rigid control of family elders. This serves both personal and collective interests. Unfettered youth are able to participate in the activities of the wider community—work team, brigade, and commune—aimed at economic development. Young people from different families and villages enjoy greater opportunities to form personal relationships in concert with their higher order economic activities. Outside the family, young people feel less obligated to produce many children as early as possible; and women are able to take advantage of social and political opportunities. In turn, collective interests are served by a low birthrate, which is a key variable in the Chinese model of economic development.

A protracted period of courtship is thought to lead to greater conjugal stability after marriage, in which family continuity hinges on emotional bonding. The Communists emphasize the need to get to know one’s future spouse in stress-provoking situations. If two people can work together before they are married, there is greater chance that the marriage will last and that the children resulting from that union will grow up in a more stable environment in which regard for hard work is a primary value.
Finally, courtship provides a powerful analogy for the process of collectivization itself. Collectivization is similar to courtship—both are impulsive, yet highly controlled, activities oriented toward joining disparate social objects into higher order and permanent forms of communion. Forming a commune is analogous to creating a family. In the form of a courting song, the two processes may become more than mere analogy.

One example of a song that joins the erotic interests of young people with Great Leap goals is “South and North of the Mountain Become One Family” (Kuo 1959:84). A Chuang maiden from Kwangsi sings:

Elder brother lives in Plum village south of the mountain;
Little Sister lives in Peach village north of the mountain.
I want to sing elder brother a song of love;
The mountain is so high the sound is blocked.
I want to send elder brother a bouquet of flowers;
As I cross the mountain, everyone wonders how curious.
If this year the cooperative is established;
South and north of the mountain become one family.
Then I can see my love day and night;
And we can hear each other’s heartfelt words.

This song is designed to mobilize youth to work for the kind of social change that can gratify their erotic desires. Because Chinese villages tend to be exogamous, the amalgamation of Plum village and Peach village into a single production unit is more than a political-economic revolution. It facilitates the meeting and courting of potential marriage partners.

The song also contains a covert political message in the idea that the process of revolutionary collectivization is a popularly inspired movement emanating from the will of the people. It is not a relationship that has been arranged by higher authorities and imposed on a passive and hapless populace. In the song above, the obstacles to the union of the two lovers are the very ones that impede the communal incorporation of the two villages. The obstacle that looms largest is the mountain. The mountain, a ubiquitous symbol of backwardness and poverty (Mao 1965, III:322), must be removed, or more abstractly, nature must be conquered in the process of joining the two villages and increasing agricultural output.

The more subtle obstacle is the attitude of the people, who look askance at the brazen maiden daring to cross the mountain to court a strange man from the other village. This traditional peasant vigilance against active women and outsiders represents the most tenacious kind of resistance to collectivization that the Communists encountered. This was not counterrevolutionary resistance, but rather the dogged reluctance of average peasants to try unproven innovations in their livelihoods. The implication in the song is that reluctance to experiment is based on the same kinds of worn-out and discredited values as those that oppose courtship or freedom of choice in marriage.

A Lahu song from Yunnan (Kuo 1959:136) describes the proper courting technique to be used in wooing a maiden. Superficially, it induces compliance with Great Leap goals by the promise of erotic gratification:

No matter how loud you blow your whistle,
The girl’s heart won’t change one bit;
If in the Great Leap you are number one,
Then my purse I’ll give to you.

This straightforward love song tells us something about traditional male sex appeal: a “blowhard” gets no results in wooing girls. Girls are “turned on” by the boy who accomplishes something substantive without boasting about it. It is the modest but energetic producer to whom the maiden feels willing to give her “purse” (ho pao). Traditionally, maidens embroider their ho pao (“lotus wrap”) with cryptic designs for young men in an
erotic frame of mind to decipher. In this context the ho pao is a metaphor for sexual favor more than for pecuniary reward. However, as in most of these songs, the promise of sexual gratification is rooted in the need to delay it until the “great leap” has been accomplished.

The song contains a deeper political message: blowing a whistle exerts a kind of mindless authority. One of the most common mistakes made by local leaders in a political mobilization system is the tendency toward “commandism.” Because the Great Leap involved radical changes in Chinese society, coupled with the fact that the local revolutionaries had access to state power, the tendency to use negative (forceful) means to win compliance was often overwhelming. It is notable that this song is from the Lahu, a national minority engaged in swidden agriculture in the hills of the southwestern frontier. The Lahu have an unusually martial reputation with a long tradition of resisting Han Chinese encroachments. In this context, the message has special relevance to Han Chinese cadres or to Lahu trained in Han institutions, who come to those remote hills and attempt to institute changes toward which the hill people are ill-disposed. The problem of “commandism” across ethnic boundaries takes the form of “Han chauvinism” (ta Han tsu chu i).

The Lahu love song warns that leaders who attempt to get results by blowing whistles instead of inspiring commitment through exemplary participation with the grass roots are bound to fail. Here, the maiden represents the willingness of the people to alter the landscape and to deliver the fruit that nature holds in store. The purse symbolizes fertility and, in the larger sense, material prosperity.

In a song of similar construction (Kuo 1959:140), a Han Chinese maiden from the rich and progressive area on the northern outskirts of Shanghai sings that during spring plowing and sowing there is not time to loiter around town:

If big brother becomes a model worker and joins the Party;
Little sister will take him a red flag as dowry.

This Han song is politically less subtle than the Lahu song. Giving the red flag as dowry is a shocking substitution. The exchange of bridal wealth is unlawful. However, the increased importance of women as breadwinners coupled with certain structural continuities such as virilocal marriage, which the Communists never seem to challenge, maintain de facto the institution of bride-price and dowry gift. The only force operating against this institution is the emphasis on the value of courtship and conjugal relationship. Thus the maiden who merely offers a red flag implies that she is not being bought, that is, no bride-price is sent and no larger dowry is expected. However, she also addresses the fact that the dowry is no anachronism, that it is a viable vehicle of the old culture, while the red flag is a potent symbol of the new order. The analogy between the dowry and the flag lies in the tradition of including red cloth in the bride’s trousseau. Red is the color of earthly joy. It is the color of the life fluid (blood), and it symbolizes the essence of life in the idea of fertility. In the form of dowry, the red cloth represents the transfer of rights in the bride’s fertility from one family to another. In the form of the flag, red expresses the maiden’s sanguinary solidarity with her revolutionary comrades. The flag in place of the dowry therefore stands for a fundamental transformation: from the claim by the family on the bride’s sacrifice to the maiden’s own willingness to sacrifice for a wider community.

Many songs depict the maiden imposing her discipline on the young man. During the full moon, a Szechuan boy “wants to go to little sister’s house to play around.” But “as he arrives in front of her window, he sees her studying, and he does not dare to call her” (Kuo 1959:244). In a song from Kiangsu (Kuo 1959:135), the girl and her lover are weeding the wheat sprouts. As he tries to catch her attention with seductive glances, she admonishes him in a lowered voice:
Don’t keep glancing at me,
You’ll make a mistake;
If you miss the weeds,
You’ll injure the wheat sprouts.

While the new form of communal labor affords boys and girls many opportunities to associate, the interaction between the sexes is supposed to inspire each towards greater effort. In Hopei, love provides the inexhaustible fuel that turns the water wheel (Kuo 1959:186). The boy pushes one spoke, the girl pushes the opposite spoke; each in a sense chases the other around in circles:

Elder brother runs swiftly, little sister follows;
The water wheel turns disgorging precious silver.
All day they go, a thousand miles around;
Not leaving the wellhead for even one minute.
The spring water beneath is lifted without cease;
The spring runs no deeper than their love.

The same theme animates the interaction between a boy and girl digging a reservoir in Anhwei Province (Kuo 1959:120). The boy does not feel cold, the girl does not weary when they are working in unison:

Little sister carries mud, big brother digs the pond;
Pearls of sweat mix with muddy water.
Little sister doesn’t tire carrying ten-thousand catties;
Elder brother doesn’t shiver standing in the mire.
We can’t talk freely working here in the crowd;
(We are like) paper lanterns all aglow inside.
Big brother and little sister want to be heroes;
They dig until the stars set and the sun rises.

Their purpose for spending the night together is specifically to become heroes or to contend for the honor of “model worker.” The institution of “model worker” is aimed at dignifying manual labor and giving recognition for revolutionary service on “the front line of production.” The degree to which nonpecuniary rewards stimulate voluntary compliance with Communist goals undoubtedly varies over time and space. But these songs suggest that there are alternative motives for public service other than pecuniary and altruistic ones. They suggest a link between accomplishment in the political economy and sex appeal.9

This link is created in another song in which the girl says that she loves the boy’s lofty ambition. The song “Bring Water Over the Mountain Before Getting Married” (Kuo 1959:138) is a traditional duet-type hill song in which two lovers are separated by a river or valley, and they sing their heartrending words across the barrier that separates them. In this case, the barrier is an aqueduct that the Lung T’ai Commune in Wu Shan County, Kansu, is building to bring water across the mountains. Little sister praises the towering will of her lover:

Water racing through the ditch like horses;
Elder brother is like Yang Tsung-Pao.
He fights so bravely in the dragon’s ditch;
I love elder brother’s lofty ambition.

Yang Tsung-Pao is a traditional folk hero who fought and was defeated by a female general whom he later married. This implies that a boy should feel no dishonor in working or competing with a girl. On the contrary, such a relationship is the proper prelude to a good marriage. Indeed, her words inspire the boy to work even harder. He sings:

When I hear little sister’s praise,
My body surges with energy.
Yesterday I watched you from afar;
As you stared at the water, what were your thoughts?
She sings:

Hearing the water’s roar my heart was inflamed;
By myself I went down the mountain.
Staring at the water I yearned for you.
Thinking of the water how can I forget elder brother?

Then the boy calls to his beloved to redouble her effort:

Let you and me contend for the honor of model worker.
If we get the water across the mountain,
At the Public meeting we’ll have honor.

She goes one step further:

Big brother, you can put your mind at ease;
I’m certainly not a lazy person.
If I be not a model worker, I won’t see you.
If the water is not over the mountain—there’ll be no marriage.

Traditionally, the bride was integrated into the production activities gradually. But collectivization and the demand for labor brought the new bride into the production brigade a few days (or hours) after marriage instead of a few months (see Salaff 1973:112). The songs invert the role of the bride and describe the benefits of protracting the courtship (that is, delaying consummation) even after the formalities of marriage. The songs depict strong and forthright brides, the opposite of the humble and timid traditional bride. In “Brother Takes a Wife” (Kuo 1959:143), a Chinese girl in Hunan Province sings:

The Magpie cocks his tail;
My brother takes a wife
She has big eyes and black eyebrows;
Her face is the color of peach blossoms.

In the traditional wedding rites, the bride’s eyebrows and facial hairs are meticulously plucked as she laments her loss of vitality and color (Blake 1978). She arrives at the boy’s home with her head lowered and her face veiled. In stark contrast to tradition, the new bride’s eyes flash a sense of enthusiasm, her black eyebrows radiate a strength of character, and her cheeks glow with vitality.

Dark trousers and fancy tunic—
Only cuffs trimmed in red ribbon.
No bands, no sedan chair.
She comes by herself and goes straight to the kitchen.

The bride wears her best clothes with only a hint of special decoration. There is no time for fanfare and indulgence. Rather than going to the bedroom, as is customary, she goes to the kitchen.

Early in the morning on the second day,
She and brother plow the field.
My mother is so happy she smiles broadly;
She praises my brother for getting a good wife.

The newlyweds consummate their marriage by “plowing the field.” The wit lies in the analogy between the socialist value of sowing the earth and the traditional value of impregnating the bride. The song emphasizes the bride’s duty in both domestic chores and social production rather than in her need to bear children. Moreover, her nonmaternal role finds ultimate sanction in the influential role of the mother-in-law. As a hard-working daughter-in-law, she earns work points for the family even if she does not bear the family offspring. This gives mother-in-law sufficient cause to remark on her son’s wise selection of a bride. 10

The increased range of social and political opportunities for women during the Great Leap makes the rhetoric of antinatalism more convincing than during other periods when
traditional attitudes hold sway. In the Great Leap, the lowly daughter-in-law may become a community leader as in the song “A New Bride Comes to the Village” (Kuo 1959:144). In the traditional rites of marriage, the bride carries candy and fruit to her new home. The young men test her wits by seeing how well she parries their vulgar jests. This raillery is the immediate prelude to the actual consummation of the marriage. Both the teasing and the consummation are trying ordeals for the bride. With each loss in the game of wits, the bride surrenders fruit and sweets to her male tormentors to symbolize her submissive and procreative role. However, in the Great Leap version of this rite, a Chinese bride in Kiangsu turns the tables on her in-laws and proves to be the strong and competent one:

A new bride comes to the village,  
Young men all crowd around her;  
Some hold out hands for cigarettes,  
Some hold out for sweets.  
The new bride just smiles,  
She is neither timid nor hasty;  
She takes from her bosom a production schedule,  
Deliberately speaking to the crowd:  
I have cigarettes, I have candy,  
But we cannot eat them now;  
Whoever beats me in production—  
Ha, come and eat as much as you can.  
The young men just stick out their tongues,  
Yo, this bride sure has pith:  
Okay, you dare to challenge us,  
We dare to take it up.

The most pervasive value in these songs is hard work coupled with delayed gratification. It is a crucial value for young people to learn if they are to direct their immense energy into a task of economic transformation. These songs are didactic. They do not describe real behavior; otherwise there would be no need for the songs. Although we have no way of measuring the influence such songs have on people’s behavior, we are able to observe how the song writers attempt to weave a rhetoric of mutual benefits between personal needs and collective interests in a meaningful, often humorous, and always humanly realistic way. The Communists obviously believe that these songs constitute an important factor in their overall strategy of economic development, for they devote close attention to the theoretical role of popular culture, to creating, collecting, sorting, publishing, and broadcasting the songs, and to opposing the persistence of the purely popular tradition.

**persistence of the popular tradition**

The new lyrics reveal the persistence of the old society, especially the role of village women whose disciplined labor in social production was required for the Great Leap Forward. In fact, traditional attitudes continued to be expressed in popular songs. The editor of the Hupei daily newspaper (En Shih Pao 1965:63) admitted: “on the surface, our class enemies are no match for us, but they still retain greater capital in their bad songs than we have in our struggle songs.” Although the purely popular (“bad”) songs have no official outlet in the Chinese press, they persist, and they flourish during periods of consolidation, demobilization, and relaxation as in the half decade following the Great Leap.

Young people, who are among the newly literate, hand copy whole volumes of “bad” love songs. These circulate from village to village through kinship networks where they are recopied. In some instances the “bad” songs are sung at public meetings in competition with the activists who sing political songs. More generally, the old songs are sung in the fields or during periods of recreation for pure entertainment. In fact, it was the number of
letters to the editor expressing the harmless entertainment value in the old songs that prompted the En Shih Pao editorial, which was given national attention by its reprinting in Popular Literature.

What constitutes a “bad song” (huai ko)? Within the spectrum of “love songs” (ch’ing ko), the most universally condemned are those labelled “dissipating songs,” “erotic songs,” or “obscene songs.” For example, the Hupei editor wrote:

Concerning bad mountain songs, among the most poisonous are the dissipating songs. These are not the same as good traditional love songs. Dissipating songs do not have the proper “affects.” Such songs as “Black as Black Can Be,” “Commotion at the Fifth Watch,” and “Touch the Eighteen Parts (of my body)” are full of obscene lyrics and orgiastic tunes, and they are not fit for the ears of young people who are easily poisoned by the suggestion of impropriety between boy and girl (En Shih Pao 1965:63).

The only “lewd songs” that find their way into the Communist-controlled press are those that are held up for criticism. For example, a Communist music critic, Li Wei (1961:136), reprinted one entitled “When I Think of Him”:

When I see grapes I think of him; Though grapes are not as pretty as his eyes. Those flickering eyes I cannot forget; A pair of ducks swimming on the water. When autumn is over I’ll stay with him; Two bean flowers resemble us together. Add another little bud, what does that resemble? Thinking about that makes me blush.

Li Wei says this song is a “vulgar product of the propertied class.” “It tells us nothing more than how she loves his eyes, desires to marry, wants to have children, and how her face turns red.” Li goes on to enumerate those aspects of the music that are unacceptable to socialist society: they include songs that depict a man drunk on love, a girl whose emotions are depraved, the use of crescendo and diminuendo, dragging one word over several notes, and dancing up and down the scale. However, Li does not oppose “arousing songs” per se. He does not agree with those who claim that all arousing songs only serve to cover bad habits and to dissipate revolutionary energy. “Arousing songs are necessary . . . and love songs can be written; the question is how they are written and in what direction they lead the people” (Li Wei 1961:138).

Aside from the “lewd songs,” the Communists recognize that there are “good traditional love songs” (fu hsin chien k’ang ti chuan t’ung ch’ing ko). These songs do not express socialist values, but they do have aesthetic appeal and historical interest. These songs are published in numerous volumes oriented toward scholarly research (see, for example, Society for the Study of Chinese Popular Culture 1959). The substantive differences between “lewd songs” and “good traditional love songs” seem to be that the former have contemporary appeal and explicitly flout revolutionary values by justifying the dissipation of youthful energy in the pursuit of personal pleasure and natalist activity. These values are viewed as impediments to China’s economic transformation.

The legitimacy of erotic motives is crucial to the new society. The erotic motif provides a powerful metaphor for revolutionary activity. Yet the role of erotic motifs in the new culture proves difficult to handle lest it promote lewdness and dissipation. This explains in part the prominent role given to the love songs of the national minorities.

The role of national minority songs

Until the mid-1950s the Communists assigned great importance to the ethnic distinction between the Han majority and the 5 percent of the population that made up over fifty
groups of national minorities. Autonomous areas were established to protect minority rights and to allow them to develop their own cultures and to evolve into socialism at a reduced pace from the more progressive areas of the country. For example, seminomadic swidden agriculturalists such as the Lahu could hardly accomplish land reform until they were settled permanently on a plot of land; and this entailed an even more drastic revolution in their technology and lifestyle than the democratic reform that endowed every person with an equivalent piece of land.

The idea that the minorities would evolve autonomously into socialism actually meant that in prodding and guiding them through the preliminary stages, Party cadres were to take into account the special historical (ecological and cultural) factors that impeded the minority group’s development. However, according to Mao Tse-Tung (1977:406), by 1957 most minority areas, with the major exception of Tibet, had completed democratic (land) reform and socialist transformation. In their own ways, many national minorities were part of the Great Leap. This seems to be reflected in the large number of Great Leap songs that the minorities contributed to the Song Writing Campaign of 1958.

The national minorities, who make up 5 percent of the country’s population, contribute 18 percent of the love songs in Songs of the Red Flag. Or to put it another way, 40 percent of the minority songs are love songs compared to only 11 percent of Han songs. The impression conveyed by these numbers is that the minorities are still noted for their love songs in the same way that they are noted for their greater sexual equality, open courtship, and extramarital lovemaking. These impressions are partially indicated by a closer examination of the contents of the songs.

Whereas the new Han songs are rather staid, the minority songs preserve more of the erotic essence. In one Han song, the girl and boy working together stay through the night because “they want to be heroes.” In a similarly constructed minority song (Kuo 1959:118), the Mongolian girl would keep the sun from setting “in order to stay with her lover.” In similar vein, the Chuang maiden works to create the cooperative in order to spend the days and nights with her lover. In a Han song from one of the most progressive areas of China, a Shanghai girl promises her lover a “red flag” as reward for his community service. This lacks the subtlety of a similarly constructed song from one of the most remote parts of China where a Lahu maiden promises her “purse” to the boy. Finally, the Han songs are distinguished in their attacks on the wasteful and subjugating rites of marriage by substituting a red flag for dowry, having the bride walk to her new home without need of escort and fanfare, and having the bride present her in-laws with a production schedule instead of gifts.

National minority musicians acknowledge the special character of love themes in their folksongs. At the same time they are sensitive to the erotic character with which their musical traditions have been more or less stigmatized as well as exploited by the Han majority. One group of national minority musicians (Li Chih-Shu et al. 1961:150) criticizes those comrades who, in selecting minority songs for publication, overemphasize the love themes and neglect themes of struggle and labor. Superficially, such criticism might apply to Kuo and Chou’s selection of Red Flag songs. Nevertheless, all the songs, Han and non-Han alike, compose a corpus of new Chinese love songs that express similar political values aimed at common goals of economic rationalization. By writing new love songs, the Chinese minorities inject the kind of social discipline into their lives for which Han culture is famous and upon which socialist culture depends. In turn, the minority love songs provide authentic erotic values that are crucial to the new culture but that the Chinese majority seem less suited to communicate in a socially disciplined manner. I think that in this area of Chinese culture we can observe a case of (mutual) acculturation.
courtship as a “root paradigm” in Chinese communism

Great Leap love songs are courting songs. Courtship implies certain core values that animate the new culture and that underlie the drive for economic development. At the most general level, courtship symbolizes the creative, experimental, expressive, and impulsive power of youth manifest in the struggle to form new and permanent social relationships—the quintessence of revolutionary reconstruction. Courtship implies a strong cathartic goal orientation and close attention to the manner by which the goal is achieved. For example, the Maoists preach that “friendly persuasion,” which is the essence of courtship, is an art that revolutionaries holding state power need to cultivate. In addition to the values of collectivization, friendly persuasion, hard work, and delayed gratification, courtship also implies social (sexual) equality, connubial stability, and antinatalism. This complex structure of existential values forms what Victor Turner calls a “root paradigm.” It refers: not only to the current state of social relationships existing or developing between actors but also to the cultural goals, means, ideas, outlooks, . . . and so on, which enter into those social relationships, interpret them, and incline them to alliance or divisiveness. . . . [Thus, root paradigms] go beyond the cognitive and even the moral to the existential domain, and in so doing become clothed with allusiveness, implicitness, and metaphor (Turner 1974:64).

Courtship is rooted in the post-land reform period of Chinese communism. It does not countenance “free love.” The ideals of “free love,” which imply aimless impulse release, are more appropriate for the early nationalist period in which the Confucian order, resting on the father-son model, was discredited, and individual liberty was celebrated. With the period of national reconstruction after 1949, the Communists imposed their well-defined set of goals and methods onto the Chinese people in ways that made courtship a most appropriate and useful paradigm for the new culture.

Francis Hsu (1971) has suggested that the root paradigms for sociocultural systems are dominant kinship dyads. The clearest illustration of Professor Hsu’s hypothesis is the Confucian social structure, which was modeled consciously on the father-son dyad. However, the modern Chinese family is in a state of flux, and it no longer provides a dominant kinship dyad for Chinese culture. Instead, the dominant dyad, or root paradigm, is provided by primordial processes outside the institutionalized family. Of course, my study focuses on the most radical reconstructive period of Chinese communist history. The popular culture of later periods may reflect other paradigms and even stress certain kinship dyads or their particular attributes such as the “stern father as hero” (Chin 1970:108). In general, however, we have only distant glimmerings of what the Chinese family will look like as the revolution is consolidated—or in the present analogy, the courtship is consummated. Furthermore, it remains to be seen if and in what way the family will supply a new set of dominant kinship dyads as root paradigms for Chinese Communist culture.

conclusion

The songs composed during the Great Leap Forward became part of China’s national legacy stressing the values, goals, and methods of economic collectivization. In accordance with Mao’s theory of culture, song writers employed popular motifs, such as sexual love, to communicate socialist values to young people whose energetic and disciplined labor was crucial to the Great Leap Forward. The Great Leap established China’s collective order and created many new opportunities for young people and women especially. In stressing the ideological stridency, forced savings, substitution of altruistic for pecuniary incentives, technical deficiencies, organizational failures, food shortages, and sinification
of minorities, many Western scholars have overlooked the heady and hopeful side of the movement in which popular symbols were used to inspire voluntary compliance with communist goals.

notes

1 The Chinese Communists subscribe neither to a Freudian theory of substantive libidinal (sexual) drives nor to the Western Marxist view of the individual as a reflection of his/her material environment. The Communists, as Chinese, view the individual as having an inner vitality that interacts with outer socially defined values. Unlike the Russian Communists, the Chinese prefix "consciousness" (neng li) with subjective or vitalistic power (chu kuan) (see Chin and Chin 1969).

2 According to Amitai Etzioni (1961), there are three modes of motivating compliance in social systems. These are normative or symbolic power, force, and pecuniary incentives. C. William Skinner and Edwin Winckler (1969) place these three modes of power into a cyclical model to explain overall Chinese Communist methods. In this scheme, the Song Writing Campaign of 1958 is an example of symbolic power that stimulated the Great Leap Forward. As the movement swung into its militant phase and land and labor were rationalized beyond the traditional limits of peasant social structure (see Skinner 1965; Schurmann 1968:464-500), and as people became more discouraged with the lack of immediate results, its momentum was increasingly forced. This was followed by the period of demobilization and retrenchment in the early 1960s, when food shortages appeared and monetary incentives were re instituted. This revisionism led to the next upheaval in the Cultural Revolution (1966-1968). Other scholars, who hew closer to the Chinese Marxist view, emphasize the organizational complexity of different modes of work incentives in which, according to Carl Riskin (1975), moral and material incentives are combined in the same motivational system. No matter which view we take, there is no question that the Chinese Communists use the political power in popular symbols to define and motivate revolutionary activities. In general, Western scholars have neglected the analysis of the voluntaristic and normative aspect of Chinese Communism.

3 One of the original Chinese Classics is the Book of Songs. The first part, "Country Airs," is a compilation including many love songs from the various countries in pre-Han China. However, over the course of history, the songs were annotated by Confucian scholars in order to instruct persons in the proper deportment to be observed between the sexes. According to Marcel Granet (1932:6) the Confucian "scholars put the poems at the service of political ethics and thereafter were unable to admit their popular origin." Throughout Chinese history, the Hill folk and non-Han "barbarians"have been a prime source for erotic motifs that Chinese scholars have subjected or refined for vicarious and didactic purposes.

4 This fact has a universal validity because it seems to be true of other primate groups as well (see Lancaster 1975:44-47).

5 Traditional Chinese hill songs use kin terms "elder brother" and "little sister" to express the erotic relationship between lovers who are not kin. The terms may be rendered as "master" and "maiden." Also, in many places the singer refers to herself or himself in the third person.

6 According to Mao Tse-Tung, Commandism is wrong in any type of work, because in overstepping the level of political consciousness of the masses and violating the principle of voluntary mass action it reflects the disease of impetuosity. Our comrades must not assume that everything they themselves understand is understood by the masses. Whether the masses understand it and are ready to take action can be discovered only by going into their midst and making investigations. If we do so, we can avoid commandism (1965, III:316).

7 In his seminal article "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People," Mao Tse-Tung says that "it is imperative to foster good relations between the Han people and the minority nationalities. The key to this question lies in overcoming Han chauvinism" (1977:406).

8 The groom's side pays the bride-price, much of which is returned in the form of dowry. This makes bride-price and dowry roughly equivalent values. Thus, the groom's side pays for the wedding expenses and in a sense enforces the prestige of the bride by paying for her. Some of the structural features of the old society that occasioned the exchange of bridewealth remain today. Families pool the earnings of their members, girls eat a family's earnings and upon maturity go to earn wealth for another family. The old adage that a daughter amounts to "goods on which money is lost" still provides some rationale for the exchange of bridewealth. During my recent trip to China, I met an urban cadre who was diligently saving his money for marriage. He expected to pay as much as 2,000 yuan. In recent months a number of letters to newspapers have protested such exorbitant bride-prices (see Anonymous 1978:29).

9 There are songs that disarm traditional forms of female sex appeal, like the following ditty from Hupeii (Kuo 1959:148):
Her hair is combed to glisten,
Her face is rubbed with rouge;
Inasmuch as she's not productive,
People say she's filthy.

10 Although the song writers celebrate the ideals of women's liberation from the rigid controls of the traditional family, the writers must work with the realities of rural family life. The mother, son, daughter-in-law triangle is a condition of virilocal postmarital residence rules and is an inexorable part of rural life. Consequently, the song writers attempt to weave a rhetoric of complementarity between the traditional needs of the mother-in-law and the new opportunities for the young daughter-in-law.

11 The classic statement on the role of art in the revolution, to which all subsequent critics refer, is Mao Tse-Tung's 1942 "Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art" (1965 III).

12 More recently, William Parish reports (personal communication) the circulation of hand-copied erotic literature. However, this does not seem to be on the same scale as the "underground literature movement" in the Soviet Union. The circulation of erotic songs and stories in China is not directly "anti-Communist." I have witnessed a similar phenomenon among rural Hong Kong village women, who, having become somewhat literate in recent years, have taken to copying by hand volumes of marriage lament and circulating them from one village to another. The volumes have a certain surreptitious aura about them because they contain feminist feelings, and men view them with disdain (see Blake 1978).

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Society for the Study of Chinese Popular Culture

Turner, Victor

Yang, C. K.

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