Beyond the Western Pass: Emotions and Songs of Separation in Northern China

Thesis

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ABSTRACT

For several centuries, men in parts of northern China, driven by poverty and frequent droughts, were forced to journey beyond the Great Wall to find means of sustenance in Inner Mongolia. Over time, a song tradition arose dealing with the separation of these men from their loved ones. This study examines how various themes and metaphorical images in the lyrics of folksongs and local opera-like performances about “going beyond the Western Pass” (zou xikou 走西口) reflect aspects of folk models of danger and emotional attachment. It also looks at how the artistic expression of these folk models may have helped people to better cope with the separation involved in this difficult social phenomenon. I suggest that the articulation of these folk models in song provided a traditionally available means through which to conceptualize and deal with complex emotions.
For my wife, Aída, who inspires me in everything I do.
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In addition, as the Chinese saying goes, “when you drink water, think of its source” (yinshuisiyuan 饮水思源), and in doing a project dealing with regional Chinese folksongs, I often think of the classes I took with Professor Huang Bai 黄百 at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, and the year in which Professor Li Wenzhen 李文珍 led me through a survey of regional Han folksongs at the China Conservatory of Music in Beijing. I would also like to thank Antoinet Schimmelpenninck, Frank Kouwenhoven, and Bernice Weissbourd for their assistance that allowed me to attend the 11th CHIME
Conference/Fieldwork Project in northern Shaanxi 陝西省 province in 2006, which furthered my inspiration to write this thesis. Last, but not least, I am grateful to my parents and my brother, Ian, for all of the love and support they have given me over the years.
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The roots of this thesis are in a concert I attended in Taipei, Taiwan, in 1999. After a rather solemn first half of traditional Chinese orchestral music, out stepped a man with a white towel on his head and a big grin on his face. The audience was mesmerized even before he opened his mouth... and then he sang. I had never heard such pure emotion pour forth from anyone, and Wang Xiangrong 王向荣, the “King of Northern Shaanxi 陕西 Folksongs,” instantly became one of my favorite singers. Later, I bought a CD of his songs, and saw that some dealt with men in northern China who were forced to part from their loved ones and travel beyond the Great Wall to Inner Mongolia in order to find work, a phenomenon known as “going beyond the Western Pass” (zou xikou 走西口). Intrigued, I wondered why such a story was told in a dialogue, expressing painful emotions so publicly in song. My curiosity eventually led me to attend the 2006 CHIME\(^1\) Conference/Fieldwork Project in northern Shaanxi province, where I met Wang and recorded him singing these songs next to the Yellow River and at a nearby temple. From the large crowds that gathered and the audience responses, it was clear that the songs struck a chord with the local people, and it seemed that part of the attraction came from how they elicited certain emotions in the listeners.

In exploring the song lyrics for this thesis, I was struck by the way that complex emotions involved in separation were conceptualized in terms of relatively simple images and metaphors. It seemed to me that, in addition to the culturally coherent melodies and vocal timbres of the songs, these metaphorical images also aided in stimulating the listener to call to mind, experience, and reflect upon certain emotionally-charged issues. It is linked to “…those expressions that most members of a close group know and to which they respond” (Toelken 1996: 219). As Barre Toelken writes:

…”[W]hat makes folk art important is precisely that it is based on the aesthetic perception, expression, and appreciation of community values in everyday life. Folk art is dynamic because it is totally integrated with the dynamics of life in a close group—a situation which encourages unspoken group awareness of what is considered pleasing. (Toelken 1996: 223)

According to Toelken, the “dynamic” effect of folk art relates in part to its use of “traditional metaphors,” which are “…effective artistic units that call upon our ability to respond to familiar beliefs” (Toelken 1996: 395). I believe that a close examination of such folk art provides a window into the “familiar beliefs” of other peoples and localities, while at the same time an awareness of such beliefs, in turn, increases our enjoyment of the art forms themselves. In order to gain insight into the underlying concepts reflected in such works, we must look at folk art in the situated contexts of genres and performance

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2 Toelken writes of “traditional metaphors”:

The metaphor itself differs from the usual concept of metaphor in that there is no specific simple analogy but rather traditional actions, colors, images, symbols, and so on, that have culture-based connotations. (Toelken 1996: 395)

Several “traditional metaphors” relevant to “going beyond the Western Pass” will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.
events, since “the act of performance” is “...situated behavior, situated within and rendered meaningful with reference to relevant contexts” (Bauman 1984: 27). By properly situating such works, we can hopefully begin to understand what makes them meaningful and “dynamic” for the group to which they were intended.
INTRODUCTION

河曲保德州，
十年九不收。
男人跑口外，
女人挑苦菜。³

In Hequ and Baode prefectures,
In ten years, nine have no harvest,
Men go “beyond the Pass,”
While women pick bitter weeds.⁴

For several centuries, driven by poverty and frequent droughts, men in parts of northern China were forced to journey beyond the Great Wall in order to find a means of sustenance in Inner Mongolia. Over time, a song tradition arose dealing with the separation of these men from their loved ones. This study examines how the lyrics of folksongs and local opera-like performances about “going beyond the Western Pass” (zou

³ A folksong from Hequ 河曲, Shanxi 山西 province (Yang 2006: 35). Another text claims that an earlier variant ending was “...while women sell their charms” (nürén mai fengliu 女人卖风流) (Ma and Zhang 1990: 111).

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Chinese texts and song lyrics are my own.
reflect aspects of folk models of danger and emotional attachment. It also looks at how the artistic expression of these folk models may have helped people to better cope with the separation involved in this difficult social phenomenon. After examining local singers’ rhetoric about singing zou xikou songs and songs in general to relieve anxieties, I suggest that the articulation of these folk models in song provided a means through which to conceptualize and deal with difficult and abstract emotions. In this way, this preliminary study, based largely on published materials, will provide a foundation for future fieldwork and investigations in the area.

According to Brian King, in his study on ways in which emotions are conceptualized in the Chinese language, folk models are defined as:

...ways of understanding and accounting for everyday phenomena and perceptions of reality. These models represent a simplified or idealized world that is built up through everyday experiences of interacting within a culture. (King 1989: 5)

King suggests that the examination of folk models “...is a convenient way of exploring the knowledge structures of these concepts and offers important insights into how such abstract concepts are understood” (King 1989: 3). Through an analysis of themes and

5 The “Western Pass” (xikou) refers to the gates in the western sections of the Great Wall, which was seen as a boundary between the area south of the Great Wall, known as “inside the pass” or kouli 口里, and the area to the north, known as “outside the pass” or kouwai 口外. In 2009, a 52-episode historical drama by this name (“Zou xikou”) was shown on CCTV (China Central Television), which deserves to be further examined in the future.

6 While I use the term “folk models,” there are other similar terms, such as Alan Dundes’ “folk ideas,” which he defines as “traditional notions that a group of people have about the nature of man, of the world, and of man’s life in the world” (1971: 95). These include “various underlying assumptions held by members of a given culture” and may express themselves in different types of folklore (Dundes 1971: 95-96).

7 Ladislav Holy and Milan Stuchlik emphasize the point that folk models do not indicate how the world is “...‘really’, i.e. in some suprasocial or suprahuman sense... but as it is... perceived, assigned meanings, explicated and made relevant for people who live in it” (Holy and Stuchlik 1981: 17).
metaphors in different song lyrics, I look to uncover aspects of “the role played by cultural belief systems in creating an emotional reality” (King 1989: 2), via the ways in which emotions are conceptualized in an artistic form.

In looking at aspects of folk models of danger and emotional attachment reflected in the song lyrics, I borrow from works concerning how danger is dealt with in different regions in China and elsewhere (Baptandier-Berthier 1994; Bender 2001; Jones 2009; Lévi-Strauss 1967; Mullen 1978), as well as the psychology of separation (Freud 1946; Stafford 2000). I also explore how abstract notions are conceptualized through metaphors (Kövecses 2008; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Shen 2008; Yu 2008). In analyzing several key metaphors in the song lyrics, I suggest that they can be aptly thought of in terms of Victor Turner’s notions of “structure” (i.e. the forces of social cohesion and hierarchical structure), “anti-structure” (i.e. the forces that threaten to tear apart the social fabric), and the “liminality” or “in-betweenness” that connects the two (Turner 1969).

Although most of the songs are drawn from published collections, often with little or no supporting contextual information, in the first two chapters I attempt to frame these songs in their various contexts, using ideas from performance folkloristics (Abrahams 2005; Bauman 1977; Ben-Amos 1993; Smith 1978; Toelken 1996). Chapter 1 provides a background for the social phenomenon of “going beyond the Western Pass,” including a brief history and geography of the areas involved and the main routes, as well as a discussion of other major migratory trends in China, which places it within a more general context. Chapter 2 looks at how Chinese scholars and locals (i.e. the “folk”) tend
to think about these songs, including their genres, various performance contexts, and the ways in which songs and singing are said to elicit and express emotions. In Chapter 3, I examine themes that occur frequently in the songs, which reveal aspects of folk models for danger, gender roles, and mutual dependence between the genders. Chapter 4 expands on those folk models, focusing on the use of metaphorical imagery in producing lyrics meant to reflect and elicit certain emotions and ideas regarding danger and emotional attachment.

**METHODOLOGY**

The songs that are the focus of my study were largely drawn from published collections of Chinese folksongs and folk opera lyrics. In addition to looking at excerpts from the lyric texts, I also supplement this analysis with additional background materials, including ethnographies, oral histories, and scholarly surveys, in order to provide a context through which to gain insight into certain underlying concepts reflected in the songs. However, some of the limitations of this approach must be mentioned at the outset, both due to the nature of published collections and to the lack of original, live contexts.

Many of the songs, such as those collected in the 1953 Hequ 项目, which I will discuss in the next section, were collected from performances elicited by the collectors and then edited and/or bowdlerized. One problem is that of selection. “Chinese study of repertory has always been partial, tending first to choose the more

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8 For the latter, I also make use of outside theories on music/performance and emotion.
‘healthy’ elements (such as for folk-song, omitting ‘superstitious’ or ‘pornographic’ songs) and then the more ‘classical’ elements” (Jones 2007: 101). In discussing the compilation of one of the main anthologies of Chinese folksong, Jones notes that “[t]hroughout the process selection is inevitable: first by performers (e.g., what kind of songs singers see fit to sing for fieldworkers), then editorial adaptation of the material collected” (Jones 2003: 303). In the end, one never knows how close the published project is to what someone might have sung in a spontaneous performance many years ago.

A second issue is that, while the songs may have originally been performed by or for people who actually “went beyond the Western Pass” or those who had relatives and/or friends who did, since the migratory trend described in the songs declined sometime during the twentieth century, not many of these people are still alive. Nowadays, these songs have new audiences, and may take on new meanings as they are sung in karaoke parlors and on televised competitions. My general impression is that they are now often portrayed as both “love songs” and as a symbol of regional culture for the areas historically affected by this “going beyond the Western Pass,” such as sections of Shaanxi and Shanxi provinces. Thus, my interest in understanding the social contexts within which the songs were originally composed and transmitted comes perhaps several decades too late to answer with any degree of certainty.

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to determine the accuracy of published song texts, I might note that, during the 1950s when the majority of these songs were collected, the songs about “going beyond the Western Pass” were seen by scholars and
government officials as evidence of the “ills of a feudal past” (Cf. ZYXZYY 1962), and thus fit into standard dichotomy between post-Revolution New China and the pre-Revolution “feudal past.” As such, while it is difficult to determine whether any wordings in the lyrics have been altered, the collectors may have highlighted the placement of the songs in collections through a process of selection (Jones 2003).

With regards to the limitation of observing the “original” circumstances in which the songs were sung, I attempt to extrapolate aspects of context from the lyrics themselves, oral histories collected from former zouwikou migrants, and historical documents. An analysis of excerpts of available lyrics and what has been published about the social context offers insight into how folk models of complex emotions were conceptualized and portrayed in an artistic form.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The classic study of the “going beyond the Western Pass” song tradition was conducted in 1953 by a group of scholars from the Chinese Music Institute of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, who led a folksong collection expedition to Hequ, Shanxi province (hereafter, the “1953 Hequ expedition”). Their goal was “...to understand the relationship between folksongs and people’s lives through an in-depth collection of material in one area” (ZYXZYY 1962: 1). The “Shanxi Folksong Collection Team” (Shanxi min’ge caifang dui 山西民歌采访队) spent approximately three months in the area and collected 400 folksong melodies, over 4,500 folksong lyrics, and 45 errentai 二人台 (“two-person opera”) dramas. Afterwards, they completed more
than ten books and reports (ZYXZYY 1962: 107). The main book published afterwards, *Hequ Folk Songs: A Collection of Investigations and Research* (*Hequ minjian gequ: diaocha yanjiu zhuanji* 河曲民间歌曲: 调查研究专辑, hereafter *Hequ Folk Songs*), includes 119 songs with melodies and lyrics in its main collection (in addition to others scattered in addendum and appendices), and several reports on folksongs and local life (ZYXZYY 1962: 107). Many of the research questions proposed within the work deal with looking at the songs in terms of expression of the feelings and moral and aesthetic views of the local people and different types of workers. One of the main discussions concerns the “love life” (*aiqing shenghuo* 愛情生活) of the people as expressed in folksongs, and how various problems had been caused by the “feudal marriage system.” Xiao Mei 萧梅 notes that “[t]he folksong collection team’s entire theoretical preparation and methodological guidance for its fieldwork was built on Mao Zedong’s preface to his *Rural Surveys* (*Nongcun diaocha yuyan* 农村调查序言) and Lü Ji’s 吕骥 “Outline for Chinese Folk Music Research” (“Zhongguo minjian yinyue yanjiu tigang” “中国民间音乐研究提纲”) (Xiao 2007: 190).9

Among the more recent studies, Ma Xiaolin 马小林 and Zhang Jingmin’s 张敬民 work contributes a great deal of firsthand, recollected knowledge compiled from oral histories they collected while retracing sections of the *zou xikou* route in 1985. Beginning in the northwestern section of Shanxi province, they traveled over 2,000 li on foot through northern Shaanxi province to Baotou 包头, Inner Mongolia, and conducted

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interviews with former migrants on the way (Ma and Zhang 1990). Ma Busheng’s study, in turn, provides a well-written combination of historical documents and popular anecdotes (Ma 2000). Yang Hong’s extremely well-researched work on troupes that perform a type of sung folk performance called errentai (literally “two-person opera”), a genre that grew up along the zou xikou route and which incorporates Han and Mongolian musical elements, provides a wealth of information about the history and geography of this migration, as well as the performance contexts of errentai performances about zou xikou (Yang 2006).

In terms of collections of song lyrics, in addition to Hequ Folk Songs, around twenty zou xikou songs are to be found in the Shaanxi volume of the Grand Compendium of Chinese Folk Songs (Zhongguo minjian gequ jicheng 中国民间歌曲集成) (Lü 1994), as well as several in the volumes for Shanxi province and Inner Mongolia (ZMGJQBW 1990 and ZMGJQBW and ZMGJNMJBW 1992). While these songs explicitly mention “going beyond the Pass” or one of its synonyms, there are also songs that may be related, which merely mention traveling men, being separated from loved ones, etc. without specifically using that term. In addition, Li Shibin’s collection of errentai pieces contains several versions and excerpts from performances dealing with going beyond the Western Pass (YDW 1983). All of these collections contain transcriptions of the melodies as well, and Yang Cui 杨璀 has written an article comparing five variant melodies of zou xikou songs (Yang 1984).
There are several additional works that contribute to our knowledge of the current and historical “performance-scape”\(^{10}\) of the region in which the zou xikou songs are sung. Stephen Jones has written about the music and lives of shawm band musicians in the northern part of Shanxi province (Jones 2007), and more recently on bards, shawm bands, and other music-making activities in northern Shaanxi province (Jones 2009). David Holm discussed the Yangge Movement in and around Yan’an in the forties, which adapted a local song and dance genre for political purposes (Holm 1991).

For both a geographical and social context, in addition to Jones (2009), Xin Liu’s ethnography of a small village in northern Shaanxi presents a relatively current backdrop and examines aspects of gender relations (Liu 2000). In addition, Adam Yuet Chau’s study of popular religion in northern Shaanxi offers insight into both the experience of temple festivals and the means by which folk event productions are socially produced (Chau 2006).\(^{11}\)

In sum, there have been several studies related to different aspects of the historical, social and economic factors related to the “going beyond the Western Pass” phenomenon, as well as various collections containing zou xikou songs and analyses of some of the melodies. However, it appears that none, thus far, have looked at the song

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\(^{10}\) I have chosen to use this term, proposed by Mark Bender, which I feel is more inclusive than Kay Shelemay’s “soundscape” (Shelemay 2006) for the purposes here.

\(^{11}\) While I have not found specific works in English on “going beyond the Western Pass,” there seem to be several studies on Han migrations to other peripheral areas in China, including Manchuria (Gottschang and Lary 2000, Reardon-Anderson 2005) and the eastern regions of Inner Mongolia (Pasternak and Salaff 1993). In addition, Tian Tao 田涛 provides a brief comparison of folksongs about the three main migratory trends (i.e. beyond the Western Pass, to Manchuria, and to Southeast Asia) (Tian 2004).
lyrics in order to see what they tell us about this social phenomenon and how they conceptualize folk models of emotions related to separation.
CHAPTER 1

HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY AND BACKGROUND

1.1 HISTORY

Both the start and end dates of the “going beyond the Western Pass” tradition are subject to debate, although Yang Hong suggests that “Zou xikou started in the early part of the Qing dynasty” (Yang 2006: 36). During the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the area beyond the Pass was still not part of the China’s sphere of influence, and it was only when Inner Mongolia was added to the map during the Qing dynasty that the “going beyond the Western Pass” phenomenon began to become popular (Yang 2006: 37). In the mid-seventeenth century, the Qing Dynasty government originally enforced a strict border policy, prohibiting the intermingling of Mongols and Han, both to avoid potential conflicts and also to discourage factions within the two groups from teaming up to overthrow their Manchurian overlords (Ma 2000: 25-26). The Manchu emperor outlined a 50 li-wide, over 2,000 li long empty space, known as the “black border land” (heijiedi 黑界地), into which the Mongols could not move south to pasture and the Han were not allowed to travel north to plant crops (Ma 2000: 21ff.). This happened to be very fertile soil and verdant grasslands, which lay for years untouched, and tempted various “illegal” Han farmers to try their luck at cultivating it (Ma 2000: 21ff.).
However, by 1697, the Emperor Kangxi decided to allow Han Chinese to farm Mongolian lands (Yang 2006: 35). There is a “Stele Recording the Relocation of the Hequ County Seat” (yizhu Hequ xianzhi beiji 《移驻河曲县治碑记》) that was erected when the Hequ county seat was moved from its old location to the area just outside the city gate, which has the inscription:

自康熙三十六年圣祖仁皇帝特允鄂尔多斯之请，已故河保营得与蒙古交易，又准河民垦蒙古地，岁与租籽。 (quoted in Yang 2006: 36)

From the thirty-sixth year of the Kangxi reign (1697), the Emperor granted special permission to the request of the Ordos. Thereupon, the battalions of Hequ and Baode were allowed to trade with the Mongolians, and the people of Hequ were permitted to clear Mongolian land for agriculture, and rent the land by the year.

Yang cites the above fact in suggesting that the zou xikou phenomenon began during the latter half of the seventeenth century (Yang 2006: 36). Nevertheless, it appears that there may have been “illegal” immigrants earlier than that. There is a stone stele in the Xiannong Altar 先农坛 in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia (formerly called Guihuacheng 归化城), which records that Han people started going beyond the Pass to clear land for farming in the thirty-first year of the reign of Emperor Kangxi (1692) (Yang 2006: 35).12

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12 The 1953 Hequ expedition found conflicting views as to the dating of the history of zou xikou. One elderly villager they interviewed suggested that it had been going on for several generations, with not many people going before five generations ago, while a middle school teacher insisted that the areas of northern Shaanxi province and Inner Mongolia were only opened up during the first few years of the Tongzhi 同治 reign (1861-1875) in the Qing dynasty, during the Dungan Revolt (1862-1877) after the failure of the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) (ZYXZYY 1962: 148). Later, the way to Houtao was only gradually opened up, and it was really only during the past two generations that people from Hequ started moving to settle in Houtao (ZYXZYY 1962: 148). They also quote a book entitled Chinese Economic Geography (Zhongguo jingji dili 中国经济地理) that says that Inner Mongolia during the Qing dynasty (1644-1912) was pasture land, and Han people from Shanxi, Shaanxi, Hebei and other provinces only came to clear the land for farming within the past forty to fifty years (ZYXZYY 1962: 148). Nevertheless, given the other evidence, these dates seem rather late for a start date, and I suspect that they may instead reflect certain waves of migrations.
According to the Geography Volume of the *Tumed Gazetteer* (*Tumote zhi—dili zhi* 土默特志·地理志), Han people were already entering Mongolian lands in large numbers during the Qing dynasty:

Most of the Han people that entered this land [Tumed] during the Qing dynasty were from Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces. The majority worked in agricultural production, and some were engaged in commerce and the handicraft industry. Around the Kangxi reign [1661-1722], Han farmers began to move beyond the border. At first, they “traveled like wild geese” (*yanxing* 雁行) [i.e. “migrated” back and forth at intervals],\(^\text{13}\) and later they gradually came to settle down permanently. Starting from the first year of the Qianlong reign (1736), the Han began to move in large numbers, and by the seventh year (1742), they had already reached forty to fifty-thousand. After this, the number of Han people had a basic upward trend.” (*Tumote zhi* 1997: 61; quoted in Yang 2006: 36)

*Errentai* (“two-person opera”), a sung folk performance genre that developed along the *zou xikou* route from a mixture of Han and Mongolian musical elements, is generally thought to have first developed sometime in the nineteenth century, although different ranges of dates are given (Yang 2006: 44). This would allow for roughly one hundred years since the time that Han farmers began to have a large presence “beyond the Pass.” In fact, there is an *errentai* performance of *zou xikou*, in which the story is set in the fifth year of the Xianfeng reign (1855), when a terrible drought supposedly drove the main character to leave his wife and go beyond the Western Pass (*YDW* 1983: 444-449). One of the earliest manuscripts of this piece that is still extant was written in 1885 (Yang 2006: 54).

\(^{13}\) There is also a term, dating from the Tang dynasty (619-906), for “transient people” who wander about aimlessly, which literally translates as “wild goose people” (*yanhu* 雁户) (*Cihai* 词海, 1989 ed., s.v. “*yanhu* 雁户”). See the discussion of metaphors involving wild geese in the song lyrics in Chapter 4.
Ma (2000) writes that in the early Republican period, various provinces set up organizations to relocate people to farm the Northwest (including Inner Mongolia), and these people received money from the national government and social organizations to buy land, livestock, seeds, houses, and even grain for consumption (Ma 2000: 57-58). In fact, from the late Qing to the Republican era, going beyond the Western Pass was one of three major migratory trends in China, all of which led to the creation of folksongs that artistically expressed the emotions involved in separation (Tian 2004: 195).  

As for the end date of zou xikou, Yang suggests that this unique social phenomenon declined in the early years of the People’s Republic of China (Yang 2006: 35). However, according to Ma and Zhang’s (1990) oral histories, it appears to have continued, at least to a minor degree, even after that time. One man they interviewed recounted three specific occasions in which he went beyond the Western Pass, the latter two of which occurred during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)—once, he impersonated a Red Guard to gain permission to leave, saying that he was carrying out a “revolutionary” operation, and during the other time, he mentioned that the policies in Inner Mongolia were more relaxed, and it was a chance to subsidize expenses (Ma and Zhang 1990: 152-153). Given that the man had to resort to tricks to “get away” during the last two trips, it appears that at least some people were still going during this period, although the number may have been much less than before.

14 The other two migrations were known as “charging into the area beyond Shanhaiguan [Shanhai Pass]” (chuang guandong 閘关东), referring to Han migrants from Shandong province and other provinces who migrated to the Northeast of China, and “going to the Southern Seas” (zou nanyang 走南洋), a term used to describe migration from southern China to the Malay archipelago and Southeast Asia to find work (Tian 2004: 195). For more information on the northeastern migration, see Gottschang and Lary 2000, and for “going to the Southern Seas,” see Tian 2004. For Cantonese folksongs of immigrants to San Francisco during the Gold Rush in the mid-19th century, see Hom 1987.
In discussing the end date, we may consider two factors. First, there was most likely no clear “end date” and numbers of migrants probably fluctuated over time. Second, as there was a great deal of stigma attached to the plight of those who had to go beyond the Western Pass in the past, there tends to be a highly contrastive distinction drawn between the past and the present. This is highlighted when Ma and Zhang interview a former zou xikou migrant’s son, who now has a business transporting goods to and from Inner Mongolia. The two authors ask if that isn’t also a type of “going beyond the Western Pass,” to which he replies:

In the past, the older generation would carry their things on a shoulder pole and “walk beyond the Western Pass.” Now, I drive a truck beyond the Western Pass. One thing is fleeing from famine, another is earning big money, they’re not the same! (Ma and Zhang 1990: 145)

After they learn that in his family of five, each person makes an average annual salary of 2000 RMB, the two authors respond by saying, “There is truly no comparison between past and present!” (Zhen shi jinféixibi ya! 真是今非昔比呀!) (Ma and Zhang 1990: 145).

1.2 GEOGRAPHY

While other regions were involved as well, the main areas from which peasants left to “go beyond the Western Pass” included Hequ (河曲), Baode (保德), and Pianguan (偏关) in the northwestern corner of Shanxi province and the area around Fugu (府谷) in the northeastern part of Shaanxi province (ZYXZYY 1962: 145). All of these areas border on the Yellow River, and are said to have frequent droughts.
1.2.1 SHANXI

The northern border of Shanxi province runs along the Great Wall, which separates it from Inner Mongolia to the north and northwest. The Western border begins where the Great Wall meets the southern-flowing Yellow River, and continues along with it, facing Shaanxi province on the other side, until the river turns sharply eastward, where Shanxi shares its south and southeast border with Henan province. The literal meaning of Shanxi is “west of the mountains,” which refers to the Taihang mountains (Taihang shan 太行山) forming its eastern border, which looks out onto the plains of Hebei province to the east (Lin and Hendrischke 2006: 172).

Geographically, “Shanxi lies on the eastern part of the loess plateau of northern China and, consisting of some 70% of mountains, is known as the ‘land of mountains’” (Lin and Hendrischke 2006: 172). It “...has a temperate, but continental, monsoon climate, which can lead to extremes of temperature” (Lin and Hendrischke 2006: 172). While the southeastern section of the province enjoys more rain, the northwestern part, like the northern region of Shaanxi, is relatively dry (Lin and Hendrischke 2006: 172). There is a saying in the north part of Shanxi that “in ten years, there are nine without harvests” (shi nian jiu bu shou 十年九不收), referring to the frequent droughts (Yang 2006: 39).

Historically, Shanxi played a key role in the interactions (including both defense and trade) between the Chinese of the Central Plains and the nomadic peoples to the north. Beginning from the time the Qin Empire was founded in 222 BCE onwards, “...this region became a crucial area in the defence against the nomadic barbarians
beyond the newly linked Great Wall” (Lin and Hendrischke 2006: 173). “...Shanxi was to find itself a stronghold from which the northern conquest of the Middle Kingdom could be accomplished” (Lin and Hendrischke 2006: 173). Due to its strategic geography, during the Ming dynasty, the Mongols conducted numerous invasions into Shanxi, entering through Shahukou 杀虎口, one of the passes in the Great Wall, and eventually reaching Datong, Taiyuan, Pingyao and other cities in Shanxi (Liu et al. 2005: 144). In fact, during the Ming dynasty, the pass was known as the “Barbarian-Killing Pass” (Shahukou 杀虎口), and only during the early Qing dynasty was the name changed to the “Tiger-Killing Pass” (Shahukou 杀虎口) (Liu et al. 2005: 143).

This name change coincided with a transformation of the relationship between the Mongols and Han. By the end of the Ming and the early Qing, Shahukou gradually evolved from a strategic military point to a frontier commercial center (Liu et al. 2005: 145). This is said to have sprung from the mutual needs of those in the Central Plains and those beyond the Pass. Namely, since the pastoral Mongols didn’t farm or weave, they needed daily necessities like cloth, tea leaves, grain, salt, needles and thread, and for these things they depended on the Han. At the same time, the Han needed cattle, horses, fur, and leather from the Mongols (Liu et al. 2005: 145). When travel was still restricted between the two areas, “horse markets” (mashi 马市) were set up along the border passes, where goods could be traded, but after the Qing emperor integrated Inner and Outer Mongolia, the Great Wall no longer served as a division between the Mongol and Han, and the horse markets lost their purpose (Liu et al. 2005: 146).
The vast majority of Shanxi’s population is Han Chinese, and, according to the 2000 census, “...the province had the least number and the smallest proportion of ethnic minorities of any region of China...” (Lin and Hendrichke 2006: 173). Nevertheless, the ethnic minority groups that are present include the Hui, Manchu and Mongol peoples (Lin and Hendrichke 2006: 173).

With regard to “going beyond the Western Pass,” Hequ county, located on the banks of the Yellow River in northwestern Shanxi, is said to be the birthplace of zou xikou folk songs (Li 1990: 134), and was the site of the 1953 Hequ expedition conducted by the Chinese Music Institute of the Central Conservatory of Music, mentioned earlier. Called the “Land of Folksongs” (min’ge zhi xiang 民歌之鄉) (Li 1990: 134), Hequ is also known as the place “where a rooster’s call is heard in three provinces” (ji ming ting san sheng 鸡鸣听三省), as it is located across the Yellow River from both Fugu county in Shaanxi province and the Jung Gar Banner (Zhunge’erqi 准格尔旗) region of Inner Mongolia (Yang 2006: 28).15

### 1.2.2 SHANXI

Shaanxi province is divided into three regions: north (Shanbei 陕北), central (Guanzhong 关中), and south (Shaannan 陕南), the three of which are “very different physically and culturally” (Jones 2009: 5). The northern part of Shaanxi is bounded to the east by the Yellow River, which loops southward once again after passing through

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15 Actually, the Jung Gar Banner was originally part of Hequ. Only after the People’s Republic of China was established did the Yellow River become the administrative boundary (Yang 2006: 27).
Inner Mongolia. The northern border with Inner Mongolia at one time was located along the Great Wall, which passes southwestwards through the region. Now, however, the border is further to the north, though still roughly parallel to the Wall, due to the expansion of Han farmers over the years:

In fact, the big stretch of Shaanbei territory “beyond the pass (or the gates of the border walls)” (*kouwai*) resulted from agricultural colonization of former Mongol pastureland by Shaanbei peasants during Qing and Republican times. (Chau 2006: 23)

In the northwestern corner, there is a short border with Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region 宁夏回族自治区, and the rest of northern Shaanxi’s western border is with Gansu province. To the south is the low central Shaanxi (also known as Guanzhong 关中) plain, through which the Wei River runs from west to east, joining the southern-flowing Yellow River and forcing it abruptly to the east (Lin and Hendrichcke 2006: 160).

While the southern part of the province is dominated by forested mountains and enjoys a subtropical humid climate, “[t]he higher, soft, loess plateau of the north (45% of the province’s territory) is deeply eroded,” and its “…monsoonal climate is a temperate semi-arid one (which has contributed to the historic desertification of the loess plains” (Lin and Hendrischke 2006: 160). By examining written documentation of droughts for several thousand years, scientists have discovered that the area in northern Shaanxi normally has a drought every three years, and a severe drought on average every eights years (Ma 2000: 13). These harsh natural circumstances, combined with the region’s propensity for rebellions, have led to numerous famines. One of the largest of
these occurred after the great Muslim rebellion of the mid-19th century, during which five million people died from 1876 to 1878. Other severe famines occurred in 1915, 1921 and 1928, resulting in the deaths of three million people (Lin and Hendrischke 2006: 162).

Culturally, sections of northern Shaanxi are said to be influenced by Shanxi province to the east. Many people from northern Shaanxi say that their ancestors came from the area under a big locust tree (huaishu 槐树) in Shanxi province (Li 2004: 358; Chau 2006: 23). As for the location of this “big locust tree,” some say it’s in Hongdong 洪洞 county, and others suggest different counties (Li 2004: 358). While this may be an origin legend, the historical union of the two provinces is a fact:

In 1666 it was united with Shanxi across the Huang He (Yellow River), and then as part of Shenzhuan (which also included Sichuan in 1680-1731 and 1735-49). Then, until restored as a separate province in 1912, after the fall of the Qing, Shaanxi was administered with Shanxi and Gansu as Shengan. (Lin and Hendrischke 2006: 162)

The cultural interaction between the two areas most likely goes back much earlier, as there is an idiom that denotes “the friendship between the lands of Qin [Shaanxi] and Jin [Shanxi]” (Qin Jin zhi hao 秦晋之好), which is said to describe how, during the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BCE), elite families from both areas would intermarry, and that later, this custom gradually came to be observed by the folk as well (Li 2004: 358). At the same time, northern Shaanxi was also a place where northern nomadic peoples came south, and there were areas where Mongols and Han lived in the same region (Yang 2006: 31, 36).
According to the 2000 census of Shaanxi, “[t]he overwhelming majority of the population were Han Chinese and only 0.5% came from the minority nationalities, most of them also being Chinese speakers” (Lin and Hendrichke 2006: 161). Of the minority nationalities, the Hui were the largest group, and other significant groups included the Manchu and Mongol people (Lin and Hendrichke 2006: 161).

1.2.3 INNER MONGOLIA

Spreading in a large crescent along much of China’s northern border, Inner Mongolia meets the countries of Mongolia and Russia to the north, the provinces of Heilongjiang and Jilin to the east, and Liaoning, Hebei, Shanxi, Shaanxi, and Ningxia to the south, with Gansu forming its southwestern border. While Han migrants also made their way to eastern and northeastern Inner Mongolia, the area relevant to “walking beyond the Western Pass” lies in the West. Inner Mongolia’s regional capital, Hohhot (Huhehaote 呼和浩特 in Chinese, formerly Guisui 归绥), is located north of the border with Shanxi. Baotou is the second-largest city, which was a primary destination for those who “went beyond the Western Pass” (Lin and Hendrichke 2006: 201, Yang 2006: 39). Approximately 73% of the land in Inner Mongolia is classified as grasslands, making the raising of livestock an important activity (Lin and Hendrichke 2006: 204).

When the peasants in Hequ use the terms xikou 西口 and kouwai 口外, they are broadly referring to areas in the western section of Inner Mongolia, such as Yeke-juu

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16 For Han immigration to northeastern Inner Mongolia, see Pasternak and Salaff (1993) and Reardon-Anderson (2005).
League (Yikezhaomeng 伊克昭盟, also called Ikh Juu League, now known as Ordos City), Jung Gar Banner (Zhunge’erqi 准格尔旗), Baotou, Daqing Mountain (Daqingshan 大青山), and Houtao 后套 (ZYXZYY 1962: 5). Yeke-juu League, often referred to as the Ordos, is largely defined by the large bend in the Yellow River that cuts through the region.

The Huang He (Yellow River) flows through the centre-south of the region, flowing north out of Ningxia into central [Inner Mongolia] and looping eastwards before heading back into the heart of China between Shaanxi and Shanxi. The plainsland caught in this loop is known as the Ordos. West of here is the edge of the Gobi Desert, a desolate region with few habitations. Most of the southern border follows the line of the Great Wall, at least between Hebei and northwestern Gansu, often built where hills and mountains helped the southern Chinese defences. (Lin and Hendrischke 2006: 161)

Covering an area of approximately 35,000 square miles (90,650 square kilometers), the Ordos has been called a “sandy desert plateau region,”17 although Waldron notes that “[e]cologically, the territory is mixed” (Waldron 1990: 63). Although parts of it are “pure desert,” others are more hospitable to plant-life (Waldron 1990: 63). George B. Cressey writes that:

The greater part of the Ordos is an arid desolate plain, parched by a blazing sun in summer and swept by icy blasts in winter. Shifting sands held here and there by low scrub or wiry grass makes the region an inhospitable waste where nature offers but little to man, and yields that little grudgingly. (Cressey 1933: 180)

On the other hand, in describing another section of the Ordos, he notes that the

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...natural vegetation is comparatively more luxurious, so that it nearly carpets the ground. Short grasses afford some feed for animals and make this area better for nomad and farmer. The western limit of this semi-humid area is along a line roughly connecting Pao-t’ou [Baotou] and Yü-lin [Yulin]. (Cressey 1933: 190)

A common destination for many Han migrants was the Hetao 河套 area, which lies along the Yellow River’s loop in the northern part of the Ordos:

In this northernmost part of the loop, south of the mountain barrier and north of the desert, it meanders though a plain, creating a potential agricultural region in the midst of what would otherwise be desert. This is the Ho-t’ao [Hetao] area, where the river has changed its course repeatedly over the years, entering its present bed in the early Ch’ing. Fertile and rich, this plain is called the one blessing of the Yellow River, source of a thousand sorrows. (Waldron 1990: 62-63)

Hetao was an area where northern nomadic economy was able to interact with the agricultural economy of the Central Plains (Yang 2006: 25).

Historically, “…the Ordos played a very special strategic role in the steppe world. It was one of the handful of places dotted through that arid realm where lakes or rivers provided a water supply which made farming possible” (Waldron 1990: 61). Since ancient times, it has been “a focal point for the strive for supremacy between the farming culture of the Central Plains (zhongyuan 中原) and the northern grasslands culture (beifang caoyuan wenhua 北方草原文化)” (Yang 2006: 32). Northern invaders would often use the Ordos as a base from which to launch invasions south into China proper (Waldron 1990: 64). At the same time, the Ordos was also “…important to potential Chinese influence on the steppe” (Waldron 1990: 62):
Since earliest times, Chinese strategists have been aware of the territory’s commanding position in relation to the Chinese heartland. And history shows that Chinese states which have failed to control it have inevitably found themselves on the defensive in relation to the steppe. (Waldron 1990: 62)

Waldron even goes so far as to compare the Ordos and Yellow River with the Rhine and Rhineland in France:

Potentially the Rhine forms a natural and militarily advantageous eastern frontier for France in much the same way that the great loop of the Yellow River defines a possible and highly logical northwestern boundary for China (Waldron 1990: 61).

The importance of this “logical boundary” can be seen from a brief history of the region.

During the Tang dynasty (619-906), China placed “a strong presence in the Ordos,” which gave it a “great strategic advantage” and kept out nomads and bandits (Waldron 1990: 66-67). In 982 CE, the Ordos became part of the Tangut Ta Hsia [Da Xia] kingdom, “...a part-settled, part-nomadic state that successfully resisted repeated Chinese attacks, thus demonstrating the potential economic strength and cohesiveness of the area” (Waldron 1990: 67). This lasted until 1227, when Chinggis Khan destroyed the Da Xia, devastating the area (Waldron 1990: 67).

In the Ming it became an unconquered base for nomads; and in the Ch’ing [Qing] (which did exercise official control over it), a refuge for Muslim rebels. Nor had it lost its strategic significance even in the mid twentieth century: for about a decade after 1935 it was part of the Chinese Communists’ Shen-Kan-Ning [Shaan-gan-ning] base area. (Waldron 1990: 67)
Thus, we can see the degree of historical interactions the area has had with the Central Plains.

1.3 THREE ROUTES

According to Zhang Cunliang 张存亮, the former director of the Hequ County Bureau of Culture (wenhuaguan 文化馆) who accompanied the 1953 Hequ expedition from the Chinese Music Institute of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing:

Going beyond the Western Pass had three routes in total: One was the through the grasslands in the West, which was the route taken by the male workers (dagongzai 打工仔) sung about in the folksongs. Another route was the river route up along the Yellow River. The last route was the large road in the East traveled by trade caravans, also known as the “trade route.” (Yang 2006: 37)

Yang suggests that the choice between the three routes had to do a great deal with a person’s status (Yang 2006: 38), with the poor farmers taking certain routes and wealthier merchants taking others.

1.3.1 THE OVERLAND ROUTE\(^\text{18}\)

Known variously as “walking through the grasslands” (zou caodi 走草地), “walking beyond the Western Pass” (zou xikou 走西口), and “running the overland route beyond the Pass” (hanlu pao kouwai 旱路跑口外), this was the route taken by the most migrants. The majority of those who traveled this route were manual laborers, mainly from northern and northwestern Shanxi province and northern Shaanxi province. The

\(^{18}\) For the information in this section, I have used Yang 2006: 39-40, unless otherwise noted.
most common and representative groups came from Hequ and Baode counties in northwestern Shanxi. In addition, many people from other parts of Shanxi, as well as Hebei, Henan, and other provinces would pass through Hequ on their way to Inner Mongolia.

Forced by extensive droughts, the migrants would cross the Yellow River at or near Hequ, pass through the southern tip of Inner Mongolia and then Gucheng 古城 in Fugu 复古 county in the north of Shaanxi province, and then walk through the Ordos Plateau up to Baotou in Inner Mongolia. There, they would rest and regroup before setting out to other sections of western Inner Mongolia. According to a folk saying, the entire trip on foot would take seven days if one walked fast and eight if they walked slow (jin qi man ba 紧七慢八) (Yang 2006: 39).

The most dangerous part of the trip involved passing through the Kubuqi Desert (Kubuqi shamo 库布其沙漠) in the Ordos Plateau. There, one could only look for scattered camel dung to indicate a trail, and had to depend on hunches and experience in pressing on amidst the sand dunes and desert weeds. As soon as one lost their way, there was the chance that they might never make it out alive, and for this reason it was often referred to as a “Devil’s Gate Pass” (guimenguan 鬼门关). The travelers would walk approximately sixty to eighty li per day, sleeping out at night. Their traveling accessories were extremely simple, often merely consisting of a shoulder pole to carry food and luggage. The carrying pole had three additional uses: It could be used to fend off the attacks of wild dogs and wolves, as a main beam for improvised straw “tents” when one
slept out at night, and as a horizontal bar placed on the shoulders to avoid falling into holes in the ice when crossing the Yellow River during one’s return in early winter.

1.3.2 THE RIVER ROUTE

The river route (referred to in the phrase “running the river route,” or pao helu 跑河路) went along the Yellow River, both against the current up to Ningxia, and down to Hequ in Shanxi province. It was considered an important thoroughfare between the areas inside and outside of the Great Wall. Sailing boats and cargo ships provided transportation year in and year out. Both passenger and those who traveled on foot would meet and mix in Hekou Village (Hekou zhen 河口镇) and Baotou in Tuoketuo County (Tuoketuo xian 托克托县), Inner Mongolia, which was considered a land and water port and commercial/transportation center (Cao 1961: 4).

Those boatmen who left Hequ and traveled upstream along the Yellow River were called “River route men” (helu han 河路汉) (Yang 2006: 40). They were quite poor, and Hequ had thousands of them (Yang 2006: 40). They would transport oilseeds, pelts, grains, and other goods to areas of Inner Mongolia for local “wealthy street vendor merchants” (zuodi da shangfan 坐地大商贩) (Yang 2006: 40).

Within the area of Hequ, there was a section of the Yellow River known as the “Dragon’s Mouth” (longkou 龙口), which was a natural barrier where the precipitous cliffs on both sides squeezed the river, causing a swift current that roared like thunder, with rocks of grotesque shapes breaking off and falling unpredictably into the river from both sides (Yang 2006: 40-41).
Due to the dangerous nature of the river route, accidents often occurred, resulting in numerous deaths each year (Yang 2006: 41). In order to deal with these unfortunate deaths, the tradition of the River Lantern Festival (hedeng jie 河灯节) arose in Hequ County. Just outside of the west gate of the county town, a King Yu Temple (Yuwang miao) was built, along with an ancient stage on the edge of the shores of the Yellow River, which looked across to both Inner Mongolia and Shaanxi province (Yang 2006: 41). Each year, on the fifth day of the seventh lunar month, people would set out 365 river lanterns to float in the current, in order to release the souls of the dead who had drowned in the river (Yang 2006: 41).

1.3.3 THE EASTERN ROUTE

“Walking the eastern route” (zou donglu 走东路), also called the “trade route” (shangdao 商道) or the “camel route” (luodao 骆道), involved transporting goods and draft animals between Inner Mongolia and Shanxi province (Yang 2006: 41). This route was often traveled by trade caravans that would drive groups of camels to Inner Mongolia, where they would engage in commerce (Yang 2006: 41). The trade caravans brought daily necessities to the Mongolians, and then brought local products from Inner Mongolia back to the Central Plains (Yang 2006: 42). They frequently transported and sold rice, noodles, and silk to the Mongolians (Yang 2006: 41). In addition, Mongolian goods were transported via boats back to Shanxi province, where teams of draft animals

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19 For myths concerning King Yu, also known as “Yu the Great,” see Birrell 1993: 146-159.
would take them to various cities and towns in the northern and central regions of the province (Yang 2006: 41).

In fact, several of these traveling merchants became rich. The most famous of these is perhaps Qiao Guifa 乔贵发, whose large estate was featured in Zhang Yimou’s 张艺谋 (1991) movie, _Raise the Red Lantern_ (Da hong denglong gao gao gua 大红灯笼高高挂). Qiao was a poor farmer who went to do business in Baotou, and, while unsuccessful at first, managed to buy large quantities of soybeans and corn during a bumper harvest in 1755, and then sell them during a drought the following year. His family later became one of the powerful clans of “Shanxi merchants” (Jinshang 晋商) (Cf. Huang 2002: 438-447).
CHAPTER 2
GENRES, STYLE, AND PERFORMANCE CONTEXTS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This section outlines various contexts within which to place the songs about “going beyond the Western Pass,” discussing the various song genres in which they are sung, with their characteristic structures, themes, and performance contexts. I also look at several ways in which songs and singing are said to elicit and express emotions, both by local singers and outside theorists on performance, and why local people chose song to tell the story of separation due to going beyond the Western Pass.

With regards to song types, the area involved in the zou xikou phenomenon hosts a wide range of musical activities, and songs about “going beyond the Western Pass” can be found in two categories of folksong, known as “mountain songs” (shan’ge 山歌) and “little ditties” (xiaodiao 小调) (two terms that will be examined below), as well as a local opera-like folk performance genre known as errentai. These categories should not necessarily be seen as mutually exclusive, but rather as interrelated and belonging to a sort of continuum, ranging from improvised, free rhythm songs on the one hand to highly stylized songs with regular rhythm on the other. Roger Abrahams’ idea of a “genre
continuum” among all forms of traditional expression provides a useful framework within which to think about different performance styles:

The progress from the more interpersonal to the more removed involves a passage from smaller and more intimate forms invoked as part of direct and spontaneous discourse to the larger and more symbolic genres, which rely upon a profound sense of psychic distance between the performer and audience. (Abrahams 2005: 61-62)

According to Abrahams, folklore genres range from “close involvement” to “absolute distance” between performers and audiences (Abrahams 2005: 61). He divides the spectrum of genres into four segments: “conversational genres; play genres; fictive genres; and static genres” (Abrahams 2005: 61, italics in original). “Mountain songs” which are often sung in dialogue with another person (either present at the scene or implied in the lyrics) would fall under the category of “conversational genres,” being one of the “smaller and more intimate forms invoked as part of direct and spontaneous discourse” (Abrahams 2005: 61).

Errentai, as a type of folk play, would be included under “play genres” relatively close to “fictive genres” (Abrahams 2005: 64-65). Not only are errentai dramas not as spontaneous as mountain songs, but there is greater distance between the singers and the audience:

Although all folklore calls for a sympathetic relation between formal object or item of folklore and the audience, the longer genres increasingly draw upon vicarious, rather than immediate, involvement to induce the sympathetic response. (Abrahams 2005: 62)

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20 The “spontaneous” aspect of “mountain songs” is best understood as a manipulation of stock phrases as a “means of formulaic composition that asks for spontaneous, fixed response from the audience” (Wang 1974: 102).
As the songs exist in a continuum, their placement into separate genres is “...not so much to classify as to clarify...” (Frye 1957: 247). The purpose of genres is two-fold: to organize the songs in a way to allow us to compare and find relations between them, and to provide a frame through which we may interpret them (Abrahams 2005: 52).

After a description of the three categories of songs, ideas about the expression and elicitation of emotions through song are discussed, both from the point of view of the singers and the audience (who may include the singer[s] as well), and according to various theorists. Several meta-commentaries about the interrelation of singing and emotional expression within the songs are followed by an examination of various ethnographic materials, including interviews with singers. Among these sources, singing seems to be viewed as both an expressive and a transformative process. Next, various theories on the experience of performances are considered, noting that the sense of real-like experiences and emotions in performances are created through the mind (Smith 1972; Freud 1946) and that much of the individual meaning of a particular performance depends on context (Bauman 1977; Ben-Amos 1993; Smith 1978). Ideas inherent to the Chinese context are also discussed, such as “red-hot sociality” (Chau 2006) and the merging of “real life” and the stage (Johnson 1989; Feng and Stuart 1994). In addition, I make use of work done on public musical expressions of emotions, such as laments

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21 Alan Dundes first used the term “metafolklore” to describe “folkloristic statements about folklore” (1966: 509). Barbara Babcock further discussed the “metadimension of folk expression,” using terms such as “metanarration” and “metacommunication,” the latter of which refers to “any element of communication which calls attention to the speech event as a performance and to the relationship which obtains between the narrator and his audience vis-à-vis the narrative message” (1977: 62, 66). While Babcock focuses on folk narratives, this idea of reflexive expressions in folklore, for which I have used the term “meta-commentaries,” also applies to song.
(McLaren 2008; Tolbert 2008), and various theories of the significance of repetition in performances (Freud 1989; Webster 2008; Toelken 1996; Turner 1969).

This additional background provides a better conceptual framework within which to examine specific emotions expressed in the lyrics, and some ideas about how the singers and audience members may have experienced the production and reception of the songs.

2.2 MOUNTAIN SONGS

“Mountain songs” (shan’ge), a term frequently used by Chinese scholars for songs from many parts of China, are “...generally defined as improvised songs in free rhythm, sung loudly during work outdoors” (Schimmelpenninck 1997: 18). In the area surrounding the intersection of Shanxi, Shaanxi, and Inner Mongolia, there are said to be three local genres that fall into this category, which are loosely delineated by province—xintianyou 信天游, or “[songs that] fly freely in the sky,” which are found in northern Shaanxi, shanqu 山曲, or “mountain tunes,” found in northwestern Shanxi and northeastern Shaanxi, and “mountain-climbing melodies” (pashandiao 爬山调), which are from the neighboring section of Inner Mongolia. These three genres travel across borders, and according to Li Xiongfei 李雄飞, they all belong to one category, although he notes that each place adds its own local characteristics (Li 2004: 350, 360-362).

Most songs of this type are about love, and the song genre names have become synonyms for “love songs” among the local people (Li 2004: 353). With regards to their performance contexts, Li writes that:
In northern Shaanxi, this type of folksong is mainly sung by women, usually at home, and less so by men, who usually sing them alone outdoors. Cases of antiphonal singing are few and far between. In the Ordos Plateau and areas of Ningxia, there is also antiphonal singing between men and women, and less so between members of the same sex. (Li 2004: 353)

However, while the songs in northern Shaanxi are in many cases sung alone, the roots of the songs seem to be in antiphonal dialogues:

There are some shanqu and xintianyou lyrics that sometimes seem like they are sung by a man and sometimes seem like they are sung by a woman. This is probably left over from this type of antiphonal song form. The place and occasion in which the songs are sung are not strictly limited. They can be sung in the mountains, on the road, at home, and in the courtyard. They are also sung during drinking bouts, housewarming parties, marriage celebrations, and shehuo 社火 performances during the lunar new year. Some singers avoid any near kin that may be present when they sing, in order to keep their relatives and family from feeling embarrassed after they hear or see the song. However, once they manage to hide away from them, they begin to sing out with gusto. (Li 2004: 353-354)

The embarrassing experiences by the singers with regards to their relatives is slightly ambiguous here, although it most likely has to with social prohibitions on either public displays of emotion and/or lyrics involving risque topics such as love.

Each verse is made up of a couplet, and usually the two lines are of matching length (Li 2004: 352). It is most common for the second phrase to be a sort of musical echo of the first, in which the second repeats part of the first and changes the ending so that it finished on the tonic (i.e. keynote) of the musical mode used (Lü 1994: 80). The majority of lines are made up of seven characters. Due to the influence of the Jin 晋 dialect (from Shanxi province), various types of reduplication are used (Li 2004: 352),
and this sometimes leads to lines with nine or eleven characters (Lü 1994: 80). Some songs have as many as thirteen characters to a line (Li 2004: 352). “...[I]n the everyday language of northern Shaanxi, it is a common custom to use repetition and reduplication to convey an affectionate tone...” (Lü 1994: 80). In the songs, “the use of repetition and reduplication increase the beauty of the rhythm, temperament, and style of the lyrics” (Lü 1994: 80). In addition, all the couplets have end rhymes (Li 2004: 352).

With regards to the melodies used, there seems to be a great variety of individual variations on regional tunes.

When shanqu are sung among the folk, one melody may be sung in many different ways. Some sing it more simply and others add in more variations. Often, these variations, including rhythm, melody, and mode, occur in synch with the mood of the singer. (ZYXZY 1962: 98)

In writing about the melodies of xintianyou, He and Zhang note that: “Even the same singer, when he or she sings different lyrics, changes the melody in keeping with the change in feeling” (He and Zhang 1952: 317). Since xintianyou are meant to be sung outdoors in the countryside, they use a very high pitch (He and Zhang 1952: 318). “At this time, the xintianyou singers use their falsetto to sing in way that’s extremely loud and clear. If they stand on a mountain peak, the sound can carry as far as seven or eight li” (He and Zhang 1952: 318).

In the Shaanxi volume of the Grand Compendium of Chinese Folksongs, two basic categories of melodies are outlined, the characteristics of which are useful in providing an additional auditory context for the lyrics as printed on the page:
Generally speaking, *xintianyou* have two types of melodies. One kind is a free, drawn-out melody with a slow, unhurried tempo and a wide range of notes. Often, the first phrase reflects an expansive state of mind or concept, with a bold and unrestrained mood and the melody floating up in the higher vocal register. The second phrase, in turn, tends to reveal and explain the complicated inner world of the person in an innate way with deep feeling. The majority of the melodies in this part reverberate in the middle and lower registers. The other kind has a rather regulated structure with an even rhythm, and graceful, easy-flowing and smooth melodies. (Lü 1994: 80)

There is a similarity between many of the lyrics and the melodic characteristics described here. The first line of the couplets often uses images from nature or other readily available objects and scenes to express “expansive states of mind or concepts,” setting the stage for the more introverted statement of emotion that follows in the second line. In addition, the second type of melody mentioned, with its “regulated structure” and “even rhythm,” is closer to the type of songs mentioned below, thus showing, in part, a sort of continuum between genres.

### 2.3 LITTLE DITTIES

What are sometimes translated as “little ditties” (*xiaodiao*), are characterized as “lyrical, mellifluous songs in a regular rhythm, often sung indoors in a soft voice and to instrumental accompaniment” (Schimmelpenninck 1997: 17-18). In some cases, *xiaodiao* also refers to “sung melodies in certain opera and ‘performed narrative’ *quyi* (曲艺) traditions, which come from folksongs that have been reworked in accordance with

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22 I have adopted Mark Bender’s translation of *quyi*, which he also translates as “performed narrative arts” (Bender 2003: 3, 10).
the musical characteristics of the particular opera and ‘performed narrative’
genres” (Jiang 1982: 173).

Dealing with a wide variety of subject matter and themes, these are songs that
people sing to themselves during daily life, which can be sung anywhere and don’t

...[N]o matter whether in the mountains, hills, gullies and low-lying areas or in
courtyards and in front of cave dwellings, people may burst out into song at any
time, while they do farm work, carry out household chores, turn a grain mill, or
do needlework. Through song, they voice their personal feelings, and seek a
psychic release and comfort for their spirit. (Lü 1994: 172)

The general structure of xiaodiao are verses with four lines of seven characters
(Lü 1994: 173). There are also some with five and six characters, as well as mixtures
between the two (Lü 1994: 173). Many times, the lines include filler words and phrases
(chenzi chenju 衬字衬句, translated as “padding words” in the cases of classical poetry
and tanci 弹词 performances by James J. Y. Liu and Mark Bender respectively)\(^{23}\) inserted
in the middle or at the end of lines, which support the melody when lines are too short
(Bender 1995: 79; Liu 1962: 32; Lü 1994: 172).\(^{24}\) These may also serve as a way to
“...add emotional emphasis, deepen the content, and provide variety for the form” (Lü

\(^{23}\) Chung-wen Shih, in his discussion of Yuan dramatic and non-dramatic lyrics (qu 曲), translates chenzi as
“non-metric words,” while suggesting other alternatives, such as “padding,” “additional,” “foil,” and
“extra-metric” (Shih 1976: 121-124).

\(^{24}\) Qiao Jianzhong 乔建中 also writes that chenci 衬词 and chenju 衬句 contribute to variable line length: “This
variable structure developed from a more fixed structure by the addition of chenci, the addition of words
added for balance or euphony, and chenju, the addition of phrases, added for the same reasons. Chenci
changes the structure of the original song and makes it more rhythmic; chenju can be used at the beginning
of a song or as an epilogue” (Qiao 1998: 40).
They include empty words (xuci 虚词), words such as “older brother,” “little sister,” and “darling” (the equivalent of “baby” in American pop songs), and other phrases that are considered to have lost whatever meaning they originally had (Lü 1994: 172-173). The tunes generally have a rather solid structure, with even meter and smooth-flowing melodies (Lü 1994: 173).

As mentioned earlier, there seems to be a connection between xiaodiao and certain opera-like traditions, including errentai. Some errentai are said to be based on folksongs, and the opposite is said to be the case as well. In examining various versions of “going beyond the Western Pass” songs, I have found similar lyrics among xiaodiao and errentai versions, suggesting a rather close relationship (cf. Lü 1994: 191-203 and YDW 1983: 51-76). Many of the xiaodiao pieces and excerpts published appear to belong to part of the more complete errentai performances, which tell a fuller story, replete with named characters. According to He and Zhang (1952):

The xiaodiao “Going Beyond the Western Pass” (zou xikou) was originally popular in Shanxi and Suiyuan provinces, and later spread to northern Shaanxi. In each place that it is sung, the lyrics are mostly different. ...In the region around Baotou, there is also a xiaodiao opera (xiaodiao jù 小调剧) that is performed. The plot is roughly: In the fifth year of the Tongzhi reign (1861-1875), a man from Taiyuan prefecture in Shanxi province, named Sun Pengxian 孙蓬仙, had a daughter, Sun Yulian 孙玉莲, who was sick in bed, so he called a doctor for her. Thus, she was later married to the doctor, Taichun 太春. Not long after Taichun was married, he had to return home. (He and Zhang 1952: 91)

25 In his work on tanci performances, Bender writes, “These insertions act to vary the pace of the lines, and thus affect the feelings aroused by them. [They] are often used in the context of a rhyme change and can serve to draw attention to subsequent lines” (Bender 1995: 79-80).

26 The territory of the former province of Suiyuan spread from the Great Wall in the South to the Gobi Desert in the North, with the Daqing Mountains and the Yellow River dividing it internally (Tighe 2005: 202). The province was divided into three main regions: the Tumed section, the Ulaanchab section and the Yeke-juu section (Tighe 2005: 202).
Thus, once again, there seems to be evidence for a sort of continuum between the genres involved.

### 2.4 ERRENTAI

*Errentai* (“two-person opera”) is a sung folk performance genre popular in Fugu and Shenmu 神木 in northern Shaanxi province, Hequ in northwestern Shanxi province, and Yikezhaomeng 伊克昭盟 and the areas near Baotou and Hohhot (Huhehaote 呼和浩特) in Inner Mongolia (YDW 1983: 1). It is usually sung by two performers who respectively take on the traditional role types of the female (dan 旦) and the male clown (chou 丑). Both were traditionally performed by men (ZYXZYY 1962: 213). The performance is usually accompanied by several instruments, including the bamboo flute, *sixian* 四弦 (a spike fiddle with four strings), and *yangqin* 扬琴 (a type of hammered dulcimer) (YDW 1983: 2).

The formation and development of *errentai* is said to be closely connected to the history of “walking beyond the Western Pass.” Over the years, the back and forth movement of the Han from ethnically Chinese areas to Inner Mongolia led to a mutual exchange of Han and Mongolian cultures, including music. According to Yang Hong, *errentai* is the “crystallization of the common knowledge of the Mongolian and Han peoples” that was formed through the waves of “walking beyond the Western Pass” (Yang 2006: 57). As the two cultures interacted, each brought elements of their own folk musics and soon formed a new genre. Perhaps it is quite fitting that one of the most popular *errentai* pieces is entitled “Walking Beyond the Western Pass” (“Zou
xikou” “走西口” (ZYXZYY 1962: 201), the story of which is mentioned above. Li Shibin 李世斌 writes that:

...[S]ince a large amount of immigrants from “inside the Pass” [i.e. Han] migrated to Inner Mongolia, the Mongolian and Han people inhabited the same area for a long period of time. They lived together and worked together. Some became friends and others married each other. Their living habits and feelings became interrelated, and this interrelation naturally was reflected in the mutual exchange and facilitation of culture and the arts. (YDW 1983: 2)

The scholars from the China Music Institute who went on the 1953 Hequ expedition, in writing about the folksongs in this area, said:

Due to the large number of peasants that “walked beyond the Western Pass,” the economic and cultural lives of the regions in northwestern Shanxi and western Inner Mongolia had widespread exchange. The folksongs of the Mongolians and Han also mutually influenced each other. (ZYXZYY 1962: 5)

As Han migrants traveled “beyond the Pass,” folksongs from “inside the Pass” (specifically, Hequ in Shanxi province) and the performance style known as sixiandiao 丝弦调, where several people would sit in a circle and sing and play instruments, were spread to Inner Mongolia during the time of the lunar New Year. Specifically, they were performed during shehuo, a kind of variety show performed outdoors by local farmers during the Lantern Festival, which falls on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month. An old resident of Fugu county remembered how, when he was young, errentai was performed during the Chinese lunar new year. The performers would sit cross-legged on the kang 炕 (a heatable brick bed built into the structure of the
home in northern China) and sing, with the audience sitting on the floor. In this way, the *kang* would serve as a makeshift “stage” (Yang 2006: 51). Other early performances simply involved a group of amateur musicians sitting in a circle, playing instruments and singing together.

Another performance context for *errentai* was during the River Lantern Festival (*hedengjie* 河灯节), which was held each year on the banks of the Yellow River at the King Yu River God Temple (*Yuwang heshen miao* 禹王河神庙) (Yang 2006: 200). This temple was built along with an ancient stage on the edge of the shores of the river, which looked across to both Inner Mongolia and Shaanxi province (Yang 2006: 41). On the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month, which coincides with the Chinese Ghost Festival (*zhongyuanjie* 中元节), boatmen who worked the river route would set out 365 lanterns on the water, symbolizing the days of the year (Yang 2006: 200-201). The purpose of the festival was to make sacrifices to the river god, the Great Yu, to mourn the deaths of those departed spirits who had perished during their journey beyond the Western Pass, and to pray for peaceful, safe trips along the river route (Yang 2006: 200). The temple, built in the sixteenth year of the Qianlong reign (1751), was constructed at a historic crossing for those who went beyond the Pass, facing the Yellow River to the north. Across from the temple’s main hall, there was a two-story building called the “Building for Looking Out on the River” (*wanghelou* 望河楼). The first floor served as an operatic stage for the entertainment of the gods, and the upper level overlooked the

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27 See footnote 19 on page 31.
Yellow River, and provided a place for those who stayed behind to see off their loved ones as they left for the Western Pass (Yang 2006: 200).

It should be noted that both the New Year’s Lantern Festival and the River Lantern festival in the seventh lunar month have potential connections to excorcistic performances and the merging of the spiritual and human realms through performance. With regard to the former, Feng and Stuart (1994) describe new year’s shehuo dramatic performances in Qinghai province, that involve an actor dressed as Chenghuang (the Taoist protector of towns and villages) making an “inspection” of the town, thus momentarily fusing together the mortal and spiritual worlds, as well as shehuo teams from other villages said to take away evil spirits when they go and dispose of them at some point between the two villages (39-44). The Ghost Festival, with which the River Lantern Festival coincides, is essentially a mass community exorcism in which “hungry ghosts” (i.e. the ghosts of those people who have been wronged and/or don’t have descendants to provide them with offerings) are appeased and dispersed. David Johnson writes about Mulian operas which are performed during this festival in several areas in China, which involves “…the virtual disappearance of the distinction between ‘real life’ and ‘stage,’…” (Johnson 1989: 29). Similar to the shehuo performances mentioned by Feng and Stuart, the Mulian operas are often purportedly put on “to avert epidemics and expel demons” (Johnson 1989: 13). Yang also mentions that the errentai performances at the River Lantern Festival are put on, in part, to “release from suffering those departed spirits who died in the [Yellow] River” (yi chaodu si yu hezhong de wangling 以超度死于河中的亡灵) (Yang 2006: 41). When taken in this light, the performances of the
2.5 EMOTIONS INVOLVED IN SINGING

In both the 1953 Hequ expedition and Ma and Zhang’s journey on foot collecting oral histories about zou xikou in the eighties, in addition to stories, songs also play a prominent role in the way that the experience of going beyond the Western Pass was related (ZYXZYY 1962; Ma and Zhang 1990). Ma and Zhang mention how old people would use songs to express their experience: “In every village that we walked through in Hequ, as soon as one brought up ‘going beyond the Western Pass,’ the older people would all use ‘mountain songs’ (shanqu) to relate their own personal experience of suffering” (Ma and Zhang 1990: 117). We might think that the narration of such tragic experiences would be a sensitive issue—indeed, rather private and personal—and hardly suited to such a loud, public, and forthright form as mountain songs. In fact, Ma and Zhang raise this apparent contradiction in one of their interviews:

In Nanshawa 南沙窴, we asked some of the old people in the village, “Since going beyond the Western Pass was so bitter, why did you still want to sing songs [about it]?”

With a faint, meaningful glance, the old people sadly replied, “It was so bitter it makes your heart tremble. With speaking you can’t clearly express how bitter it was. Only in songs (ququ 曲曲) can you sing it clearly.” “Mountain songs’ (shanquzi 山曲子) relieve sorrows and worries and keep one optimistic (jiekxukuan 解心宽).” (Ma and Zhang 1990: 116)

28 Here and below, I have capitalized “Going Beyond the Western Pass” when I am referring to the errentai performance, which carries that name (zou xikou) as it’s title.
The elderly villagers’ responses raise two notions about singing. First, the complex and often abstract emotions involved in such an experience are best conveyed through song. Second, the process of singing actually works to transform the emotions experienced, relieving many of the feelings of distress. In fact, these two ideas are related. According to people interviewed in Hequ, “‘Mountain songs’ (山曲) are poor people’s songs. When one is sad in their heart in a bad way, only then do they sing” (Ma and Zhang 1990: 117). It seems that the sadness brought on by the difficult experience of going beyond the Western Pass led them to seek both articulation and solace through song.

In the 1953 Hequ expedition, which incidentally was based in Nanshawa, the spontaneous (although elicited) bursting forth into song is discussed in the investigation into what they called the “‘going beyond the Western Pass’ life” (‘zou xikou’ shenghuo ‘走西口’生活):

In order to experience in depth the life emotions mentioned above, we invited six or seven women who both had life experience and could sing. We asked them to remember life back then, and to sing folksongs reflecting their feelings at that time. As soon as we asked them to do this, they became lost in thought, and then couldn’t help singing out:

1. 盘算起亲亲走口外，
   泪蛋蛋流得泡一怀。
   When I think of my dear walking “beyond the Pass,”
   My tears flow, soaking my bosom.

2. 你走西口我上房，
   手攀烟囱泪汪汪。
   You walk beyond the Western Pass and I climb on the roof to see you off,
   My hands climb up the chimney and my eyes brim with tears.

47
3. 山在水在石头在，
   人家都在你不在。
   The mountains, the rivers, and the rocks are here,
   Everyone is here, but you’re not here.

4. 你走在大青山伙房里闪，
   我守在家里受艰难。
   When you walk to Daqing Mountain, you’re bound to be a mishap in the
   kitchen,
   While I’m at home enduring hardship.

5. 十冬腊月数九天，
   深沟担水谁可怜？
   The nine periods of nine days in the depths of winter,
   Carrying water up from the deep ravine—who is there to pity me?

6. 说起我难来真是难，
   泪蛋蛋好比水推船。
   If one says things are difficult for me, they are truly difficult,
   My tears flow like water pushing a boat.

7. 泪蛋蛋本是心上的血，
   谁不难活谁不滴。
   Tears are really blood from the heart,
   For whoever isn’t ill at heart, they don’t drip.

8. 泪蛋蛋本是心上的油，
   谁不难活谁不流。
   Tears are truly the oil that lubricates the heart,
   For whoever isn’t ill at heart, they don’t flow. (ZYXZY 1962: 121)

In fact, while the majority of the songs dealing with “going beyond the Western Pass”
tend to be sad, Ma and Zhang note that there are also upbeat ones as well. These
occurred when the zou xikou migrants had been paid at the end of the season, and were on
their way home after the harvest. In these times, they would sing happy songs (leyidiao
乐意调) (Ma and Zhang 1990: 123). In these, the very landscape that had seemed so
dreary and hopeless before was now seen through a bright, optimistic light (Ma and Zhang 1990: 123). Ma and Zhang relate this to the poetic idea of “being moved by things” and “forming impressions into song” (gan yu wu er xing yu sheng ‘感于物而形于声’) (Ma and Zhang 1990: 117). Obviously, in this process, the impressions formed by the things incorporate the overall mood of the context in which the singing takes place. In local terms, this might be referred to as “see something, sing about it; think of something, sing about it” (jian shen chang shen, xiang shen chang shen 见甚唱甚、想甚唱甚) (Ma and Zhang 1990: 117).

In fact, whether happy or sad, meta-commentaries about singing in these songs seem to view it as a way to both express and process complex emotions:

......学（啦）会（那个）唱（啦）曲（来）解心宽。
(ZYXZYY 1962: 58, emphasis added in translation)
Learn to sing songs to get rid of your worries.

......唱（啦）曲（那个）顶（啦）如（来）说比方。
(ZYXZYY 1962: 58, emphasis added in translation)
Singing songs is just like saying analogies.

These two excerpts come from songs connecting singing to courtship and extramarital affairs. The first emphasizes singing as a means of soothing frustration sprung from as yet unrequited (and perhaps soon to be requited) love. The second notes how singing

29 This concept concerning the origin of expression can be traced to the “Record of Music” (Yue ji 乐记) included in the Book of Rites (Li ji 礼记). The following excerpt about how external things cause a reaction in the mind is from Stephen Owen’s translation:

感于物而动。故形于声。
Stirred (kan*) by external things into movement, it takes on form (hsing*) in sound. (Owen 1992: 50-51)
provides a semantic bridge for discussing issues that may be socially unacceptable and/or difficult to verbalize if spoken in public.

Both of these ideas are in keeping with one of the reasons that Wang Xiangrong, the folksinger from northern Shaanxi province mentioned in the Preface, known as the “King of Northern Shaanxi Folksongs,” gives for singing. In addition to providing entertainment to assuage boredom, one of the major reasons he mentions for himself and other singers from the region is to “get something off one's chest” (gangqing xuanxie 感情宣泄, literally “pouring out one's feelings”) (Gibbs 2006: 1). He talks about times during the Spring Festival and during slack periods in the farm-work when people would sing together or some would provide instrumental accompaniment and others would sing.

At the same time, these scenes of group singing were also a chance to vent unexpressed feelings. Here, Wang says, one could express “those things that one normally wouldn't dare say, or those things for which there was no outlet or place to express them.” And to who were these comments directed? He says, to “all of the people who came to listen to the singing.” Wang repeatedly referred to pent-up emotions that find their outlet only through song. This occurs not only in the presence of others, but also when one is alone in the mountains. There, one “...sings to nature, to that flock of sheep, to that cow.” Here, one can express the joys and sorrows of life. According to Wang, these songs are not sung for anyone in particular, just a free expression of one's feelings. He says, “There are many things that have no place to be expressed. Who can you tell them to? This is a kind of free, unconstrained singing with nature as your audience. In reality, it is actually singing for one's self.” He says that after a session of singing like this, a man goes home happily, content that he's been able to get out all of the feelings that he wanted to. Certainly, several of Wang's reasons sound similar to those given by blues singers as to why they sing. The first thing he said in response to the question “Why do you like singing so much?” was that “Singing is always better than crying.” He also quoted a popular Fugu saying that “When men are sad, they sing. When women are sad, they cry.” (“Nanren nanguo chang quzi, nüren nanguo ku bizi.” 男人难过唱曲子，女人难过哭鼻子。) The implication
seemed to be that men in particular are not supposed to openly show their emotions, except through song. (Gibbs 2006: 1-2)

Particularly interesting is the idea that men use singing as a substitute for tears. Elizabeth Tolbert, in an article on Karelian laments, writes that “[i]n Karelia, women who lament are said to ‘cry with words’, as opposed to men who merely ‘cry with the eyes’, i.e. cry in the ordinary sense” (Tolbert 2008: 203). While the gender distinction is the opposite of the Fugu saying, the idea of “crying with words” seems to highlight the underlying significance of singing as a substitution for crying. He Qifang 何其芳, in his influential article “On Folksongs” (“Lun min’ge” 论民歌), mentions another saying from northern Shaanxi that emphasizes the way in which songs help people to “get things off their chests”:

信天游，
不断头，
断了头，
穷人就无法解忧愁。  
(Xintianyou, Never end; If they ended, The poor and suffering would have no way to get rid of their melancholy.  
(Lü 1994: 79)

Placed together, this idea of “crying with words” serves to “get rid of one’s melancholy” in a sort of cathartic experience. Tolbert suggests that “[l]aments were sung to accompany all stages of separation, transition and reincorporation phases of... rite[s] of passage, easing the transition from deceased to ancestor, or bride to wife” (Tolbert 2008: 203). She also knows how laments were used for “semi-ritual contexts involving separation, transition and/or strong emotion,” including “…soldiers leaving for war, or friends or relatives meeting after a long period of time” (Tolbert 2008: 203). The songs
of going beyond the Western Pass could easily fit into this category, and indeed there are
certain similar lyrics in songs from the same region about conscripted men and their
abandoned wives (Cf. Lü 1994: 190-191). It is understandable then, how we might relate
emotional expression of abandonment in *zou xikou* songs to the expression used in songs
for the dead or in bridal laments, where the bride is “abandoned” by her natal family. In
fact, just as Tolbert says that the Karelian lament, with its many forms and performance
contexts, “... has its roots in the ancestor worship of the ancient Karelian folk religion,
and contains vestiges of classical Eurasian shamanism in its ecstatic, trance-like manner
of performance” (Tolbert 2008: 202), the various lament-like Chinese forms also appear
to share a common ancestry with each other.

In her study of Nanhui bridal laments, Anne E. McLaren links such laments “...to
an ancient Chinese tradition of weeping and wailing for ritual and social
effect” (McLaren 2008: 83). The performance tradition, known as *ku* 哭, which she
translates as “weeping and wailing,” was “...associated with mourning for the dead,
admonition, protest, and the propitiation of spirits” (McLaren 2008: 83-84). However,
“[a]part from wailing at funerals, the term *ku* was also used in ancient times to refer to a
public performance involving the vocalization and dramatic enactment of
emotion” (McLaren 2008: 85). This type of “public performance” of dramatic emotion
seems similar to both the songs dealing with going beyond the Western Pass and Wang
Xiangrong’s description of “pouring out one's feelings” through song.

When read along with Tolbert’s discussion of Karelian laments, McLaren’s work
raises two points of importance: First, unlike the Karelian tradition, the *ku* tradition
involved both men and women, although McLaren notes that the latter “...stands out as a rare example of a performance art where women not only held the stage but were able to exert a quasi-magical power denied them in mainstream ritual culture” (McLaren 2008: 83). She suggests that “...although both men and women engaged in wailed performances, they tended to [do] so in different contexts and for different purposes” (McLaren 2008: 83): “Men performed wailing to admonish their rulers, and women to admonish their husbands and sons. Both used vocalised wailing to exhibit moral superiority in the absence of political or social power” (McLaren 2008: 88). In both cases, the wailing provided a means of coping with limitations of power vis-a-vis social relations with others (i.e. rulers, husbands, sons, etc.).

Second, McLaren emphasizes the point that this type of wailing was produced purposefully as a “dramatic enactment of emotion” (McLaren 2008: 85). This purposefulness is contrasted with other spontaneous expressions of emotion:

As demonstrated in the careful study of Christoph Harbsmeier, the term ku in antiquity referred to a solemn, sometimes ritual, act involving vocalization or speech but not necessarily wept tears. He distinguishes the term ku from the related term qi, which, he argues, referred to tearful weeping, with or without vocalization. The act of ku was a form of deliberate behaviour, whereas the act of qi was a spontaneous emotional reaction to an event.” (McLaren 2008: 85)

This “deliberate behaviour” often creates multiple meanings, both for the singers themselves and for those who observe them. A discussion of the audience’s experience of emotion opens the door for us to examine another aspect of the songs—how those who
2.6 AUDIENCE EXPERIENCE OF EMOTION

According to Robert Stecker, although we say a work “expresses” a certain emotion, we really only perceive that emotion in the work, and that emotion doesn’t necessarily correlate to any intrinsic quality of the work. “Music is expressive only if we perceive emotion in the music” (Stecker 2001: 86). He suggests that “…it is not intelligible to say (literally) that a passage sounds like sadness. What it is intelligible to say is that the music sounds like someone's expression of sadness or that it evidence that someone is sad” (Stecker 2001: 89).

Noting that we lack the conceptual tools for dealing with emotion, Robert Jerome Smith has devised two concepts: “normative affects” (how a performance or a part thereof is supposed to make us feel) and “actual affects” (how it actually makes us feel) (Smith 1972: 75). He suggests that “...the measure of agreement between actual and normative affect is also the measure of the appropriateness of a story to a particular audience” (Smith 1972: 77). Given that errentai troupes performed their pieces, including “Going Beyond the Western Pass,” in villages along the route traveled, combined with the fact that the musical genre developed as a result of the fusion of cultures facilitated by the traveling back and forth, one might speculate that the normative affects were able to facilitate similar actual affects.
Smith goes on to make several interesting points regarding these categories that could potentially be applied to zou xikou songs. He notes that people’s responses towards a folklore genre that has a cognitive element are not directed “...toward the performer but toward the referent of the performance. ...The response, in other words, is toward a being or event outside the present empirical interaction situation” (Smith 1972: 77). Smith also suggests that “…the total immediate response to the presentation of any genre of folklore is not the total response, much of which is delayed” (Smith 1972: 78). During the after-effects of a performance experience, “[a] real situation... becomes linked to a symbolic experience and acquires the affective meaning of that experience” (Smith 1972: 78). One wonders whether people’s experiences of zou xikou were at all affected/informed by the emotional tenor of the dramatic opera-like presentations of parting that they may have seen in public performances, and/or tales they had heard from fellow villagers. In addition, “this delayed/resumed response... acts as a stimulus for a man to want to repeat a tale he has heard” (Smith 1972: 78). The same of course would apply to songs heard in public performances in Shanxi and Shaanxi. Smith then suggests that emotional responses to a story are remembered more strongly than its plot. The idea of a strong emotional memory seems important to the way that zou xikou songs were experienced. Smith says that “...the reality of the subject is within the mind...” (Smith 1972: 78).

This concept is similar to Freud’s notion of the “omnipotence of thought” (Freud 1946: 111), which he outlines with the following:

We may say that at present there is a general over-valuation of all psychic processes, that is to say there is an attitude towards the world which according to
our understanding of the relation of reality to thought must appear like an over-
estimation of the latter. Objects as such are overshadowed by the ideas
representing them; what takes place in the latter must also happen to the former,
and the relations which exist between ideas are also postulated as to things. As
thought does not recognize distances and easily brings together in one act of
consciousness things spatially and temporally far removed, the magic world also
puts itself above spatial distance by telepathy, and treats a past association as if it
were a present one. (Freud 1946: 111)

Freud goes on to suggest that this “omnipotence” can be projected out of the mind. He
posits that in religious traditions, humans cede it to the gods. However, in the “modern”
world, he believes that this “omnipotence” has been relinquished to science, except for
one exception:

Only in one field has the omnipotence of thought been retained in our own
civilization, namely in art. In art alone it still happens that man, consumed by his
wishes, produces something similar to the gratification of these wishes, and this
playing, thanks to artistic illusion, calls forth effects as if it were something real.
We rightly speak of the magic of art and compare the artist with a magician.
(Freud 1946: 117-118)

Both Smith and Freud (and others to be sure) emphasize this creation of real-like
experiences through the mind in artistic performances.

It is important, in thinking about the festival events where these songs were
performed (including lunar new year, temple festivals, ghost festival, weddings, funerals,
etc.), to remember the variety of individual experiences of the same event. Adam Yuet
Chau notes that, due to the complexity and diversity found in any given temple festival,
each person’s experience of it is different and unique (Chau 2006: 164). However, he
contends that most of them experience what he calls “felt satisfaction: a sense of having
been part of intense red-hot sociality” (Chau 2006: 164). In Chau’s view, this idea of “red-hot sociality” (honghuo 红火) seems to be an integral part of the experience of such performances.30 Looking at social events like temple festivals with an “emphasis on affect rather than symbols and meanings” (Chau 2006: 163), Chau discusses what he calls the “sociothermic theory of sociality,” referring to the idea that “...when people converge they generate more social heat (i.e., honghuo)” (Chau 2006: 156). Building on Charles Stafford’s term, the “separation constraint,” Chau calls the Chinese desire to congregate in large groups the “reunion imperative” (Chau 2006: 156). In his work, he provides an excellent attempt at capturing the feeling of honghuo at temple festivals, in which he describes the various sensations, including noises, sights, smells, tastes, and ambient sensations. He notes that the average participant is “someone who is experiencing intensely his surroundings through all his senses,” an experience which he calls “sensoric” (Chau 2006: 162). This description reminds us that there was always much more going on in the audience’s experience of zou xikou performances than just the song and music itself, and a simple analysis of text and melody alone will not suffice.31

In addition to “red-hot sociality,” another common feature in various festivals in China seems to be a certain degree of the “fusing together” of “real life” and the stage, as

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30 A similar term in common usage in many parts of China is renao 热闹, literally “hot and noisy,” which refers to lively situations “buzzing with excitement,” and has connotations of mirth and merrymaking, all similar to the term discussed here.

31 I hope to conduct additional fieldwork on audience reactions in the future, since Smith postulates that “...the significance of festival behavior must be looked for in the responses of those toward whom it is directed, in the meaning they assign to it” (Smith 1972: 69).
noted earlier. The Mulian operas described by Johnson (1989) blur the distinctions between opera, ritual, and reality. For example, some of the actors are mixed in with the audience, and those who are on the stage may run off into the crowd (Johnson 1989: 18-19, 27). Other examples include fake weddings (part of the opera story) that are conducted with processions as if they were real, and “monk” actors that travel door-to-door begging for alms, like real monks (Johnson 1989: 27-28). Johnson suggests “…that ‘actor’ and ‘priest’ were not wholly separate categories in traditional China” (Johnson 1989: 30), and furthermore finds a likeness between opera and ritual in their mutual use of performance: “Opera and ritual, the two most important institutions of non-elite community life in traditional China, were profoundly akin because for both, performance was fundamental” (Johnson 1989: 31). This commonality made it possible for the performances of the Mulian operas to bring about “…the virtual disappearance of the distinction between ‘real life’ and ‘stage,’ which in turn made possible the literal embodiment of some of the people’s deepest terrors, and hopes” (Johnson 1989: 29).

Johnson discusses the performative nature of Chinese folk religion, springing from the “emphasis on behavior rather than doctrine” in Chinese society, which causes both rituals and operas to be viewed as “fundamental metaphor[s] for life” (Johnson 1989: 31). He ends the article by suggesting that the main scenes in the most popular operas serve to crystallize the ideas, values, and meanings that are most central to traditional Chinese culture.

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32 This is somewhat similar to Dorothy Ko’s idea of “conflation of fiction with reality” that occurred when readers of The Peony Pavilion (Mudan ting 杜丹亭) would offer sacrifices to Du Liniang (the protagonist), believing that she had been a real person (Ko 1994: 83).
There are several compelling points here which might be explored with regard to *zou xikou* performances. First, Johnson provides evidence for a strong connection between ritual and opera, which may have carried over into other forms of musical expression. Second, the fusing of real life and the stage is an interesting phenomena, and seems to combine well with Chau’s discussion of “red-hot sociality.”

Another key element in the audience’s experience is the specific context in which the songs were performed. One can imagine that the mood of individual temple festivals would vary among different temples, different occasions at the same temple, and from year to year, as would the feelings of individual audience members. All of these factors would influence what Bauman calls the “emergent quality of all performance,” referring to the way that each performance is different, depending on its context and the group of people among whom it occurs (Bauman 1984: 37). This “emergent quality” affects not only the performers’ experience, but also the audience’s reception of that performance. While there might be a generalized reaction to particular performances, Chau, as mentioned earlier, suggests that each individual’s experience is unique (Chau 2006: 164).

In discussing the varied responses to similar repeated performances, Toelken writes, “In each case, even though there is an audience, the dynamics of aesthetic and

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33 Sims and Stephens describe this phenomenon as follows:

If you have ever attended several showing of the same movie, this phenomenon is probably familiar: you see and hear new things in every viewing, and your experience of the event differs depending on the time of day, the people you go to the theater with, perhaps even your mood. Performers who repeat the same material again and again experience this quality of performance first-hand. Even if the content doesn’t vary much (a play script for example, or an aria in an opera), performers might emphasize a certain line differently each night, or even forget a line and have to improvise. The audience might react with laughter during one performance and silence at the same point another time. In essence, because the experiences of the audiences and performers constantly change and evolve, both from performance to performance and during a single performance, a new text emerges with every performance. (Sims and Stephens 2005: 149)
cultural interaction will be different” (Toelken 1996: 137). These “different dynamics” can perhaps be partly explained by the two types of context for folklore suggested by Dan Ben-Amos: the “context of situation” and the “context of culture.” The former refers to “the narrowest, most direct context” (Ben-Amos 1993: 216). This would include the specific time when the performance occurred, its physical location, and the reason that it was held (a deity’s birthday, ghost festival, funeral, etc.). The “context of culture,” in turn, is described as “the broadest contextual circle which embraces all other possible contexts” (Ben-Amos 1993: 216). It is “…the reference to, and the representation of, the shared knowledge of speakers, their conventions of conduct, belief systems, language metaphors and speech genres, their historical awareness and ethical and judicial principles” (Ben-Amos 1993: 215-216). This would refer to the local and regional cultures and world-views, and would have included popular knowledge about going beyond the Western Pass. Obviously, the two contexts (i.e. situation and culture) are interconnected. Sims and Stephens note that “Ben-Amos’ distinction between these narrow and broad perspectives demonstrates many overlapping contextual spheres…” (Sims and Stephens 2005: 138). Nevertheless, it is important to remember that “…any aesthetic expression is rooted in and explained by its context of culture, which in turns [sic] it reflects” (Ben-Amos 1993: 216). At the same time, the context of culture’s interaction with the context of situation is what produces unique experiences for each individual at each performance.

The “context of situation” can be further broken down by looking at Barbara Herrnstein Smith’s work on the way certain texts are able to produce unique emotions
based on the individual contexts in which they are presented, an idea she calls “prefabricated utterances,” defined as “...verbal structures preassembled for later use as natural utterances” (Smith 1978: 59). Smith uses the example of the greeting card, which provides a fictive message, written by an (unknown) author, that can then become part of natural discourse when “…it is signed ‘John and Mary’ and sent to Mrs. Jones in Cincinnati…” (Smith 1978: 58). This effect is similar to aspects of the performances of zou xikou songs. While the songs were composed in part by others and sung by others in different contexts, in a sense, when an individual singer sang those lyrics in a certain set of circumstances, he gave them a unique meaning. The performance variables that he chose, including the time (e.g. the moment when he left his wife), place (e.g. their home), audience (e.g. just his wife), and song genre (e.g. parting song), influenced in part how the performance was received. As Richard Bauman notes, the perception of the text depends on the performance “frame” (Bauman 1977: 9; cf. Goffman 1974). Smith also notes that the prefabricated utterances originally have a range of possible meanings, but “...[acquire] a particular meaning with respect to a specific context...” (Smith 1978: 59).

While it is difficult to know much about individual audience reactions to various zou xikou performances in the past, and current audiences will most certainly react differently due to changed contexts of culture and situation, Ben-Amos’ idea that aesthetic expressions reflect their “contexts of culture” is key to Chapters 3 and 4, which will look at how culturally appropriate, aesthetically powerful language has been put together in order to form expressions that conceptualize feelings involved in social realities.
While these expressions may attempt to detail aspects of social realities, they do so through people’s emotional experience of them. As to whether songs such as these seek to change the realities they describe, that is another issue. McLaren suggests, in her study of bridal laments, that while superficially, the lyrics and performance of the laments may seem to criticize the social system with an attempt to affect change, she argues that this is not the case:

The bride’s complaint was expressed in pungent colloquial language designed to convince her audience of the palpable reality of her grievance. The sheer hyperbole of the lament repertoire, the twists and turns of the bride’s ‘argument’, her flights of imagination, were not so much referential to any social reality as evocative of her emotional dilemma on departure from the home of her childhood. None of the bride’s complaints could change the reality of patrilocal marriage, nor was this her intention. What the lament performance did do was to create an intensive dramatic setting where these challenges could be rhetorically deployed. In other words, the audience watches as the bride dramatises her ‘resistance’ to patrilocal marriage while the ritual of the wedding ceremony, taking place in front of their eyes, enacted its inevitability. (McLaren 2008: 79, emphasis added)

The emphasis, clearly, is not on changing society (which, essentially, provided her with the songs), but rather on venting pent-up emotions, similar to Wang Xiangrong’s discussion of singing mentioned earlier. Certainly, the public performances of “Going Beyond the Western Pass” could have served as a periodic release valve for suppressed stress and anxiety of both zouxikou migrants and their wives. Nevertheless, at the same time there is no reason why expression of personal emotion and expression of “social criticism” have to be mutually exclusive. Perhaps there are elements of both in the songs.

34 As Holy and Stuchlik note, “...one of the essential characteristics of social reality is that it is a constituted reality...” (1981: 1).

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In his discussion of the psychology of separation, Stafford brings up Freud’s analysis of *fort* and *da* in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where he discusses “the compulsive repetition of what are presumably unpleasant experiences (e.g. when people repeatedly dream of traumatic events)” (Stafford 2000: 8). Freud sees these repetitions, in part, to be “attempts to replace a passive response to ‘unpleasure’ with mastery” (Stafford 2000: 8). In discussing how, in Freud’s example, the child creates a game to simulate the unpleasant experience of having his mother periodically leave his immediate presence, Stafford writes: “The child, rather than protesting against something which he cannot in any case control, instead symbolically replays the unpleasant experience and makes it his own” (Stafford 2000: 8). It is quite possible to see how, with the repeated performances of “Going Beyond the Western Pass” (some in which the male character returns in the end, and others where it is unknown if he will return), audiences would most likely have become more accustomed to dealing with the “unpleasure” of such separations. At the very least, they would have been able to think that “this is not just happening to me, but has also happened to many other people as well.” Perhaps such repetition served, in part, to turn private experiences and emotions into something that was socially shared. In addition, the incessant urge to repeat unpleasant experiences in an unconscious attempt to establish some mastery over them is certainly a plausible explanation of the popularity of this type of performance.

35 Freud describes a case where a child invents a game in which he throws his toys into a corner or under a bed and shouts *fort* ['gone'], later finding the toy again and pronouncing *da* ['there']. Freud suggests that the repetition of this game served to help the boy to learn to master the separation anxiety he experienced when his mother left his immediate presence (Freud 1955: 15-16).
The idea of repetition leading to a mastery over something uncontrollable is also implied in Anthony K. Webster’s work on Navajo narratives, where he notes that in Navajo curing ways “[r]epetition four times satisfies expectations and makes the utterance compelling or efficacious” (Webster 2008: 447). There seems to be a certain similarity between a shaman repeating a chant over and over to affect a cure, a child playing *fort* and *da* repeatedly to gain mastery over dealing emotionally with the departure of his mother, and repeated performances of “Going Beyond the Western Pass,” which may have both helped audience members to better deal with periodic separations from their loved ones, and, in the case of ghost festival performances for those who died “beyond the Pass,” may have been seen as attempts to reconcile the feelings of angry ghosts and allow them to “find their way” and “move on.”

The attempt at “mastery” over a situation is also in keeping with Victor Turner’s view concerning the way in which dangers that threaten to break up a social structure are often made to reinforce that structure. In his discussion of the Ndembu twinship rites, he notes:

> The raw energies released in overt symbolisms... are channeled toward master symbols representative of structural order, and values and virtues on which that order depends. Every opposition is overcome or transcended in a recovered unity, a unity that, moreover, is reinforced by the very potencies that endanger it. One aspect of ritual is shown by these rites to be a means of putting at the service of the social order the very forces of disorder that inhere in man’s mammalian constitution. (Turner 1969: 93)

By focussing on the very elements that involve the breaking-up of the social fabric (i.e. the departure of men and husbands), perhaps the frequent performances of “Going
Beyond the Western Pass” attempt to ritually locate it within the social structure. What has been recreated in fictionalized performances can no longer be said to be foreign to a society, and in this sense, perhaps the performances served as an attempt to re-appropriate what was mainly seen to be a destabilizing element that threatened the social structure.

Perhaps ironically, performances of zou xikou have come to be seen as emblematic of the region, as can be seen in terms like “xikou culture” (xikou wenhua 西口文化) (Ma and Zhang 1990: 263). This would seem to suggest that Turner was right. Elements that threaten to break down the social fabric (i.e. separation caused by going beyond the Western Pass) can be re-assimilated and used instead to reinforce that very social fabric (i.e. by serving to symbolize a regional community). The use of folk performances to reinforce group identity has been discussed by many scholars, including Toelken, who relates this to the repetition discussed earlier:

There is a something being done, performed, by someone who has done it before, for an audience of people who already know it. Their reason for doing and experiencing the performance time and time again is of course that—beyond the pleasure of entertainment—such familiar performances help to reinforce and maintain the central ideas of the group (their value centers), help to induct newcomers (children, greenhorns) into the group, help to re-experience important emotions, and help to define outsiders and strangers. (Toelken 1996: 137)36

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36 The term “value center” was coined by William A. Wilson (Wilson 1976: 46). In discussing the role of the audience in Mormon folklore, Wilson writes, “If the story is to live, [the storytellers] cannot, in the telling of it, depart too far from the value center of the audience whose approval they seek” (Wilson 1976: 46). The same adherence to the “value center” of the local population might explain the popularity of songs and performances about “going beyond the Western Pass.”
While this group identity is only one aspect of such performances, it is a key element, along with the “context of culture,” in terms of both creating and interpreting lyrics that express the complex emotions involved in separation.

2.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have examined various genres and performance contexts for songs about “going beyond the Western Pass,” providing different frames within which to interpret their lyrics. Interviews with singers suggest that singing is often perceived as a means to vent suppressed feelings, and I have proposed that the repetition of public performances of these songs has served as a channel that allowed listeners to conceptualize and gain mastery over emotions related to the separation of family members, and, at the same time, served to further assimilate the phenomenon of “going beyond the Western Pass” into mainstream society. These contexts and ways of thinking about song provide a background for the examination in the following chapter of various themes in the lyrics that reflect folk models of mutual dependence in relationships and means for dealing with danger.
CHAPTER 3
FOLK MODELS OF GENDER ROLES AND DANGER

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to understand how the songs elicit emotions, we must first look at the themes and related emotions to which they give prominence. These include both the nature of the relationship between couples, with its corresponding issues of attachment and abandonment, and the sense of peril due to the unpredictable nature of the journey, which threatens to turn a temporary separation into a permanent one.

In this chapter, I begin by examining the theme of the perceived mutual dependence between men and women, using examples from song lyrics and ethnographic interviews. I suggest that some of the underlying hostility at separation may be due to “conflicting human needs for autonomy and dependency” (Stafford 2000: 23). I then discuss threats to that dependence, namely infidelity and potentially mortal dangers encountered during travel. I relate the hazards mentioned in the songs to the idea of what might be termed “dangerous passes” (Cf. Baptandier-Berthier 1994; Bender 2001), and discuss how sections of the lyrics giving advice on ways to avoid those dangers may be an example of the use of taboos to relieve anxiety (Mullen 1978). In this way, I suggest that the song lyrics reflect a folk model for danger and how to avoid it. Lastly, I note
how, in many of the lyrics, ideas of separation and death appear to be conflated (Stafford 2000), and this combination may reflect aspects of a folk model through which separation is conceived and dealt with. I discuss Freud’s idea of the hostility directed towards the dead due to their physical absence (Freud 1946: 82), and suggest extending that concept to cases of absence due to separation as well.

3.2 SEPARATION AND MUTUAL DEPENDENCE BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

Many of the songs examined revolve around two interrelated themes—loneliness and helplessness. By examining more closely the specific occurrences of these themes, we can achieve a broader view of men’s and women’s perceived need for each other in this local, historical situation, as represented in song and drama. Through looking at the theme of loneliness, we see what they missed, which tells us what things were notably absent and thus important to their emotional well-being. Instances of helplessness, likewise, tell us of areas of their lives where they were unable to be self-sufficient, and thus were dependent on the other gender. As we will see, each gender felt “helpless” in carrying out somewhat different activities, and this may provide hints towards some of the gender roles dominant at the time.

To begin with, the loneliness of the man, as seen through various songs, seems to be a combination of longing for his home and woman, and a feeling of not having anyone
to care for him. The following song, entitled “This Place Is Not as Good as Our Nanshaliang,” makes this explicit:

乃马代德红柳老彦格巴的沙，
给了蒙古受苦怎不想家。
Naimadaide’s red willows, Laoyan’geba’s sand,
After suffering for the Mongolians, how could one not miss home?

吃了一碗饺子没喝一碗（的）汤，
这地方不如我们南沙梁。
Ate a bowl of jiaozi, didn’t drink a bowl of soup,
This place is not as good as our Nanshaliang.

前山的（个）后山拉短（哟的）工，
出门的（那）人儿（哟）谁照应。(Lü 1994: 144)
This mountain and that mountain recruit short-term labor,
But those who leave their homes—who will care for them?

In these lyrics, we see a combination of missing one’s home and feeling helpless, without anyone to take care of them. Often, thoughts of home merge with thoughts of love ones:

又（哟）想（那个）地方（哎哟哟那哎哟哟哟）又想（哎）毛眼眼人。
(Lü 1994: 157)
I miss that place ai yo yo na ai yo yo yo,
And I also miss that ai girl with the long eyelashes.

37 Nanshaliang is a place in the county of Fugu in the northeastern part of Shaanxi province.

38 Naimadaide and Laochangeba are two places in Inner Mongolia.

39 The words in parentheses in the Chinese lyrics in this song and those below are the filler words and phrases (chenzi/chenci and chenju) discussed above in the section on “Little Ditties.” In some of the translations, where convenient, I have put these in italics, to be understood as phatic exclamations, akin to an emotion-filled sigh. However, in most of the translations, I have avoided them entirely, in order to maintain a poetic flow in English.

40 Dumplings popular in northern China.
Here, nostalgia for the land is mixed with nostalgia for the woman left behind. When this feeling becomes too strong, they may decide to return:

西山嘴（呀）卧羊羊（呀）台，
丢不下妹妹反回来。 (Lü 1994: 159)
Xishanzui ya, Woyangtai,\(^{41}\)
Can’t let go of Younger Sister, I’m going back home.

The sense of loneliness and helplessness is expressed well in the following verses:

日头出来一点红，
出门人儿谁心疼。
When the sun peeks out upon the horizon, there’s only a little bit of red,
For those men who have left home, who is there to feel sorry for them?

月芽出来一点明，
出门人儿谁照应。 (Lü 1994: 122)
When the crescent moon comes out, there’s only a little bit of brightness,
For those men who have left home, who is there to take care of them?

Here, the “little bit of red” produced by the dawn sun is compared to the lack of companions available to feel compassion for the men in their day-to-day struggle while away from home. The second stanza develops this idea to include the nighttime as well. In addition to the literal meaning of having no one to attend to his daily needs, a possible double entendre implies that, as the man must now sleep alone, he has no one to “take care of him” at night.

\(^{41}\) Two places names in Houtao, Inner Mongolia.
The loneliness of the wife at home is another prominent theme:

山又（的那个）高（哎）来，路又远，
妹妹像孤雁落沙滩。（Lü 1994: 145-146)
The mountain is high and the road faraway,
Younger Sister is like a solitary wild goose alighting on a sandy beach.

我在东来你在西，
什么人留下个活分离。（Lü 1994: 145)
I’m in the East and you’re in the West,
Who else is there that experiences this “separation while still alive”?

In addition to loneliness, the wife also expresses her sense of helplessness. However, there is a difference in the helplessness experienced by men and women. The man’s helplessness is portrayed as being pitiful, the result of a cruel world that forced him to leave home. The woman has similar “helpless” verses where she asks who will take care of her, but the language she uses also serves as an indictment of her husband for abandoning her. She feels “left behind” and “thrown away” by him:

井子里打水麻绳断，
你丢下妹妹谁照管。
Getting water in the well, the hemp cord broke,
You left Younger Sister behind, who will take care of her now?

城墙底下撒豌豆，
你扔下妹妹叫谁收留。（Lü 1994: 145）
Under the city wall garden peas are scattered,
You threw away Younger Sister, now who will take her in?

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42 Implying that separation should only have to occur at death—to have it happen while still living is seen as something that no human should have to go through.
The line about the hemp cord breaking could be understood literally as describing her
difficulty in fixing things around the house (i.e. the cord in the well) during her husband’s
absence. The image of the broken cord can also be interpreted symbolically as a broken
lifeline—her ability to survive on her own has been cut short. In the second verse, the
scattered peas are a particularly striking metaphor for having herself and the “pieces of
her life” thrown away with no regard, now passively waiting to be “rescued” by someone,
and the use of peas, as a kind of seed, may imply an underlying reference to wasted
fertility.43

In addition to the sense of anger at her husband’s abandonment, there are other
aspects in the woman’s conceptualization of vulnerability that are absent in the man’s. As
we have seen thus far, the man’s idea of helplessness tends to deal with a lack of food
preparation and someone to nurse him through illnesses, and the woman’s conception
deals more with economic support and handyman services. However, in addition to these
aspects, the woman’s vulnerability also has to do with the riskiness of her status as a lone
woman. One danger is that young men may come by and bother her in her husband’s
absence. For this reason, he gives her the following advice:

再不要想哥大门上站，
灰小子过来把你看。（Lü 1994: 145）
Don’t stand at the big gate anymore when you think of me,
Those young ruffians will come look at you.

43 I would like to thank Professor Mark Bender for pointing out the latter possibility.
There was also the danger that she would be forced to remarry (Lü 1994: 86-87). Since the wife was seen to be the property of the husband’s family, her in-laws could benefit economically by selling their daughter-in-law into a new marriage. In this sense, the absent husband had more options in the realm of love and matrimony. He could either go home to her or remarry in Inner Mongolia, depending on his whim. The wife, however, might have not even been unable to remain loyal to her husband, if society and/or her in-laws intervened.

While each gender differed in their particular notions of helplessness and vulnerability, the underlying idea shared by both was that men and women cannot and/or should not live apart. In his ethnography of a rural town in northern Shaanxi province, Xin Liu discusses this perceived mutual dependence:

Men were believed to be incapable of managing a house on their own, as Wanyou explained: “A man simply cannot live by himself. How can he do those little jobs? I’m an exception because I know how to cook. Household chores have to be done by women. Women can live by themselves. They know how to do everything.” The women differed, for they believed that a woman could not survive without a man: even carrying water home from a well needed men’s physical strength. The two views coincided in their agreement that men and women must live together in order to deal with the tasks of everyday life. (Liu 2000: 77-78)

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44 The theme of a wife remarrying or being courted by others in her husband’s absence (whether willingly or unwillingly) is a common one in world literature, with the Odyssey’s Penelope as perhaps the most famous example (Cf. Heitman 2005). Similar to the case of Odysseus, there also are numerous war stories of returned soldiers encountering their wives’ fidelity challenged or compromised. In China, there are numerous poems and songs on the topic of military conscripts and their abandoned wives in such collections as the Shijing 诗经 (The Book of Songs, compiled ca. 600 B.C.E., and including poems from four and five centuries before that) and the “Nineteen Old Poems of the Han” (Eastern Han Dynasty, 25-220 C.E., first collected in the Wenxuan 文选 [Anthology of Refined Literature], compiled by Xiao Tong 萧统 [501-531]). Maija Bell Samei also notes that “...the large number of soldiers required for Tang military control of its borders... gave rise to a good number of popular songs in female voice complaining about long-absent husbands and lovers” (Samei 2004: 75).
This idea of the struggle of living on one's own is echoed in songs about the difficulties of being a bachelor (Cf. ZYXZYY 1962: 48-52). The lyrics discuss the loneliness of living alone, the difficulty of “making a home” (anshen 安身) without a wife, insomnia, etc. (ZYXZYY 1962: 49-51). One song describes the bachelor laboring all day in the fields, only to come home to cook dinner in dirty pots. In addition, a single man would most likely have to pay someone to sew clothes for him, and one song complains that these were always either too long or too short (ZYXZYY 1962: 48). A footnote adds that it was extremely difficult for single peasants to deal with both heavy labor and daily household chores (ZYXZYY 1962: 49).

In talking about their mutual need for each other, men and women often emphasize economic factors and need for shared labor. The latter coincides with Sulamith Potter’s article on “The Cultural Construction of Emotion in Rural Chinese Social Life,” where she says, “In marriages of long standing, whether successful or unsuccessful, work as a symbol of relationship is the most significant element in the villagers' evaluation of the quality of the union” (Potter 1988: 202). “The underlying assumption is that work shared means a close relationship” (Potter 1988: 205).

Xin Lisheng 辛礼生, a folksinger from Hequ, Shanxi province, provides a personal view of this in his account. He says that in Hequ, men were the main labor force, and their presence was necessary to keep things running smoothly. In fact, the men often didn’t want to go, but felt compelled to based on the extreme circumstances (Ma and Zhang 1990: 119). These ambivalent feelings about whether to go or not will be
examined later. Much of Xin's reasoning can be gleaned from the lyrics he sang to his wife when he left:

叫一声妹子你不要哭,
Tell Little Sister, don’t you cry,
哭的哥哥心难活。
If you cry, Older Brother’s heart will be distressed.
守住妹子倒也好,
Holding on to Little Sister isn’t a bad idea at all,
挣不下银钱过不了。
But without earning money, we won’t be able to survive.
再不要难活再不要哭,
Don’t be sad and don’t cry anymore,
谁家的亲亲常守着。
Who can stay by the side of their darling forever?
一对对蛤蟆并上蹿, 池
A pair of frogs hopping on the edge of a well,
哭成泪人人怎叫哥哥走。
With a face covered in tears, how can a person let Older (Ma and Zhang 1990: 119) Brother go?

According to Xin:

When I left home to go “beyond the Pass,” those at home kept crying and crying. Just like the song says, “dragging and pulling—in great distress” (yi la yi che hao nanhuo一拉一扯好难活). In Hequ, with this type of terrain, men are the main laborers, just like the main support pillars in a house. Once they are gone, the house falls apart. Therefore, women sincerely don’t want to let the men leave. In fact, the men also don’t want to leave, but they have no choice. Without money or rice, one can’t get by. If they don’t leave, how can they survive! (Ma and Zhang 1990: 119)

A woman from Nanshawa Village 南沙窝村 named Di Lan 迪兰 said,

When men are sent off, the women are the ones who suffer the most. Once the men leave, they are gone for a year. Whether they are alive or dead—we don’t even get a letter. When a woman sees off her man, she always wants to look at him just a while longer. Who knows if she will see him alive again after he leaves today? Every woman wants to accompany her man a few steps further, but they are afraid that others will make fun of them, and they are so ashamed that they are unable to. Therefore, once they have seen the man past the cave dwelling’s door, the women hurriedly scurry up to the top of the cave dwelling to watch the man
leave. They keep watching until he is gone, and then some more…” (Ma and Zhang 1990: 119)45

Di Lan’s observation that “the women are the ones who suffer the most” seems to suggest an underlying ambivalence and even hostility at the men for abandoning them. Stafford discusses the roots of such ambivalence during separation as springing from the “conflicting human needs for autonomy and dependency” (Stafford 2000: 23). He writes:

If separation is indeed a universal human dilemma or constraint, it is because humans are dependent—e.g. emotionally or economically—on others. But given our potential ambivalence about such dependency, we may have strongly conflicting desires for autonomy, i.e. for separation from those on whom we depend (cf. Freud’s ‘conflict of ambivalence’). (Stafford 2000: 23)

The emphasis on both emotional and economic dependence, as well as the strong feelings of ambivalence about such dependency seem to echo many of the emotions expressed in the song lyrics I have discussed above.

As we can see from these accounts, the feelings involved in separation are quite complex, and not easy to formulate into words. Stafford suggests that the Chinese classical poetry genre of “sending off” (song 送) “…to this day provides friends and acquaintances with appropriate ‘words of parting’ (bieci 别词)” (Stafford 2000: 3-4).46 This appears to be similar to the way zou xikou song lyrics provide appropriate words to express the complex emotions of parting couples.

45 According to a footnote: “The houses in Hequ all have flat tops. On the top, people can dry out crops. It is also where they go to relax and escape the heat. In addition, people often go there to keep a lookout. In the lyrics of mountain songs (shanqu 山曲), there are often lines that describe [women] standing on top of their houses watching for their lovers arrival” (ZYXZYY 1962: 6).

46 I have added in the characters to supplement the pinyin found in Stafford’s book.
In Xin’s case, the lyrics were necessary to negotiate the difficult contradiction between *leaving* (which superficially is a form of rejection) and *maintaining a relationship*. Myers points out that even ordinary leave-taking is “managed carefully in order to avoid giving the impression that departure represents a rejection of relations with those who remain behind” (Myers 1988: 596). Given the reasons for leaving mentioned in the songs, it appears that men like Xin often didn’t want to leave, but felt that they had to. Knowing that the woman would see it as a form of rejection, they were compelled to list all sorts of justifications (e.g. terrible droughts, the need for money and food, etc.) in order to “convince” her of the necessity that they had to leave. The woman, on the other hand, understood that they had to leave, but felt abandoned at the same time. Much of the ambivalence here often seems to have revolved around economics: While the man was going away with the hopes of bringing back much needed income, the woman, in the meantime, was left with meager food and labor resources. The man, in turn, was torn between “holding on to” his woman and going away to earn more money (Ma and Zhang 1990: 119).

While much emphasis is made in the songs for the *need* for the man to leave, there are also hints that the situation is not so black and white. For example, in one song, the woman says, “Whether you earn money or not, come back” (*zheng bu zheng qian ni huilai ba* 挣不挣钱你回来吧) (ZYXZYY 1962: 15). She also suggests that even if he doesn’t make money, they can always make due with making cheap, low quality noodles (ZYXZYY 1962: 15). The underlying emphasis seems to be that there was never a clear line of when he *had* to go beyond the Western Pass—it was always a judgement call.
As we look at more and more songs, there seems to be a stress on the fact that the man can stay away as long as he wants, contingent on his personal whim, instead of any well-defined economic necessity (ZYXZYY 1962: 17). It is also suggested that he’s really only concerned with himself (ZYXZYY 1962: 17). There seems to be a conflicting nature between the declarations of extreme poverty and the suggestions that the decision to leave was much more of a personal choice. In fact, Gottschang and Lary (2000), in their discussion of Republican period migration from Hebei and Shandong to Manchuria, suggest that “…the image of desperate migrants driven by extreme poverty was a cultural construction…” (Gottschang and Lary 2000: 7), and the reality was far more complex.

Another element of the zou xikou context is revealed in songs that talk about the man “having fun” in Baotou (the primary destination in Inner Mongolia).

西包头红火（呀）人又多，
顾了你红火（呀）忘了我。

鸽鸽鸽出窝（呀）一对对，
西包头红火（呀）没妹妹。

Baotou\(^\text{47}\) is lively ya, with lots of people,
Attending to all that liveliness ya, you forgot me.

Doves leave their nest ya, in pairs,
Among the liveliness in Baotou, Little Sister isn’t there.

(ZYXZYY 1962: 17)

What I have translated here as “liveliness” is the term honghuo 红火 (literally “red-fire”), which, as I mentioned earlier, Chau (2006) has translated as “red-hot sociality.” Given the context of the song quoted above, I believe that not only is the woman upset that her man will get to enjoy the excitement of the big city with its various forms of

\(^{47}\text{The town in Inner Mongolia where travelers would regroup and rest before heading to more distant lands in the grasslands of western Inner Mongolia. Note that “western Baotou” is another name for Baotou (ZYXZYY 1962: 17).}\)
entertainment and a high degree of “red-hot sociality,” but she also worries that he will find other women. This is explicitly stated in pieces of advice sung by the woman to her man, where she warns him not to “make friends” with other girls, and insists that they will only love him for his money, but will leave him when it is gone.

3.3 INFIDELITY

One of the most common pieces of advice sung by the woman to her man is the following:

哥哥你走西口，
万不要交朋友，
交下了（的那个）好朋友，
恐怕你忘记了奴。(Lü 1994: 195)
When you, Older Brother, leave by the Western Pass,
Don’t ever make friends,
If you make good friends,
I’m afraid you’ll forget me.

It should be noted that the term “to make friends” (jiao pengyou 交朋友) in local dialect use usually refers to making friends with the opposite sex, and often implies taking a lover (Lü 1994: 195). While in the above example, the woman uses her fear of abandonment as the reason for her man not to make friends, in other versions, she argues that things might end up badly for him as well. Here, the underlying argument is that any other “friends” would be superficial at best, merely interested in his money (or lack thereof), whereas only his wife will stick with him through thick and thin:

48 This term has also been used, at least in more recent decades, in various parts of China to refer to finding a boyfriend, girlfriend, and/or fiancé/fiancée.
Older Brother, when you go to the Western Pass,
Whatever you do, don’t make friends,
If you make a lot of friends,
I’m afraid that you will suffer in the end.
When you have money, they are your friend,
When you don’t, they’ll just stare at you blankly,
Only I, Little Sister, will be there with you till the end, will be there with you till the end.

When you pass Baotou,
Don’t make friends,
When you have money they’re your friends,
When you’re broke,
you’ll only have a pair of eyes with knitted brows looking at you;
They can’t compare with your Little Sister,
Who’ll stick with you forever.

The fear of abandonment evident in these verses emphasizes the woman’s worries that he may decide never to return, leaving her to fend for herself.

Certain hints are also present indicating that the man worries about her infidelity.

This concern seems to be present in the lyrics where he encourages her not to wait for him at the door, which I mentioned earlier:
再不要想哥大门上站，
灰小子过来把你看。 (Lü 1994: 145)
Don’t stand at the big gate anymore when you think of me,
Those young ruffians will come look at you.

In fact, this could be construed in two ways. If she indeed felt threatened by the “young ruffians,” this would indicate one aspect of her helplessness. However, this may also reflect the husband’s suspicions concerning her fidelity, similar to her suspicions of his fidelity.

These suspicions of infidelity are further nuanced when we look at other songs in the anthologies that deal with extramarital affairs, called either “making friends” (jiao pengyou 交朋友 or wei pengyou 为朋友) or “cohabiting without marrying” (da huoji 搭伙计). After the 1953 survey of the life and songs in Hequ, Shanxi province, the various scholars wrote, “This phenomenon is extremely common in Hequ, and is reflected the most in the folksongs” (ZYXZY 1962: 122-123). While they laid the majority of the blame for this “irregular” phenomenon on the “feudal marriage system,” which forced people to marry spouses that they did not love, a direct causal relationship is suggested with the “going beyond the Western Pass” phenomenon:

Since the land in Hequ was poor and barren and accumulated in the hands of a small number of landlords, the people had no means to make a decent living. Thus, every year a large number of men went “beyond the Pass” (to what was then Suiyuan province) to make a living. Some left in spring and returned in the fall, while others stayed for several years without returning. Some even left without ever coming back. All of these cases led to the separation of married couples for long periods of time. Therefore, due to feelings of emptiness or a lack of means to support themselves (in the case of the wives), situations of “making
While this text proposes a connection between “going beyond the Western pass” and extramarital arrangements, it also suggests two specific reasons for the latter: “feelings of emptiness” caused by separation, and the woman’s difficulty in supporting herself financially.49

I would suggest that both of these elements contributed to the ambiguous emotions expressed in the songs. The loneliness expresses itself in the love for, suspicion of, and anger at the man for leaving. At the same time, the contradiction between possible future wealth and the present, temporary lack of any economic support leads the woman to both struggle against and ultimately accept the man’s departure. As noted, Potter’s examination of emotion in rural Chinese social life suggests that the contribution of labor is considered crucial to the well-being of couples, and most arguments between the two involve disagreements in this area. “The conflict between the husband and the wife is not thought of in emotional terms but in terms of the symbolic significance of the capacity to work, and in relation to the economic and social contexts of the marriage” (Potter 1988: 203).

Thus, any threat to one’s capacity to work—whether infidelity or mortal danger—must be avoided. This seems to be the purpose of the advice lyrics about (1) not

49 For a humorous song about the economic benefits to be gained by “making friends” with men of different professions (baker, shepherd, etc.), see Ma 2004: 118-120.
finding a lover, mentioned above, and (2) steering clear of various perils on the road, mentioned below.

### 3.4 DANGERS EXPRESSED IN THE SONGS

The song lyrics highlight numerous worries about the dangers involved in going beyond the Western Pass. The majority of these are from the point of view of the woman, concerned about the safety of her man during his time away from home. The woman voices her concerns in the form of advice, with each of these verses usually beginning with a dual-part command in the form of “do this, don’t do that,” followed by an explanation of the logic behind this distinction. For example:

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走路走大路，
莫要走小路，
大路上人儿多，
小路上有贼寇，
大路上人儿多，
小路上有贼寇。(YDW 1983: 73)
When you are walking, take big roads, 
Don’t walk on little roads. 
On big roads there are many people, 
On little roads there are bandits. 
On big roads there are many people, 
On little roads there are bandits.
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In each case, she begins by making a statement of what he should do (i.e. take big roads, eat hot food, etc.). She then follows by condemning the opposite action (i.e. taking small roads, eating cold food, etc.), which serves to reiterate the first notion, while further suggesting a danger associated with not heeding her advice. The last section of the verse
provides the reasoning behind the line drawn between the approved and the prohibited: If he walks on the big road, there will be many other fellow travelers, and he will be safe. If, on the other hand, he chooses to walk on a little road, he exposes himself to the danger of theft and murder at the hand of bandits that roam the countryside.

In the end, from the point of view of the listener, this type of reasoning is quite effective as a logical argument. If the man does what she suggests, taking big roads, then nothing untowardly will happen. However, if he goes against her prohibitions and does what she says not to, taking small roads, disaster will certainly befall him.

By looking at the pieces of advice in various song versions, we gain a clearer understanding of the perceived dangers of going beyond the Western Pass. This mélange of dangers, in turn, provides a contextual backdrop for much of the anxiety that fuels the songs. While the majority of the dangers described appear to be historically based, others suggest aspects of various folk beliefs concerning the supernatural. Broadly grouped, the various perils mentioned, in addition to the “heart-stealers” discussed earlier, can mainly be placed in the following categories: bandits, illness, and accidents.

### 3.4.1 BANDITS

As mentioned above, one of the main hazards in traveling by foot to and from Inner Mongolia were bandits who would lie in wait for travelers. Ma and Zhang interviewed a veteran zou xikou migrant, Liu Zhao 刘招, who said that, at that time, many bandits would hang around the border of Shanxi province and Inner Mongolia.

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50 For more information on bandits in this area, see Wang and Zhao 2008.
preying on those *zou xikou* migrants that had come back with money (Ma and Zhang 1990: 94). They would steal your things and strip you of your clothes. In order to protect themselves, men would often travel in groups of several tens of people in order to come back safely. Even so, they were sometimes attacked by bandits. As Ma and Zhang interviewed this man, a government official listening to the interview noted that his father was killed by bandits when he was two. The banding together of men to travel safely beyond the Western Pass and back is mentioned in the *errentai* drama of “Going Beyond the Western Pass.” The reason that Taichun feels the urgent need to leave that very same day is, in fact, because a group of fellow villagers are forming a band to travel together (YDW 1983: 446).

In the verse quoted earlier, bandits are seen to infest smaller roads, while bigger roads are seen to be more crowded and thus safer. Another verse gives the following reasoning: “On big roads, there are many people. Talking and laughing you can relieve each other’s worries” (YDW 1983: 63). While the “worries” mentioned probably also concerned the destitute conditions of their families and concerns about finding work, worries about bandits also seem to be implied. Thus, by traveling in groups and “talking and laughing” with each other, the men could reduce their worries about being attacked.

In addition to travel on the road, their choice of sleeping accommodations were also influenced by the threat of bandits. The women warn:

歇店歇大店，
再不要歇小店，
大店里人马多，
不怕那贼娃子。(Lü 1994: 191-192)
Stay in big inns, not small ones,
In big inns there are many people and horses,
You don’t have to worry about thieves.

Ironically, picking the right inn is not enough to keep the ever-present thieves at bay:

睡覺你睡当中，
万莫要睡两边，
操心那挖墙贼，
挖到你跟前。(Lù 1994: 199)
Sleep in the middle of the bed,
Not on the sides,
Careful, lest a “wall-digging thief” dig his way in to you.

The term “wall-digging thief” may seem rather bizarre. However, Arthur H. Smith, in his late nineteenth century discussion of the variety of ways that thieves in rural Chinese villages would break into houses, mentions that the padlocks used were not of good quality, and could “…generally be picked with a wire, a chop-stick, or even with a dry weed, and afford no real protection” (Smith 1899: 28). He also adds: “Nothing is easier than to dig through adobe walls. In some of the rich villages of Shan-hsi [Shanxi] house-walls are built quite six feet thick to discourage such penetration” (Smith 1899: 28).

3.4.2 ILLNESS

Besides bandits, another major concern was illness. The particularly threatening aspect of this worry seems to have been the fact that there would be no one to nurse the lone man back to health, unlike at home. Here, the woman’s concern that her man would fall sick and die while away is shown in the following verses of advice. An underlying
theme seems to be men’s inability to take care of themselves without the help of women, as discussed earlier.

睡觉要睡滚炕，
万不要睡冷炕，
睡了冷抗得下病，
谁是你递汤端水的人。(Lü 1994: 197)
When you sleep, sleep on a hot kang, 51
Never sleep on a cold kang,
Sleeping on a cold kang will make you sick,
And who will be there to bring you soup and hot water?

吃饭要吃滚饭，
万不要吃冷饭，
吃了冷饭得了病，
谁是你的疼心人。(Lü 1994: 197)
When you eat, eat hot food,
Never eat cold food,
Eating cold food will make you sick,
And who will be there to care for you?

Lastly, even the type of water to be drunk is specified, although the reference to the dragon’s tail is somewhat ambiguous:

喝水要喝长流水，
万莫要喝泉眼水，
怕的是泉眼水，
泉眼水里龙摆尾。(Lü 1994: 199)
Drink river water,
Not water from a spring,
The dragon moves its tail in spring water.

51 A traditional brick bed used in northern China, which has a flue built into it, and can be heated from within during the winter months.
Another version has it as “the snake moves its tail” (quanyanshui shang she bai wei 泉眼水上蛇摆尾) (He and Zhang 1952: 93). While it is possible that this is merely practical advice about avoiding snakes that live in or near springs, one is also reminded of the Dragon King (who presides over water in its multifarious forms) and was said to inhabit rivers and other bodies of water. According to Norman Douglas, there is an association between dragons and springs in many places around the world, springing from the spring’s resemblance to an eye (Douglas 1956: 103-104).

And inasmuch as an eye presupposes a head, and a head without body is hard to conceive, a material existence was presently imputed to that which looked upwards out of the liquid depths. This... is the primordial dragon, the archetype. (Douglas 1956: 104)

Due to this connection, there are various languages around the world that use eyes to describe fountains, and furthermore, “[t]here are fountain dragons in Japan, in the superstitions of Keltic races, in the Mediterranean basin” (Douglas 1956: 104). In China, the mouth of a spring is referred to as “the eye of the spring” (quanyan 泉眼), and Qiguang Zhao notes that “[t]here are many Chinese place names combining the word dragon with the word spring: Longquan (Dragon Spring), Longquanchi (Pool of Dragon

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52 According to Douglas, the association of dragons and serpents with water is common in southern Italy as well, due to the resemblance of meandering rivers to snakes (Douglas 1956: 102).

53 “In Italy, for example, two springs in the inland sea near Taranto are called ‘Occhi’—eyes; Arabs speak of a watery fountain as an eye; the notion exists in England too—in the ‘Blentarn’ of Cumberland, the blind tarn (tarn = a trickling of tears), which is ‘blind’ because dry and waterless, and therefore lacking the bright lustre of the open eye” (Douglas 1956: 104).
Spring), Longquansi (Temple of Dragon Spring), and Longquanguan (Pass of Dragon Spring), etc.” (Zhao 1992: 114).

As to the significance of these dragons, Douglas suggests that they are “…the personification of the life within the earth—of that life which, being unknown and uncontrollable, is eo ipso hostile to man” (Douglas 1956: 103), and that the image of the dragon “…ultimately received a concrete form from that innate craving on the part of humanity to give a poetic or pictorial image to its hopes and fears” (Douglas 1956: 105). This idea of using a concrete image to conceptualize abstract notions of the unknown is congruent with the discussion below of the folk model of danger.

3.4.3 ACCIDENTS

Perhaps due to the rough geographical terrain involved, including rocky precipices and rushing rivers, accidents were another common cause of death. One of the more unusual types of disaster involved being buried alive while attempting to dig out large licorice roots (gancao 甘草) which could be sold for use in traditional Chinese medicine. Ma and Zhang interviewed a man, Han Hudan 韩虎旦, who did this kind of work, excavating licorice roots in the barren sands of Inner Mongolia. According to Han, the thickest ones were as big as an adult’s arm. It was very dangerous to dig them up, since the hole had to be dug deeper than the height of a house, and the sandpit would often collapse, burying the man inside. Han tells the story of one fellow laborer who died

54 Zhao also mentions “a great number of cults and rites connected with various springs, streams and rivers throughout history” at various places around the world, all of which are based, in part, “…on the manifestation of a presence in springs” (Zhao 1992: 113).
in such a manner. Hence the saying: “Going beyond the Great Wall to dig up roots—digging your own grave” (zou kouwai tao genzi, zi da mukeng 走口外掏根子, 自打墓坑) (Ma and Zhang 1990: 144).

In addition, river travel and crossing brought with it the implicit danger of drowning. As mentioned in Chapter One, one of the routes of “going beyond the Western Pass” included taking boats to Ningxia. In addition, those men who walked from Shanxi province had to cross the Yellow River in order to reach Inner Mongolia via Shaanxi. There are numerous bits of advice concerning taking boats and fording across rivers. When crossing a river, one is encouraged to do so in groups, or to wait until others have “tested the waters” first:

......过河你（这）有渡口，
水深深（那个）水浅浅（呀），
总叫人家头边走。(Lü 1994: 196-197)
...Crossing a river, there are places to pass,
No matter if the water is deep or shallow,
Ask others to go first.

随人过江河，
万莫要独自过，
江河里水长流，
操心水推得。(Lü 1994: 199)
Cross rivers with others, never alone,
Rivers flow along great distances,
Careful lest they carry you away.

If one must take a boat, the same rule of “letting others die first” applies. Similar to common mining practices of using a canary to detect toxic fumes, in a potentially
dangerous, unknown environment, the safest rule of thumb seems to be to use someone else to “test the waters”:

坐船坐二船，
再不要坐头船，
头船上（的）水花大，
小心翻里去。 (Lü 1994: 191-192)
When taking a boat, take the second one, 
Not the first, 
The water in front of the first is choppy, 
Be careful lest the boat capsize.

坐船你要坐船后，
万莫要坐船头，
船头上风浪大，
操心掉到水里头。(Lü 1994: 199)
Sit at the back of the boat,  
Not at the front; 
There are big waves at the front—careful lest you fall in.

In addition to death by drowning, falling off a cliff was another “accident waiting to happen”:

歇脚你歇小崖，
万莫要歇大崖，
操心那千年石，
单等仇人来。(Lü 1994: 199)
When resting your feet, choose a small cliff, 
Don’t rest on a big cliff. 
Be careful of the 1,000-year-old rocks, 
They are just waiting for enemies to come.

While the first two lines seem logical enough, one may wonder why one has to rest on a cliff in the first place. Surely there are safer places? The last two lines seem particularly
perplexing at first glance, with the “1,000-year-old rocks... waiting for enemies to come.” What is meant here is not readily clear, although some aspect of the supernatural seems to be implied. This example will be discussed further below.

3.5 THE CONCEPT OF DANGER AND THE MEANS OF OVERCOMING IT

As we have seen above, the many dangers that confronted those who walked beyond the Western Pass included death by starvation, getting lost in the desert, robbers, illness, freezing to death, drowning in a river, falling off a cliff, and being buried alive while attempting to dig out licorice roots used in traditional Chinese medicine, among others. We have also seen the format of the “advice” used in an attempt to avoid these dangers.

In terms of pure geography, one of the major physical dangers in walking beyond the Western Pass was getting lost in the Kubuqi Desert in the northern part of the Ordos Plateau in Inner Mongolia. According to Yang Hong, people saw this as a “Devil’s Gate Pass,” or guimenguan 鬼门关 (Yang 2006: 39). While this term is now commonly used to refer to any potentially dangerous situation, one of its traditional uses was in childhood protection rites known as “Crossing the Barriers” or “Crossing the Passes” (guoguan 过关 or kaiguan 开关). In various parts of China, a child’s life until the age of twelve was traditionally seen to be especially prone to disasters. Hence, these “crossing the barriers” rites were performed in places like northern Shaanxi each year at temple festivals, in order to pray for the protection and health of at-risk children (Tian 2005: 123-124). The “barriers” or guan 关, vary in number depending on locality, and generally refer to
different types of dangers and ways to avoid them. For example, the “barrier of the burning soups” warns one to be careful of burns. The “barrier of the water holes” warns one to be careful around old wells. The “barrier of the copper snake” warns of the danger of measles. While many of these are based on common sense, others verge on the supernatural. For the “barrier of the night cries,” one is advised not to make a fire at night, as this may upset the demons and the dead. The “barrier of the flying rooster” can be avoided by making sure not to look at the killing of living beings. For the “barrier of the 1000 days,” a child should not see the maternal grandmother during the first 1000 days after birth—perhaps rather unfortunate for the maternal grandmother. For the “barrier of the five demons,” one should avoid graves and coffins (Baptandier-Berthier 1994: 542-543). The list goes on and on, but these examples provide a general idea.

The concept of danger as envisioned in these “barriers” (guan) appears to be rather culturally specific. People seem to envision different dangers almost as separate entities looming about, waiting for the weak to fall into their clutches. A key idea here are the “demons of the barrier” or guansha 神煞. According to Baptandier-Berthier, “[t]he sha 神 is, indeed, an impulse, ...which can be dangerous, if not lethal, when gone against” (Baptandier-Berthier 1994: 539). The important thing to remember about these “barriers,” however, is that once they have been passed through, they are no longer a

55 The etymology of the character guan is as follows: It originally meant a “door bolt,” and then was extended to mean “to close” and later “to confine someone as punishment.” Another meaning is “strategic spot,” often referring to physical passes between geographical areas (Cihai 词海, 1989 ed., s.v. “guan 关”).

56 The way that “barrier demons” provide personalization for the passes seems related to Douglas’s discussion of dragon imagery, where he mentions “that innate craving on the part of humanity to give a poetic or pictorial image to its hopes and fears” (Douglas 1956: 105).
threat. Thus, in the “crossing the barriers” rituals, the barriers are named and then ritually crossed over. The chants that accompany the rite say, in effect, that “...under the protection of the spirits, the child has already crossed every kind of barrier, and the evil barrier demons and calamities can no longer befall him/her. He/she will have a peaceful, safe life, full of good luck and prosperity” (Gao 2005: 8).

In this way, such a ritual might be seen as something akin to a vaccination, in that a danger is confronted under buffered circumstances, and a lasting positive alternative that serves to permanently avoid the danger is put into play. We can see this process in the following excerpt of a ritual chant from Shaanxi province, sung by Liu Youcai 刘有财 and Liu Xiaoyi 刘晓义:

过关谣

蛋蛋娃，过关来， 过来了， 过来了，
汪汪汪，仓仓仓， 哈巴狗娃咬和尚，
汪汪汪，仓仓仓， 咬的饥了吃麻糖，
咬的渴了喝凉凉。

(淳化县-刘有财、刘晓义) (SSDBW 2000: 450)

Ballad for Crossing the Barrier*

Little baby, come cross the barrier; he’s passed it, he’s passed it,
Wang wang wang, cang cang cang, the Pekinese dog bites the Buddhist monk,
Wang wang wang, cang cang cang, if it bites when it’s hungry, it can eat sesame candy,
If it bites when it’s thirsty, it can drink something cool.

(Chunhua county, Shaanxi province)
Here, in the second line, we have the potential calamity—the monk being bitten. If the imagery here seems a little odd, one should note that both Pekinese dogs and Buddhist monks figure frequently in Chinese children’s rhymes. After we are confronted with this potential danger, we are then offered two positive alternatives where the disaster is avoided—if the dog is biting out of hunger, give it candy instead; if it is doing so because it’s thirsty, give it something cool to drink. Thus, by identifying the danger and offering positive solutions on how to avoid it, the child has now “passed the barrier.”

As one can see, this process seems quite similar to the advice lyrics in the songs about “walking beyond the Western Pass.” There are potential dangers, such as cold food making one sick, the danger of drowning while crossing a river, and bandits that lie in wait on small roads and in little inns. Then, there are various prescriptions for how to avoid these disasters: eat hot food, wait for others to cross the river first, and make sure to only take big roads and stay in big inns. In addition, now when we consider the “1,000-year-old rocks lying in wait for enemies,” we can see that it may be a reference to the demon of that particular barrier. Again, to repeat Baptandier-Berthier’s definition, it is the “personalization of the pass itself,” the dangerous impulse that can be lethal when gone against (Baptandier-Berthier 1994: 539).

Before continuing, I must stress that the lyrics of these songs most likely have multiple levels of meaning. On one level, the lyrics show the woman’s love and care for her man, providing practical advice that she hoped would ensure his safety and quick return. On another level, when he was already gone, these songs could be also be used to allay her fears about his well-being. Here, we may remember Di Lan’s comment about
not receiving a single letter while her husband was away for a year, and not knowing whether he was dead or alive (Ma and Zhang 1990: 119). If she worried about something happening to him or didn’t know where he was, perhaps by addressing this danger through song and then singing out a positive solution where he avoids that danger, she could help to alleviate her anxiety. Scholars such as Patrick B. Mullen have already written about this connection between taboos and reducing anxiety. In his discussion of taboos among Gulf Coast fishermen, Mullen says:

Knowing that he has not violated any of these taboos, the fisherman loses some of his anxieties. If one of the multitude of taboos is broken, he then has a ready explanation for what does befall him, and in explaining and making concrete the mysterious and unknowable, taboos again relieve some anxiety. (Mullen 1978: 7)

On yet another level, the man out in Inner Mongolia might find solace for his loneliness and worries by conjuring up images of his wife’s loving care through these songs. While additional fieldwork is necessary to flesh out a more complete picture of the emotions expressed through the songs, here I have examined one particular aspect—what seems to be a culturally-learned way of confronting danger. While traditionally, the hazardous liminal period of childhood in this region may have been thought to end at the age of twelve, it seems that the trauma of being forced to leave the security of one’s family and go beyond the Western Pass, in effect, reintroduced the feeling of danger and uncertainty once again. Just as Mark Bender, in his work on child protection rites in the lower Yangtze Delta, has noted how a “safe path” is envisioned for the child during the

ceremony, the woman’s advice in the songs we have seen also serves to envision a safe path for the man during his travels (Bender 2001: 117). In both cases, we have the image of a perilous journey with various obstacles, and it seems understandable that the methods used to confront those obstacles on the journey to adulthood might also have been adapted for the journey to the distant regions “beyond the Western Pass.”

As a complement to this folk model of danger, in the next section, I examine aspects of a folk model of separation. Just as the sense of danger perceived in going beyond the Western Pass may be related to danger in other contexts (i.e. childhood, marriage, etc.), the concept of separation, as outlined in the songs, often seems similar to death.

3.6 AMBIGUITY OF DEATH AND ABSENCE

As mentioned above, women like Di Lan often didn’t know whether their husbands were dead or alive (Ma and Zhang 1990: 119), and this ambiguity sometimes was reflected in the song lyrics. The sense of abandonment that one feels in cases of separation and death is often similar (Stafford 2000). One song that highlights the resemblance between abandonment due to infidelity and abandonment due to death is “Engaged at Thirteen, Married at Fourteen” (also called “Father-in-Law Sells His Son’s Wife”), which tells a poignant story of being forced to remarry when it was unclear whether the husband who had left for the Western Pass would ever return:

十三岁上定亲十四岁上引，Engaged at thirteen, married at fourteen,
十五岁守寡到了如今。 “Widowed” at fifteen, and ever since.
My man was sixteen, At seventeen, he ran off to the Western Pass.

Went to the Western Pass and made new friends, (You) sold your conscience and didn’t come back.

Father-in-law has it in his mind to sell his daughter-in-law. Even said his daughter-in-law didn’t show filial obedience.

There is an obvious ambiguity between the first and third verses with regards to whether the husband is now dead, or has run off with another woman. It can be assumed that in many cases the husband’s ultimate destiny was not known—he had simply “left for the Western Pass” and was now lost.

The blending together of death and separation is a common phenomenon described in Stafford’s *Separation and Reunion in Modern China*. Stafford suggests that “...death... is routinely conflated... with separation” (Stafford 2000: 6). At a fundamental level, both cases (death and separation) involve “not seeing” the person, and certainly in many instances of separation, it is unclear whether the person is still alive or not.

Stafford posits that the connections mentioned here have to do with extensions of childhood notions. He says that for most young children and young adults, “...death remains a relatively unfamiliar and incomprehensible matter, and one which is routinely conflated by them with separation” (Stafford 2000: 6). He argues that this conflation is carried over and developed into adult emotional responses:

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58 Referring to her husband.
...[W]hen adults eventually grapple with key emotional dilemmas, including both
the problems of love (i.e. the emotions of romantic attachment) and the problems
of death (i.e. the emotions of grief and mourning), they arguably do so via their
previous, i.e. infantile, grasp of separation. (Stafford 2000: 7)

While the specific means by which adults deal with separation, romantic attachment, and
mourning will undoubtedly be unique, the point that I would like to emphasize here is
that ways of dealing with one of them may be metaphorically extended to another. This
idea seems to be supported in the following two song excerpts—the first sung by a
widow to her deceased husband, and the second by a woman to her man who has gone
beyond the Western Pass. In both cases, the emphasis is placed on the man’s selfishness
in going by himself and his failure to take care of her properly:

你（啦）走（啦）阴曹（啦）你管你，
扔下我（啦）在世上（啦）活受罪（呀亲亲）。(ZYXZYY 1962: 53)
When you la go to la hell la,
You [just] care for yourself,
You abandon me la in this world la,
To live a hellish life ya qinqin.

你走在口外（呀）只管了你，
扔下了妹妹（呀）无人理。（ZYXZYY 1962: 17)
When you go beyond the Pass ya,
You just look out for yourself,
You’ve abandoned Little Sister ya,
Without anyone to take care of her.

In both cases, the woman expresses open hostility at the man for abandoning her. The
anger expressed is similar to what Freud says the living feel toward the recently
deceased: “A dead person is defenceless, which must act as an incitement to satisfy
hostile desires entertained against him” (Freud 1946: 82). In the same way, the absent husband is also defenseless, and the ambivalence between the wife’s subconscious hostility at the husband and her love and concern for him may also have led her to envision the numerous disasters, in the advice lyrics mentioned earlier, from which he (narrowly) escapes in the songs.

In addition to the similarity between the two songs above, there are also songs that explicitly compare separation to the experience of widows, and even suggest that the women in the former cases are “widowed while [their man is] still alive”:

你（啦）走（啦）口（啦）外我在家，
你打（那）光（啦）棍（啦）我守寡。(ZYXZYY 1962: 13)
You are walking beyond the Western Pass and I’m at home,
You are a widower and I a widow.59

In another song that criticizes a husband for being either physically or emotionally absent (it is a bit ambiguous), the wife is referred to as “remaining a widow while [her husband is] still alive” (huo shougua 活守寡) (ZYXZYY 1962: 34).

The comparing and contrasting of separation due to absence and separation due to death also finds example in classical Chinese poetry. This theme is highlighted in the following excerpt from a poem by Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770), entitled “Dreaming of Li Bai” (“Meng Li Bai” 梦李白), where death is seen as something that can eventually be dealt with emotionally, while separation is conceptualized as an extended state of limbo:

59 The term guanggun 光棍 can mean either “bachelor” or “widower,” depending on context. The rest of the song describes how the man abandoned her, and details all of the burdens she encounters in her difficult life.
After the separation of death, one can eventually swallow back one’s grief; but the separation of the living is an endless, unappeasable anxiety. (Hawkes 1967: 87ff)

We find similar sentiments in the following folksongs from northern Shaanxi:

哥哥走呀妹子拉，
死好分离活难离...... (Ma and Zhang 1990: 116)
Older Brother is leaving ya, Little Sister holds onto him,
At death it is easy to part, but while still living it is difficult...

我在东来你在西，
什么人留下个活分离。(Lü 1994: 145)
I’m in the East and you’re in the West,
Who else is there that experiences this “separation while still alive”?\(^{60}\)

These lyrics seem to support Stafford’s discussion of the extension of “previous, i.e. infantile, grasp[s] of separation” in dealing with “the problems of death” (Stafford 2000: 7). He also hypothesizes that “...the existential constraint of death... is merely a subset of the existential constraint of separation...” (Stafford 2000: 1). While this may or may not be the case, given that the average individual undergoes the repeated experience of separation more often than dealing with the deaths of others, it seems to make sense that one would use the more common experience (i.e. separation) to deal with the less common (i.e. death).

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\(^{60}\) See footnote 42 on page 71.
3.7 CONCLUSION

By looking at expressions of the themes of mutual dependence, danger, and separation in the songs, we can gain insight into many aspects of the life experiences that those who went beyond the Western Pass and their loved ones met with. We see both how notions of gender relations are expressed in a popular folk form and how a folk model of danger is conceived, which, in turn, is linked to the way attempts are made to reduce anxiety surrounding that danger.

In the next chapter, I examine metaphors in the lyrics both symbolize and provide a conceptual framework for the emotional experience of going beyond the Western Pass.
4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I examine several metaphors used in the song lyrics, and look at how the songs form concrete, tangible ways of describing abstract concepts—a process which also reflects local ways of thinking. By nature, songs are an artistic endeavor, and often attempt to formulate (often vague) emotions into both effective and aesthetically pleasing forms of expression. The challenge to be faced in the case of popular songs portraying the separation involved in going beyond the Western Pass seems to be to convey particularly complex and often ambiguous emotions in succinct, easily understandable lyrics that are able both to assimilate and suggest to the audience

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61 Others have suggested the use of analyzing metaphorical images in folklore in order to discern underlying conceptual frameworks. Jan Harold Brunvand, discussing the use of animal imagery in American folklore, writes:

Scholarly work by American folklorists demonstrates that, throughout our history, symbolic uses of distinctively American wild animals have expressed national attitudes about such crucial matters as politics, race, gender, sex, and danger. (Brunvand 1996: 32)

While in this chapter I use the ideas of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and others to examine how metaphors provide and reflect conceptual frameworks for thinking about and experiencing emotions, the construction of those metaphors can be thought of as being built on “traditional metaphors” with their “culture-based connotations” (Toelken 1996: 395). In addition, the tendency to express such emotions through metaphor appears to stem from the inclination of humans “to give a poetic or pictorial image to [their] hopes and fears,” mentioned earlier (Douglas 1956: 105).
certain generalized, culturally-grounded emotions and ways of understanding this phenomenon of separation.

Below, I discuss three sets of images, which I believe are used in the songs as metaphors to describe various aspects of the separation experience. Following Lakoff and Johnson (1980), I look at how the metaphorical images are “grounded”—how they “...conceptualize the nonphysical in terms of the physical... the less clearly delineated in terms of the more clearly delineated” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 59). In this way, the images serve to borrow aspects of tangible objects to characterize similar aspects conceived in more abstract emotions and ideas.

Understanding our experiences in terms of objects and substances allows us to pick out parts of our experience and treat them as discrete entities or substances of a uniform kind. Once we can identify our experiences as entities or substances, we can refer to them, categorize them, group them, and quantify them—and, by this means, reason about them. (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 25)

In this way, these metaphorical expressions serve, in part, to provide a language through which to talk about, and deal with the numerous issues involved in separation, as well as a framework within which to conceptualize what is happening. Lévi-Strauss has emphasized the ability of such provision of language to alleviate anxiety and even to affect somatic functioning. In his key example, he describes a case where the chants of a Native American shaman from the Cuna of Panama brought about relief for a woman caught in the midst of a difficult labor:

The shaman provides the sick woman with a language, by means of which unexpressed, and otherwise inexpressible, psychic states can be immediately
expressed. And it is the transition to this verbal expression—at the same time making it possible to undergo in an ordered and intelligible form a real experience that would otherwise be chaotic and inexpressible—which induces the release of the physiological process, that is, the reorganization, in a favorable direction, of the process to which the sick woman is subjected. (Lévi-Strauss 1967: 374)

This idea of “making it possible to undergo in an ordered and intelligible form a real experience that would otherwise be chaotic and inexpressible” appears to describe both Lakoff and Johnson’s conception of part of the function of metaphors and my discussion of the way that metaphorical expressions in “going beyond the Western Pass” songs provide a structured means through which to think and feel about separation.

Briefly, the three groups of metaphors include (1) WANDERING MEN ARE OBJECTS FLOATING IN THE WIND, (2) MALE-FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS ARE A STRING, and (3) PASSES (KOU □) ARE LIMINAL, DANGEROUS PLACES THAT SEPARATE INSIDE FROM OUTSIDE.62 While there are certainly other metaphors to be found in the songs, I believe that these three are both prominent and serve to outline the key features that are meant to be expressed through the lyrics. Incidentally, they seem to coincide with Victor Turner’s (1969) notion of structure and anti-structure (metaphors #2 and #1 respectively), and the liminality that both separates and connects them (metaphor #3). In the following, I examine each metaphor group individually, in order to discern which aspects of separation they are meant to describe.

Lakoff and Johnson propose that one of the characteristics of metaphors is “partial structuring,” by which they mean the “use of certain selected parts” of one concept to

62 I have chosen to follow Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) style of putting conceptual metaphors in all capital letters.
apply to another (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 84). Thus, for them there are certain “used” and “unused” parts of the metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 52). In examining the three metaphor groups, I will attempt to look at the various contexts in which each type of metaphor is found in order to further specify which aspects of the metaphors are “used” and thus relevant to the way that separation is conceptualized.

4.2 OBJECTS FLOATING IN THE WIND

In songs about “going beyond the Western Pass,” there are several metaphorical images referring to the aimlessness of wandering men. Many of these use objects floating in the wind, including tumbleweeds, rootless plants, and birds. While the specific connotations associated with each type of object (and even perhaps each species of bird) are different, they all seem to be grounded in the conceptual metaphor “FREEDOM IS UP” (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 149). That is to say, while the metaphors range from signifying passive aimlessness to active wandering to the loneliness of a traveler to yearning for one’s home, they all share the underlying notion of unpredictable movement inherent to objects that float in the air.

In the following song, entitled “Where Will the Rootless Tumbleweed End Up?” (“Wugen shapeng wang na luo” 无根沙蓬往那落), we see numerous metaphors for the “rootless” aspect of migrant farm-workers and field hands:

63 Lakoff and Turner use examples such as “rise up and cast off your chains” and “keeping someone down” to suggest that freedom is metaphorically up. This is also linked to the conceptual metaphor “BEING CONTROLLED IS BEING KEPT DOWN,” which will be discussed in the next section (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 149).
There are three main images in this song, including the fox running around looking for its resting place, a tumbleweed blown around without direction, and wild geese flying home and calling out, only to find the leaves falling off the trees. The latter two occur frequently in several songs, and both use the image of objects floating about unpredictably in the wind.

What I have translated as “tumbleweeds” (shapeng 沙蓬) refer to weeds that grow in desert areas in the land to the north of the Great Wall, whose roots wither during the tenth lunar month, causing them to roll up into a ball when blown by the wind.
Many of the songs use this image in describing the aimlessness of a wandering man. Carried by the wind, the tumbleweeds are passive agents in terms of the direction they go and where they end up, and these notions of passivity and insecurity are used to describe the traveling men.

十月的沙蓬（咱那）无根（哟）草，
哪里（哟）挂住（咱那）那里（哟）好。
The tumbleweed in the tenth month is a grass without roots, Wherever it can hang on to will have to do.

十月的沙蓬（咱那）刮在（哟）沟，
没老婆的哥哥（咱那）谁收（哟）留。
The tumbleweed in the tenth month blows into the ravine, An Older Brother without a wife—who will take him in?

十月的沙蓬（咱那）滚成（哟）蛋，
光棍汉回家（咱那）难存（哟）站。
The tumbleweed in the tenth month rolls up into a ball, A bachelor returns home, it’s hard to stand still.

十月的沙蓬（咱那）满滩（哟）抛，
光棍汉回家（咱那）难睡（哟）觉。
The tumbleweed in the tenth month is tossed around the open spaces, A bachelor returns home, tossing and turning—he cannot sleep.

64 The tenth lunar month is also presumably around the time after the harvest is over when the men are free to return home from Inner Mongolia.

65 There are also instances of such metaphorical uses in classical Chinese poetry. In Gufeng #52 (Gufeng qi wushi’er 古风其五十二), Li Bai 李白 (701-762) laments the aimlessness of “autumn tumbleweeds”:

不忍看秋蓬
飘扬竟何訖
It’s unbearable to see the autumn tumbleweeds
Wheel aimlessly, nowhere to light. (Varsano 2003: 169, italics in original)

In another poem, entitled “Seeing Off a Friend” (Song youren 送友人), there seems to be a direct association with tumbleweeds and travelers:

此地一为别，孤蓬万里征。 (Liu 1991: 389)
Here we part, the lone tumbleweed travels ten-thousand li. (My translation)
It is interesting to note that, in both Chinese and English, itinerancy is referred to metaphorically as being “rootless.” In addition, the term “rootless” in Chinese (wugen 无根) may have another meaning in relation to the local term for progeny, which is literally “posterior roots” (hougenr 后根儿) (Ma and Zhang 1990: 61). Certainly, the connection between wandering and a lack of an established family seems logical. Aside from tumbleweeds, other “rootless” images are used to convey a similar meaning:

青石板上栽（那）葱扎不个（个）根，
十七岁上跑口外（亲亲）到如（那个）今。 (ZYXZYY 1962: 24)
Planting onions on black slabstone, they can’t tie down their roots,
At seventeen I started going beyond the Pass, and have done so ever since.

In each of these images of rootless plants, several aspects of meaning that are transferred to the wandering man include the difficulty in standing still, the unknown future fate and destination, passivity in terms of deciding one’s fate, and the inability to rest one’s body, mind, and spirit.

Like the tumbleweeds and loose onions, various bird images, which also float in the wind, are used to describe the nature of wandering men, although they hold different connotations. Earlier, we saw the imagery of wild geese returning home to find the
leaves falling off trees, and crying out. We also find lone birds used as metaphors for the emotional unease of solitary men.\textsuperscript{66}

“\textquotesingle\textquotesingle A lone goose descending on the sand\textquotesingle\textquotesingle is a set topic used by such poets as Du Fu. Alfreda Murck, in discussing Du Fu’s use of the wild goose image, writes:

\begin{quote}
A wild goose separated from his flock is a man cut off from valued friends; this ominous image signified a world suddenly lonely and hostile. A solitary wild goose loses not only the fellowship of kindred souls but also his moorings to society and the status conferred on him by the community. (Murck 2000: 77)
\end{quote}

Thus, even at an early date, we have similar comparisons being made between lone wild geese and lonely human travelers cut off from their social support system.\textsuperscript{67}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{66} We have already seen an example of a song, mentioned in Chapter 3, where a lone goose is used metaphorically to describe the emotions of a solitary woman:

\textsuperscript{67} Murck translates the following poem by Du Fu, entitled “Lone Goose” (\textit{Guyan 孤雁}), as an example:
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Wild goose, alone, neither eats nor drinks; 孤雁不饮啄  
It flies crying out, voice longing for the flock. 飞鸣声念群  
Who is it pities that single shadow 谁怜一片影  
Now lost in a thousand folds of cloud? 相失万重云  
Gaze as far as you can—as if still in sight. 望尽似犹见  
Many calls of lament—as though still heard. 哀多如更闻  
Crows of the wilderness pay it no heed— 野鸦无意绪  
They squawk and caw in their multitudes. 鸣噪自纷纷  
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
For a discussion of the image of wild geese in poems dating from the \textit{Shijing} through Du Fu’s times, see Murck 2000: 74-82.
\end{quote}
In the following song, the man is compared to a wild sparrow (ye queque 野雀), which is perhaps a bird with a different connotation:

野雀雀 (唔哪)飞在 (那) 半 (个) 坡坡上，
你走了 (那个) 口外 (哪) 忘 (个) 了我。
The wild sparrow flies around the middle of a hillside,
You went beyond the Pass and forgot me.

野雀雀 (唔哪)飞在 (那) 半 (个) 坡坡上，
小妹妹 (那个) 在家 (哪) 受 (个) 惊惶。
The wild sparrow flies halfway up the hill,
Little Sister is at home, lonely and worried.

野雀雀 (唔哪) 野雀雀 (唔哪) 朝 (个) 南 (呀) 嘛，
你给我 (唔哪) 哥哥 (唔哪) 捎上 (呀) 一句话。
The wild sparrow, the wild sparrow faces south and chirps,
Deliver my Older Brother a message.  

野雀雀 (唔哪)飞在 (那) 清 (个) 水 (呀) 河，
七月里 (唔哪) 回来 (呀) 看一看 (呀) 我。(ZYXZYY 1962: 15)
The wild sparrow flies to Qingshui River,
In the seventh month come back and visit me.

This song, sung from the point of view of the woman left behind, emphasizes the “wild” and unpredictable wandering of her man. The suggestion is that, while running around from place to place, he forgets to show concern for the woman he left at home. There may be an additional layer of meaning here, as well, since the term “sparrow” (que’er 雀儿) in certain parts of Shanxi province (and presumably along the zou xikou route as

68 The idea of a bird delivering a message also appears in the Zhejiang 浙江 Yue 剧 opera, Liu Yi and the Dragon Princess (Liu Yi chuanshu 柳毅传书), where the Dragon Princess speaks to a goose and wants to ask it to deliver a letter to her parents (Cf. HXY 1955: 18).

69 Qingshui River (Qingshui he 清水河) is the name of a place over 100 li to the north of Hequ, Shanxi province. It is now part of Inner Mongolia (ZYXZYY 1962: 15).
(well) is local slang for the male reproductive organ (Ma and Zhang 1990: 59). Thus, a “wild sparrow” may also refer to a philandering man.

The honking of the geese mentioned earlier also provides an additional element to the metaphorical imagery. In a footnote to the following song, the editors mention that the sound geese (e 鵝) make is similar to the pronunciation of “Older Brother” (gege 哥哥) in the local dialect:

我送哥哥清水河， I see Older Brother off to Qingshui River,
清水河口一对鹅； At the mouth of the river there are a pair of geese;
公鹅展翅飞过河， The gander spreads its wings and flies across the river,
母鹅在河边叫哥哥。The goose cries gege [Older Brother] at the edge of the river.70

Here, we have a perfect metaphor for the male leaving the female and the female crying out after him. In addition, now when we look at images of geese honking in the songs, we see an additional layer of meaning:

大雁回家（那个）呱呱叫，
光棍汉唱的（那个）苦难调。(ZYXZYY 1962: 49)
When the goose returns home, it calls gua gua,
The lone bachelor sings a sad song.

70 These lyrics are similar to lines in a scene from the Shaw Brothers 1962 film, Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai (Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai 梁山伯与祝英台), which is based on the Yueju 越剧 opera by the same name, where Zhu Yingtai sings that the goose follows the gander, calling out “Older Brother” (gege 哥哥):

(梁)：公的就在前面走。
(祝)：母的後邊叫哥哥。
(http://www.millionbook.net/gd/y/yiming/000/010.htm, accessed on June 8, 2009)

(Liang Shanbo): The male [gander] walks in front.
大雁回家呱呱叫，
一个人睡下好孤少。（ZYXZYY 1962: 50）
When the goose returns home, it calls *gua gua*,
Sleeping alone is so lonely.

In both of these verses, the geese’s calling out of something that sounds like “Older Brother” causes the lonely men to think of their loved ones calling to them, and thus further augments their loneliness and suffering.\(^7\) There is also the implicit contrast between the goose, who can return home, and the bachelor who cannot.

At the same time, there are also several cases where pairs of birds are used as a contrast to the loneliness of individuals:

鸽鸽鸽出窝（呀）一对对， Doves leave their nest *ya*, in pairs,
西包头红火（呀）没妹妹。 Among the liveliness in Baotou, Little Sister isn’t there.

(ZYXZYY 1962: 17)

Obviously, whether bird images are used to emphasize or to provide a contrast with individual loneliness, they constitute a form of personification in which certain aspects of birds (i.e. their aimlessness, aloneness, or togetherness) are metaphorically extended to describe humans.

The unifying factor or the underlying “metaphorical concept” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 6) that connects the tumbleweed and bird metaphors is their floating in the wind, which has a variable direction that may change sporadically at any point. This basic directional metaphor applies to the aimlessness of the men who went beyond the

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\(^7\) One is also reminded of the quote from the *Tumed Gazetteer* on pages 12-13, which describes the Han farmers’ travel back and forth beyond the Great Wall as “traveling like wild geese” (*yanxing* 雁行).
Pass, and provides a relatively concrete way in which to mentally construct and understand what otherwise might be difficult to express in words.

While each of the metaphors mentioned above serve to capture the aimlessness of wanderers, each individual case includes additional elements, based on the context of the lines surrounding it, that further describe the emotions involved. The tumbleweed metaphors emphasize the passivity of being moved and manipulated by one’s surroundings, which ties in to the inability both to stay in one place and to choose where one’s next destination is going to be. Most of these metaphors seem to be used in expressing the man’s point of view.

The bird metaphors, on the other hand, tend to emphasize the emotional uneasiness associated with loneliness, both for men and women. The cries of wild geese often seem to emphasize the starkness and bitterness of a desolate landscape, and they are also taken to be phonologically similar to the cries of distant loved ones. It would appear that the use of lone birds as a metaphor springs from their “normal” grouping either in pairs or flocks. Mandarin ducks (yuanyang 鴛鴦), for example, are commonly used to describe affectionate couples and conjugal bliss. Thus, the appearance of a single bird, separated from its flock due to the unpredictable direction of its travel as it floats in the wind, might suggest an individual’s separation from his/her pair and/or “flock.”

It is interesting to compare the sense of powerlessness and passivity in the “tumbleweed” and “wild sparrow” metaphors. Whereas in the former, the man has little or no agency in choosing where he goes, in the latter, the wild sparrow is seen to be both in control of [his] direction of flight and rather flighty in terms of [his] choices of
destinations. In the latter scenario, the wild sparrow’s wife is the one who is powerless. Given that the tumbleweed metaphors are from the point of view of the man and the wild sparrow metaphor is from the point of view of a woman, in each case the blame for the aimlessness is placed on someone or something external to the singer—fate or circumstances (symbolized by the wind) in the man’s case, and the flighty wanderer in the woman’s case.

4.3 SOUL-BONDING STRING

The second group of metaphors centers around the term “soul-bonding string” (qianhunxian 牽魂线). This phrase appears to refer to the bond between a man and a woman, and its various connotations suggest interesting ideas about how relationships were, in part, conceptualized. In several songs, its use calls to mind a physical string tied to both partners, either keeping one (usually the man) from leaving the other, or “pulling” him back when he has gone away too long.

山顶上刮风树林林响，
临走你才把我心捲上。
黄河（哪）水深路途又远，
牵魂线挂住你怎走远。
二套（你）牛车你慢慢游，
真魂魂跟在你车后头。
二饼饼牛车（你）膏麻子油，
真魂魂跟在你身旁左右。(ZYXZY 1962: 5)
The wind blows on the mountain top, the trees in the forest rustle, Just as you were about to leave, you carried my heart along as well. The water of the Yellow River is deep and the road is long, With the soul-bonding string hanging onto you, how can you go far? With a two oxen-cart, you travel along slowly, With my true spirit I follow along behind.
A two “cake-wheeled” ox cart\textsuperscript{72} greased with oil from the seeds of an oil plant, With my true spirit I hover near your body.

\begin{quote}
天（啦）上云彩（哪）勾勾云，
扔不下（那）小妹妹笑盈盈。
绿（个）菌菌韭菜（哪）炒鸡蛋，
笑（个）盈盈亲亲（哪）怎离转？
风尘尘不动（哪）树梢梢摆，
牵魂线挂住（哪）走不开。（ZYXZY 1962: 70)
\end{quote}

The clouds in the sky attract other clouds, Can’t leave my dear Little Sister whose smile is so lovely. Green leeks fried with eggs, My dear’s delicate smile—how can I leave it? The dust in the wind doesn’t move, but the treetops sway, With the soul-bonding string hanging onto me, how can I leave?

\begin{quote}
牵魂线长来牵魂线短，
牵魂线拴住走时难。 (Ma 2004: 204)
Soul-bonding strings are both long and short, When one is tied to you, it’s hard to go far.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
那年哥哥我走了石圪台，
没过半年牵魂线把我牵回来。 (Ma 2004: 204)
That year, I, your Older Brother, went to Shigetai 石圪台，
Before half a year had passed, the soul-bonding string pulled me back.
\end{quote}

In addition to the soul-bonding string’s ability to keep both partners in close proximity or rein one in when he goes too far, the physical strength and overwhelming power of the bond established are also emphasized. This particular aspect is similar to Lakoff and Johnson’s conceptual metaphor of “LOVE IS A PHYSICAL FORCE” (Lakoff and

\textsuperscript{72} This refers to an ox cart with two wheels that resemble round, flat cakes (ZYXZY 1962: 5).
Johnson 1980: 49), as well as Quinn’s notion of “marriage as two inseparable objects” (Quinn 1991: 68) and Kövecses’s “RELATIONSHIPS ARE BONDS” (Kövecses 2008: 387).

一不用麻绳二不用针，
牵魂线串住咱们二人的心。 (Ma 2004: 204)
No need for hemp cord and don’t bother with sewing needles,
A soul-bonding string has strung together our two hearts.

铁锁、铁绳加上了铁铛铛，
牵魂线把咱二人拴了个牢。 (Ma 2004: 204)
An iron lock, iron cord, even iron fetters,
We are firmly tied together by a soul-bonding string.

73 Lakoff and Johnson suggest that love is often conceptualized as an electromagnetic, gravitational, or other type of physical force, providing the following examples:

I could feel the electricity between us. They were sparks. I was magnetically drawn to her. They are uncontrollably attracted to each other. They gravitated to each other immediately. His whole life revolves around her. The atmosphere around them is always charged. There is incredible energy in their relationship. They lost their momentum. (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 49)

74 Quinn examines metaphors used by married couple in talking about their marriages. For “marriage as two inseparable objects,” she gives the example “We knew we were going to stay together” (Quinn 1991: 68). Another similar metaphor is marriage as an “unbreakable bond,” implied in “That just kind of cements the bond” (Quinn 1991: 68). The latter is similar to Kövecses’s “RELATIONSHIPS ARE BONDS” (see below).

75 Also phrased as “FRIENDSHIP IS A STRONG (PHYSICAL BOND),” Kövecses provides the following examples and mappings:

True friendship is a bond that can weather the storms of life.
The real friendship somehow or other you make the other person feel and they make you feel what connects you is that you have this common, heavy heavy link in many areas, not that you were just working in the same field or what have you.
A real friendship starts with a thread and spins into a rope. It gets stronger and it gets stronger and it spins another thread and another thread, and with a real friendship, occasionally one of the little threads may break but the rope is so strong, it survives it—you know the boundaries, it’s understood—but it grows.

The mappings are as follows:

— the two entities (people, etc.) are the two friends
— the physical bond between two people is the emotional bond between the two friends
— the strength of the bond is the stability of the relationship (Kövecses 1995: 323-324)

Note the similarity in the use of thread and rope in the third example as compared with the “soul-bonding string.”
In these excerpts, various other means of linking two objects together, ranging from hemp cord to iron fetters, are rhetorically proposed and rejected in favor of the strength of the soul-bonding string. The fact that even sharp knives cannot cut it may also suggest, by extension, that such obstacles as distance and infidelity will also fail to sever it or diminish its strength.

Yeshayahu Shen suggests that the choice of metaphorical image is contingent on what he calls the “Directionality Principle,” namely, that “[t]he metaphorical source domain tends to represent a conceptually more accessible (i.e., more concrete or more salient) concept than the target.” (Shen 2008: 296, emphasis in original). Shen further notes that tactile objects are the most conceptually accessible out of all the senses:

It had previously been suggested... that there is a graduated scale of sensory modalities ranging from sight – the “highest” modality – followed by sound, smell, taste, and, finally, touch – the “lowest” sense... (Shen 2008: 302)

When a metaphorical source domain from one sense is applied to a target from another sense, a sort of synaesthesia occurs. According to Shen, it is easier for us to conceptualize the higher senses in terms of the lower senses (e.g. touch):
Applying the general DP [Directionality Principle] to the case of synaesthetic metaphor yields the principle: *The low-to-high structure is cognitively a simpler structure than the high-to-low one.* (Shen 2008: 302, emphasis in original)

This “cognitive preference for mapping the lower onto the higher domain” (Shen 2008: 303) explains, in part, why a tactile object with a physical force is able to describe an abstract emotional force in a way that is easy for the average person to understand.

The idea that the soul-bonding string is a physical force is made explicit in the following song, where it is envisioned to actually tie up the heart and keep the feet from moving away:

走三步，退两步，
牵魂线把我心绞住。
走三步，退两步，
扔不下小妹子再站住。

Advance three steps, back two steps,
The “soul-bonding string” has entwined my heart.
Walk forward three steps, back two steps,
Can’t let go of dear Little Sister, I stand still again.

(ZYXZY 1962: 5)

Several songs use the “soul-bonding string” imagery in talking about courtship and falling in love. Here, we see such phrases as “tossing the soul-bonding string [in a certain neighborhood]” and “having one’s soul-bonding string entangled by someone else,” both of which appear to refer to the beginnings of relationships. In a discussion of how the natal home (*niangjia* 娘家 “mother’s home”) was seen as an ideal place to look for lovers, the following line from a folksong is mentioned:

“牵魂线扔在娘家下” (ZYXZY 1962: 28)
The “soul-bonding string” is tossed by the mother’s home.
The idea that one’s soul-bonding string might become entangled (which I read as something akin to falling in love or infatuation) when one “hangs around” a certain house is explicit in the following song excerpt:

...走了你家的村瞭见你家院,
你家里勾住妹妹牵魂线。
牵魂线长来牵魂线短，
牵魂线线不断怎么办？...

Went to your family’s village and looked at your house,
Your family entangled Little Sister’s “soul-bonding string.”
Whether the “soul-bonding string” is long or short,
If it won’t break, what are we to do?

The last two lines seem to emphasize the persistence of love and/or the yearning to be together with someone. If the string cannot be cut, then the couple are, by default, inseparable.

While it is clear that the “soul-bonding string” is an effective metaphor for emotional attachment, one may ask why “string” was used instead of another bonding object. This may have to do with both what is available and culturally understandable.

Lakoff and Johnson suggest that:

Our physical and cultural experience provides many possible bases for spatialization metaphors. Which ones are chosen, and which ones are major, may vary from culture to culture. ...It is hard to distinguish the physical from the cultural basis of a metaphor, since the choice of one physical basis from among many possible ones has to do with cultural coherence. (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 39)

Kövecses further emphasizes the need to look at the larger context of culture when attempting to understand choices in metaphorical source domains:

> Embodiment may consist of a variety of aspects, or components, and any of these may become the preferred one in a given culture and at a given time. Which aspect(s), or component(s), of (otherwise) universal embodiment receive(s) more attention from speakers of a language largely depends on the broader cultural context. (Kövecses 2008: 393)

Thus, I will now look at other instances of “string” symbolism, both in songs from the same area, classical Chinese poetry, and regional Chinese folk customs from the same and other areas of China, in an attempt to further understand the nuances involved in this imagery.

In several cases found in songs and poems, there seem to be two related themes involving string imagery. One is tying a string to something or someone as a means of control, and the other is the desperation, helplessness, and sense of abandonment that occur when the soul-bonding string breaks. First, we have an instance where a woman’s husband\(^7\) has her “on a string”:

> 黑色板（那） altre砖满院，
> 灰（啦）小子管成我一条线。 (ZYXZY 1962: 37)
> Black slabstone eave tiles, bricks cover the courtyard,
> That bastard keeps me on a string.

This excerpt comes from a song describing the various abuses a wife suffers at her in-law’s house. The implication of the use of “string” as a metaphor is that it is a form of

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\(^7\) The song, of which I have only quoted an excerpt here, is a bit ambiguous, and may also refer to one of her in-laws.
control, and the sense of “tying down” someone is related to the conceptual metaphor “BEING CONTROLLED IS BEING KEPT DOWN” (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 149).

While here that control has overtones of dominance, one can easily see how, in the case of going beyond the Western Pass, it is used in an attempt at a semblance of control over unpredictable situations. When the soul-bonding string is unable to bond together the two people, as in cases of separation by distance, anxiety ensues and the string becomes tied up in a knot:

想你想的无办法，
牵魂线结成一个绣疙瘩。（ZYXYY 1962: 79）
I miss you so much, there’s nothing I can do,
The soul-bonding string has become all tied up in a knot.

In addition, the image of “broken string” has appeared various times in traditional Chinese poetry as a symbol for abandonment. For example, in an anonymous early ci词 poem collected in the Yunyao ji 云谣集 about “the abandoned wife or lover of a young soldier, a common theme in earlier guiyuan poetry”78 (Samei 2004: 77), we find:

......抛人如断弦。
...He’s abandoned me like a broken string.
(Samei 2004: 77, emphasis added in bold)79

78 Samei translates the term guiyuan 闺怨 as “boudoir complaints” or “complaints of the inner/woman’s chambers,” referring to “abandonment complaints” (Samei 2004: 2).

79 Taken from p. 846 of Zhang Zhang 张璋 and Huang Yu 黄畬, eds. 1986. Quan Tang Wudai ci 全唐五代词 [The Complete Anthology of Tang and Five Dynasties Ci Lyrics]. Shanghai: Shanghai guji. The string here, presumably, is that of a musical instrument.
Another poem, a *yuefu* 乐府 entitled "Since You Went Away," was written by Yan Shibo 颜师伯 (419-465) from the point of view of a person left behind:

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自君之出矣，芳帷不举。
思君如回雪，流乱无端绪。
Since you went away,
The scented curtains are never raised.
My missing you is like the whirling snow,
Wildly drifting, **without continuing thread**. (Frankel 1976: 53, emphasis added)
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While the term translated here as “continuing thread” (*duanxu* 端绪) has come to mean “the beginning of a line of thought,” its literal meaning is “the starting end of a silk thread.” The idea is that the speaker in the poem has “wildly drifting” thoughts with no order whatsoever, and hence no starting or ending point either.

In addition to imagery used in classical poetry, there are many symbolic uses of string in various regions in China (and perhaps elsewhere), tied to events ranging from birth and childhood to marriage and separation. For example, in some cases, even before a baby is born, there are examples of imagery involving thread. Catherine Bell discusses an account of a “baby tying ceremony” in Beijing at the turn of the twentieth century:

In hopes of becoming pregnant, the young wife is told to undertake a pilgrimage to a temple renowned for its connections to childbearing. There, in the usual fashion, she should light a bundle of incense sticks and place them in a burner before the image of the main deity. However, on entering the Hall of the Goddess of Sons and Grandsons, she should select a paper image of an attractive baby boy from among an array of such figures, tie a **red thread** around its neck and pray that the "child" will come home with her to be born as her son. If she subsequently gives birth to a son, the new mother should return with offerings to thank the goddess. (Bell 1997: 96, emphasis added)
It appears that the red thread is seen to “tie” the spirit of the unborn child to the woman. Once the child is born, there is a constant fear that the child’s spirit will leave its body unexpectedly and it will die, hence the various “passing the barrier” rites mentioned in Chapter 3. Stephen Jones discusses three types of ceremonies to protect children in northern Shaanxi, all of which involve some sort of string, including “...hanging the locket, the annual ‘Crossing the Passes’ ceremony at temple fairs, and opening the locket” (Jones 2009: 35). What is referred to as the “locket” is actually a red thread (hong sixian 红丝线) hung with a couple of coins, which is put around the child’s neck and supposed to help them to avoid illnesses and misfortune (Jones 2009: 36). As healthy offspring are seen as necessary for future economic stability, hanging the locket is also seen as “...guaranteeing (lanhale 揽下了) the family’s living” (Jones 2009: 36). It is interesting to note that the local dialect word for “guaranteeing” (lanhale) literally means something like “to tie down [an object].” The first character, lan 揽, means both “to fasten with a rope” and “to take on” or “to take something upon oneself,” thus providing a direct linguistic connection for the conceptual metaphor CONTROL IS TYING A STRING, which is similar to the control mentioned both in the case of the abusive husband and in separations due to going beyond the Western Pass. Both try to deal with unpredictable, potentially dangerous situations by attempting to either avoid or suppress the uncertainty involved.

The lockets discussed by Jones are hung sometime during childhood, and removed when the child turns twelve and is deemed to be free from danger. During the time between the hanging and the opening of the locket, children may be brought to
“Crossing the Pass” (guoguan) rituals at regional temple festivals, which are rites meant to signify “...the overcoming of various life crises for children below the age of 12” (Jones 2009: 37). A “pass” is set up, consisting of a red paper hoop, a decorated table, and a grain cutter, and the children are made to walk through it:

Sixteen children queue up at the ‘pass’, wearing auspicious red headscarves, with thick ropes, tied around their waists, trailing behind them. As the parents offer incense, the children crawl one by one through the red paper hoop, under the table, and through the gap between the base and the chopper, as the officiant brings the chopper down to cut the rope behind them, indicating the elimination of calamity. (Jones 2009: 37)

The ropes tied around the children’s waists seem to symbolize their connections to noxious influences, and by cutting them, they are freed from these dangers. Thus, once again, a broken string symbolizes the separation of two entities, where here the separation is purposeful. The conceptual metaphor suggested above could be expanded to CONTROL IS TYING A STRING TO DESIRABLE THINGS AND CUTTING STRINGS TO UNDESIRABLE THINGS.

The lanhale (guaranteeing/tying down) term mentioned above might also be understood as attempting to establish a fixed connection between two entities (i.e. the family and prosperity). There are also other phrases in Chinese that use the image of string to imply a fixed connection between people and/or things: The term “relations with other people” (renyuan 人缘) contains both the character for “person” (ren 人) and the radical for “silk thread” (si 线). A “predestined affinity” between two people is referred to as yuanfen 缘分. Also, there is a term meaning “to worry or be concerned
about” (qiangua 牽挂) which might be literally translated as “to hitch onto something and pull.” The latter might be conceptualized as a fixed connection between the worrier and the person or thing being worried about. In all of these cases, we see how connections are symbolized by string.

In weddings, there is also “string” imagery involved in the joining together of two people. Monica Cable has discussed tourist-oriented presentations of Dai marriages at the Dai Park in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan province, in which “…the newly formed couples tie a string around each other’s wrists to signifying [sic] the binding together of their lives…” (Cable 2008: 273). In Chinese, the term “red string” (hongxian 红线) denotes a red string binding a boy and a girl destined to marry, and “to lead [someone] by a red string” (qian hongxian 牽红线) is a colloquial expression for matchmaking. There is also the popular legend of the “old man beneath the moon” (yuexia laoren 月下老人), a sort of Chinese “Cupid,” who makes matches between lovers using a red string. One might also think of the term “tying the knot” in English.80

80 A similar concept is the thali, a sort of “wedding string,” used in marriage ceremonies of the Christian Paraiyans of the Kumbakonam Area, India, as well as Hindu weddings in other regions of India. According to Paul Roche:

The symbol of the wedding union is the thali. The thali is a gold medal on a yellow thin string. It is yellow because it is dyed with turmeric (Manjal). During Mass the priest blesses the thali and hands it over to the bridegroom who ties it around the neck of the bride. (In Hindu marriages their Valluvan priest says some mantram and blesses it.) The bridegroom has to make three knots while tying the thali. In olden days the groom made one knot and his sister made the other two knots. ...During the whole time of tying the thali, the drummers beat their drums very loudly. At the time of the tying of the thali, two elders of the village stand near the couple as witnesses for the marriage. (Roche 1977: 89)

There is also a traditional custom in Yanggao County (Yanggao xian 阳高县), Shanxi province (and elsewhere in China), in which, during a wedding ceremony, the bride and groom each hold on to one end of a strip of red silk (called hongchou 红绸) with an elaborate knot in the middle (Wang Lijun 王利军, personal communication, May 24, 2009). This type of custom is seen in numerous Chinese operas, ranging from Beijing opera (Jingju 京剧) in the North to Zhejiang Yue opera (Yueju 越剧) and Cantonese opera (Yueju 粤剧) in the South, as well as in various opera films, suggesting that “it is a widely practiced custom in traditional China” (Marjorie Chan, personal communication, June 12, 2009).
When couples must temporarily separate, as in the case of the man going beyond the Western Pass, the woman would often stuff strips of red cloth into his clothes, which he was supposed to hang on “spirit trees” on the way as a charm of protection (Ma and Zhang 1990: 52-53). While the act of tying cloth strips to trees along the way could be seen from a practical point of view as marking the route to find one’s way back (à la Hansel and Gretel), given the symbolic meanings of control and connection to loved ones and home discussed earlier, it is possible that the tying also signified an attempt to periodically reconnect distant, unknown (i.e. dangerous) lands with the familiar, safe home that they had left. By ritually placing objects from home in locations outside of home, the inside/outside distinction could potentially become softened, perhaps lessening the sense of danger and unpredictability normally associated with the outside. In addition, such acts may have led to a sense of that part of the road as “safer,” and may have been seen as a placation of local spirits, in allowing the travelers to pass. The issue of inside vs. outside will be further discussed in the next section.

4.4 DOOR AND GATE METAPHORS

The third group of metaphors center around various images of doors, gates, and passes, discussed above, many of which contain either the character kou 口 (literally “mouth”), which appears in terms ranging from the main entrance of a house (da menkou 大门口) to the Western Pass (xikou 西口), or the character guan 关, meaning “pass” or “barrier.” While most of the images in the songs seem to only use the former, I believe that several aspects of their meaning come from the compound word guankou 关口,
meaning “strategic pass,” “crucial juncture,” or “key point.” In this section, I explore two connotations that such images bring with them: the binary distinction between inside and outside, and dangerous liminality. It is interesting to note that the English word “pass” can interpreted in a similar way, given that it means both “a means (as an opening, road, or channel) by which a barrier may be passed or access to a place may be gained; especially: a low place in a mountain range” and “a usually distressing or bad state of affairs.”

However, as we will see, the Chinese concept of the pass as a perilous barrier is much more vividly illustrated than its English equivalent. The underlying conceptual metaphor seems to be TRANSITION IS DANGER.

The binary distinction between inside and outside is made quite explicit in the phrase “to run away beyond the Pass” (pao kouwai 跑口外), another term for going beyond the Western Pass (zou xikou 走西口). The implicit dichotomy in this phrase is drawn between the area inside the Pass (kouli 口里, i.e. within the Great Wall), and the area outside the Pass (kouwai 口外, i.e. beyond the Great Wall). The Western Pass (xikou 西口), then, functions as a “mediating space” (Descola 1994: 121) that delineates (and connects) inside vs. outside, home vs. away, and familiar vs. unfamiliar.

While originally referring to the gates in the Great Wall, it has become a metonymy for the area beyond the Pass (i.e. the western sections of Inner Mongolia), in that the entrance into a place has come to symbolize the entire place itself.

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82 Philippe Descola uses the term “mediating space” to refer to the way houses are presented in the myths of Achuar Indians in the Amazon River Region, suggesting that they are seen as “…a passageway between the celestial and subterranean worlds” (1994: 121). Here, I use the term not in reference to spiritual realms, but rather conceptualized spaces.
Literally “mouth,” the character *kou* 口 has come to refer to all types of openings and entrances, as well as the gates in the Western section of the Great Wall. It is literally possible to list all sorts of “passes” along the journey from one’s home within China proper to the land outside of that region with either *kou* 口 or *guan* 关 (“pass”).

Beginning in the home, the first division between inside and outside is the main entrance of the house (*da menkou* 大门口), as we see in the song:

（旦）你一定走西口，
实实也难留，
手拉住（那）手儿，
送在哥哥大门口。

（丑）送出大门（的）口，
一把刮脱你的手，
叫一声（那）哥的妹子，
你管你往回（里）走。

**Woman:** If you must go **beyond the Western Pass,**
It’s truly hard to keep you,
Grabbing hold of your hand,
I see my Older Brother off to the **main gate.**

**Man:** Seeing me off to the **main gate,**
I let go of your hand,
And call to my Little Sister,
Go back **inside.** (ZYXZYY 1962: 231-232, emphasis added)

As I have highlighted in this excerpt, there is a certain symmetry between the “inside” of the house and the area “beyond the Western Pass,” both of which are, in a sense, separated by the main gate in the middle. Likewise, in one of the *errentai* versions of “Going Beyond the Western Pass,” the door seems to play a similar symbolic role:
Taichun walks out the door,
And walks on and on,
From the inner lands to those beyond the Great Wall,
Parting is truly painful.

Here, the door almost seems to symbolize the bridge or entry way between the area inside the Pass and the land beyond the Pass, between home and away. According to Stafford, “...passages and entryways such as doors and gates—spaces for ‘sending-off’ and ‘greeting’ which are almost always architecturally elaborated or decorated in some way—are often important and problematic during rituals and social events” (Stafford 2000: 3). Samei has also discussed the role doors play in abandoned woman poetry in terms of mediating between inside and outside spaces: “The inside/outside binary is often reflected in a strophic alternation between interior scene and exterior scene as well as in images that divide inside from outside, such as screens, doors, and curtains” (Samei 2004: 151).

Many scholars have discussed these “inner-outer boundaries” (Yan 2003: 124), or what Liu refers to as a “social distinction embodied in the practice of domestic space... between the inside (li) and the outside (wai)” (Liu 2000: 47). Yan Yunxiang describes “...a physical-social code in the house that separated the inside and the insiders from the outside and outsiders...” (Yan 2003: 125). Even within the home, we see a gradation of
sections that are more “inside” and those that are more “outside.” In his ethnography of a
village in northern Shaanxi, Xin Liu writes:

The house (i.e., the *yao*) can be seen as divided along its length into three relatively equal parts. Nothing important or valuable is supposed to be kept in the other third of the house, which is next to the door. ...Behind a curtain lies the dark, private inner third of the house. The outer third of the house is the place for receiving acquaintances and neighbors. ...Neighbors are supposed to stay next to the door. ...Formal guests... are invited to sit down with the male family members in the middle zone of the house. No guests are allowed to enter the space behind the curtain. (Liu 2000: 47)

One may conjecture that the inhabitants conception of the outside world is in part influenced by the viewpoint taken from inner third of the house. In this sense, the door of the house plays an extremely important role. As Mueggler notes about an Yi minority community in northern Yunnan:

Through the apertures of a dwelling—a doorway, the opening of a courtyard to the sky—the intimacies of lived space and the immensities of the imagined universe come into communication. ...A house’s boundaries—its thresholds or ash-sealed doorways—are enabling limits rather than confining ones; they are means by which the difference between inside and outside, even if painful, is felt in dwelling. They allow inner and outer space to enfold each other. ...[O]ne first comes to know and inhabit the world through intimate relations with and in dwellings” (Mueggler 2001: 42)

Beginning from the inner section of the house, which we can envision as a sort of safe container, there are a succession of unknown, and therefore suspect, wider containers outside, each larger than the next. As one passes from the inner to the outer, they do so through various types of passes, all of which involve the characters *men* 门, *kou* 口 or
guan 关. In order to keep the outside danger from entering the inside of the home, on the main entrance there is a door bolt/bar (jiongguan 扁关) or a door latch (chaguanr 插关儿). One exits the city or town (another “inside” entity) via the city gate (chengmen 城门) and reaches the area just outside (chengguan 城关). Then, one might ferry across a river crossing (dukou 渡口) and/or go through a pass in the Western sections of the Great Wall (xikou 西口). Even if one takes a boat up the Yellow River, they still must pass through the perilous “Dragon’s Mouth” (longkou 龙口), a natural barrier with rushing rapids and rocks falling on both sides (Yang 2006: 40-41).

On a larger scale, both guan and kou appear in the names of various border passes and the areas inside and outside of them, much like the Western Pass (xikou) and the areas inside and outside of the Pass (kouli and kouwai):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese term</th>
<th>Pinyin transliteration</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>山海关</td>
<td>Shanhai guan</td>
<td>Shanhaiguan, a strategic pass at the eastern terminus of the Great Wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>榆关</td>
<td>Yuguang</td>
<td>Elm Pass (another name for Shanhaiguan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>关内</td>
<td>guannei</td>
<td>China within the passes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>关外</td>
<td>guanwai</td>
<td>the region beyond Shanhaiguan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>出关</td>
<td>chu guan</td>
<td>go northeast to Manchuria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>闯关东</td>
<td>chuang Guandong</td>
<td>(1) to seek a livelihood in the Northeast; (2) to make a living with difficulty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Taken as a whole, these terms outline a division between what is seen to be China proper, and the land outside of that, with many of the northern borders delineated by the Great Wall.

In addition to the danger implicit in the “inside/outside binary” (Samei 2004: 151), there is an inherent peril associated with liminal spaces such as borders, gates, and passes. As I mentioned above, I believe that much of this type of connotation comes
from the compound word *guankou* 关口, meaning strategic pass, crucial juncture, or key point. There are numerous words that use either *guan* 关 or *kou* 口 to refer to dangerously liminal places and/or states. For example, *nanguan* 难关 refers to a “difficulty” or “crisis,” while *shengsi guantou* 生死关头 is used for life-and-death crises, and the verb associated with both of these terms is “to pass” (*guo* 过). The phrase “tiger’s mouth” has come to mean any dangerous situation, as in “to escape from a dangerous situation” (*taochu hukou* 逃出虎口).

As mentioned earlier, the childhood protection rites are known as “crossing the pass” or “passing the barriers” (*guoguan* 过关 or *kaiguan* 开关). Similar to Lakoff and Turner’s notion of LIFE IS A JOURNEY (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 3), it is common in Chinese folk belief to envision the time of childhood as a “road to adulthood” fraught with barriers/crucial junctures (*guan* 关) of potential danger, such as the “Devil’s Gate Pass” (*guimenguan* 鬼门关) and others mentioned earlier. The “three passes” (*san guan* 三关) refers to three critical points for women (romantic love, marriage, and childbirth), once again reinforcing the concept of life as a journey filled with difficult points. Even the yearly cycle is seen as something of journey, with “yearly barrier” (*nianguan* 年关) signifying the end of the year and “passing the yearly barrier” (*du nianguan* 度年关) meaning “to pass the New Year by paying all one's debts.”

The underlying conceptual metaphor seems to be that TRANSITION IS DANGER. This appears to be the case both when applied to time in the LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor, and in terms of space in the HOME IS SAFE, AWAY IS DANGEROUS metaphor. I have already discussed how strips of red cloth from home
were perceived to ritually lessen the danger associated with the outside. Another ritual remedy involved the earth from home, which was seen to be part of the overall healthy environment for the individual. Since certain types of illnesses were thought to be caused by lack of access to the water and earth of one’s hometown, a bag of dirt from home was sometimes used as a remedy (mixed with hot water and made into sort of “tea”) for illnesses contracted while one was away (SSDBW 2000: 153). This relates to the Chinese idiom “to fail to acclimate oneself in a new natural environment” (shui tu bufu 水土不服, literally “not accustomed to the water and earth [of a place]”). During various illnesses in China, this is one of the common reasons given by Chinese as to the cause of such poor states of health. Thus, in a sense, the notion of HOME IS SAFE has been extended to the point where lands that are not home cause physical illness.

I would like to suggest that, in the zou xikou context, the danger associated with transitions, gateways, and liminal spaces is perhaps a case of metonymy, in the sense that the potential for danger perceived in the transitions themselves are extensions of the unfamiliarity with (and thus potential danger of) the places that those transitions lead to. While logically there is no way of knowing for sure which of two adjacent containers may be inherently superior or inferior, it seems common to view the container(s) that one is not personally familiar with as suspect. Thus, any time that one moves from one container to another, there is a possibility that the new container will be less pleasant and/or more threatening. In addition, since one will most likely have less familiarity and fewer social connections in the new container, they will be less able to deal with problems as they arise, thus enhancing the feelings of peril and helplessness.
Nevertheless, it is also possible that one will thrive in the new container. Thus, I propose that the “dangerous” nature of liminality springs from its unpredictable destination.

4.5 CONCLUSION

In looking at these three groups of conceptual metaphors, they all seem to share the primary metaphor “A FEELING IS A PHYSICAL OBJECT” (Yu 2008: 258),83 including objects in the air (aimlessness), string (attachment), and passes (danger). We have seen that the various metaphors were chosen from a larger range of possibilities based on availability and cultural coherence. At the same time, they attempt to describe tangible psychosomatic feelings. Ning Yu argues that, “...for conceptual metaphors, body is a source, whereas culture is a filter” (Yu 2008: 249). In this sense, the physical tension created by another person’s hand pulling on one’s hand in an attempt to keep the person from leaving may have been metaphorically related to the tension observed in a piece of string that is pulled on both ends. Yu writes that “...metonymy very often is the link between bodily experience and metaphor in the mapping process from concrete experience to abstract concepts: bodily experience → metonymy → metaphor → abstract concepts” (Yu 2008: 249). Thus, the tension felt in the wrist and arm (bodily experience) may have served as a metonym for emotional attachment, which in turn led to the metaphor of a string to describe that emotional attachment (i.e. the abstract concept).

83 Yu uses the example of “to receive love” in noting how feelings are often treated metaphorically as if they were objects (Yu 2008: 258).
Likewise, one’s corporeal sense of danger outside of one’s own body may have served as a metonym for threats to one’s physical safety, and the danger outside one’s body may have been metaphorically represented by the danger conceived of as existing outside one’s house, and symbolized by the “pass” metonym, which, in turn, expresses the abstract concept of danger. This idea of metaphorically extending the container of the body to the container of the home and then on to the container of the neighborhood, town, etc. is intriguing, although Mueggler makes the point that the extension is not only in one direction:

The house is not a microcosm of the universe; the body does not represent at one level a logic embodied in a house or universe at a different level. Instead, body, house, and universe all double, enfold, and invade one another. (Mueggler 2001: 41)

This, in turn, brings up the hotly contested topic of whether metaphors influence the way we mentally construct the world, or whether the way we think dictates which metaphors we choose. While such a conundrum is far beyond the scope of this thesis, the examination of these three groups of conceptual metaphors suggests various aspects of separation that were poetically expressed in song and most likely in keeping with folk models of danger and attachment.

As mentioned earlier, the “soul-bonding string” seems to represent an attempt to keep the social fabric (Turner’s “structure”) together, which the objects floating in the air (i.e. wandering men) threaten to tear apart, à la Turner’s “anti-structure.” These two also tie into the basic metaphors of “FREEDOM IS UP” and “BEING CONTROLLED IS
BEING KEPT DOWN” (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 149), making the binary struggle more diametrically opposed. The “passes” metaphors not only represent the danger of the unknown, but also the state of extended liminality that both the wandering men and the women they leave behind experience during the separation. Taken as part of a whole, these three metaphors provide insight into how danger and emotional attachment were conceptualized among the folk in this region in years past.
CONCLUSION

This study has examined how songs about “going beyond the Western Pass” reflect aspects of folk models of danger and emotional attachment. In addition, it has explored various perceived effects of singing and listening to songs, and attempted to discuss these in tandem with several of the songs’ generalized performance contexts.

Outlining the spectrum of genres into which the songs have been grouped provides different frames through which to interpret meanings. We see a range from personal, direct communication between lovers or spouses, to an individual’s conversation with an imagined other, to a public performance in which the audience participates vicariously in the staged characters’ story as it unfolds.

In looking at perceived effects of song, both from singers themselves and various theorists, several ideas about how the songs might be experienced are explored. Although much of the meaning is derived from individual contexts—more than an analysis of the song lyrics can offer—we are presented in several instances with the idea of song as a release valve for emotions that can be expressed in no other way, both for singers and audience members. Whether or not these songs have roots in the tradition of “weeping and wailing” (ku) discussed by McLaren (2008), the notion of using laments to ease transitions (Tolbert 2008) seems to suggest part of the their underlying appeal. In
thinking about both the public and private performances of these songs, we might consider that they were used, in part, to gain mastery over unpleasant emotions involved in separation, to turn private emotions into something socially shared, to re-appropriate destabilizing elements (i.e. the parting of family members) within the social structure, and to reduce anxiety (i.e. among those leaving and those who were left behind).

Two of the major themes in the songs seem to be the perceived mutual dependence of men and women, and the dangers that threaten that dependence. The mutual dependence is reflected in the songs, in part, as helplessness and loneliness felt by couples when they were separated, and the details surrounding the expression of those feelings, in turn, suggest aspects of gender roles common at the time. The dangers that threaten that mutual dependence, such as infidelity, bandits, illness, and accidents, are indicated in the various advice lyrics that occur in the songs. These pieces of advice, in turn, conceptualize those dangers as avoidable obstacles in a journey, and appear to reveal a folk model of danger that extends a culturally-learned way of confronting potential hazards from childhood (i.e. protection rites) to adulthood (i.e. walking beyond the Western Pass).84

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84 The folk model for danger deserves to be examined further. As we have seen, it is not only evident in child protection rituals, but also in certain folksongs, and we might look at other contexts and genres (i.e. other types of songs and, perhaps, short stories and novels) to see if different aspects of it are reflected as well. In addition, there seems to be a connection tying this concept of danger to audiences’ experiences of performances. In discussing the audience’s enjoyment of a particularly suspenseful scene in a Suzhou chantefable version of Meng Lijun, Bender writes, “Specifically, audiences want to see how Meng Lijun will ‘pass this crisis’ (guo zhegeguan 过这个关)” (Bender 2003: 199). The term for barrier/crisis (guan) used here is the same as we have seen in the folk model of danger. While it might be a widely held belief that suspenseful scenes attract audience interest, the specific way in which that suspense is conceptualized in the Chinese context (i.e. with various barriers that must be passed through) may offer us a new way to look at the audience experience of certain performances.
Given the aspects of these folk models of danger and emotional attachment (springing from mutual dependence) suggested in the song lyrics, a closer look at how these relatively abstract notions are metaphorically grounded in terms of tangible, concrete ideas allows us to consider how they were conceptualized through the imagery presented in the song lyrics. I suggest that, by providing a language for otherwise chaotic and inexpressible situations (Lévi-Strauss 1967), the songs gave singers and listeners a way to “reason about” their experiences (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 25) and reduce the anxiety associated with going beyond the Western Pass.

The three groups of metaphorical images examined reveal aspects of how the separation caused by going beyond the Western Pass was conceptualized in the songs. The unpredictability of that separation and the dangers involved are symbolized in the metaphors involving objects floating in the wind. Attempts to reaffirm the bond between separated couples are encapsulated in the string imagery. The pass, in turn, becomes a metaphor for the danger of containers (i.e. conceptualized areas) outside of one’s own, with the latter ranging from one’s body, to the home, and all the way to the entire area “inside the pass” (vis-a-vis the area “outside the pass”).

Given the importance of context in understanding the nuanced meanings of the images presented in these songs, additional fieldwork is necessary. Although published collections of folksong texts provide abundant material to work with, more contextual information will help to bring out the various subtleties in the texts. Much of the language, although deceptively simple, is rich in shades of meaning that are obvious to
locals who are conversant in this cultural form, and hidden to everyone else. Also, there is a tendency when working from published collections to hypothesize general contexts and meanings for the songs, and attribute those meanings either to token individuals slated as “representative,” or to the nameless ones who comprise the “folk.” As I have touched on in the section on the audience’s experience of emotion in Chapter 2, I am interested in how the meaning(s) of lyrics change depending on context. For example, when the same song is sung by different people, or when the same singer sings the “same” song for different groups of people or alone and when experiencing different moods and life developments, the meaning of the song is likely to be different in each instance, and even possibly for each individual in the same event (Cf. Chau 2006).

In my future work, I hope to focus on one individual’s experience of the songs he sings, offset with interviews from other singers as well. Too often, experiences of folksongs become generalized into broad trends and we lose what makes an individual’s experience unique. As Honko notes:

*Repertoire analysis* is a natural outgrowth of the intensification of fieldwork and the growing interest in informants. It may reveal interesting features of the learning and use, the selection and application of tradition by one individual. Personality traits and the life history of the individual will then play perhaps as important a role as the tradition itself. (Honko 1979: 151, emphasis in original)

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Toelken suggests that there is often a direct relationship between high context folk groups and short texts:

The possibilities for connotative richness are enormous in high context folk groups, where closely associated members are in constant touch with each other, sharing the nuances of continual references, attitudes, and information. Among such groups the most basic statement or performance may elicit a tremendous depth of meaning. As a Papago singer remarked to Ruth Underhall, “The song is very short because we understand so much.” (Toelken 1996: 246)

Since the songs in the *zou xikou* region tend to be formulated in short couplets with relatively few words, this notion of “connotative richness” seems to apply here as well.
In addition to the individual experiences of the songs, another question that begs to be asked involves the broader diachronic changes in the songs’ meanings that have inevitably taken place over the past few decades. Now that the original contexts of “going beyond the Western Pass” no longer exist, how have peoples’ appreciations of the songs changed? I hope to examine these and other issues in later works with the benefit of fieldwork and, specifically, songs collected in live contexts.


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