

OTHER NATIONS

sure of personal freedom.

Five hundred years of Russian history offer little basis for optimism, notes Starr, president of Oberlin College. The Russians have consistently made new inventions into servants of the state. Thus, while Johann Gutenberg's printing press revolutionized the West by making possible the wide dissemination of ideas and information after the mid-15th century, the tsarist government claimed a near monopoly of Russian presses until the early 19th century, reserving the machines to publish official documents.

At first glance, Starr concedes, today's pattern appears similar. The Kremlin views computers as "the last best hope" to make the Soviet Union's creaky centralized economy work. Manufactured or imported by the state and for the state, computers have been used to render the existing administrative system, including the police, more effective.

But Starr also sees signs that things might be different this time. The Russian peasant culture that bred passive acceptance of the state's dictates is dying. In 1950, two-thirds of the Soviet population still lived in the countryside, but less than one-third of today's citizens do. "Urban life in the present-day USSR, no less than that elsewhere in the world, means large apartment complexes, individualization, fragmentation," Starr writes. Young Russians are more accustomed than were their grandparents to thinking for themselves—for example, every year 20 percent of all Russian workers now change jobs. Industrialization and new technology are largely responsible.

"The best evidence of the growth of a freer mentality . . . is the way the rising generation exploits minor technologies [photocopying machines, cassette tape recorders] for its own private ends," says Starr. To retain the allegiance of these young Russians, he believes, Kremlin leaders must avoid simply using modern technology as a Stalinist whip.

China Wrestles With Romance

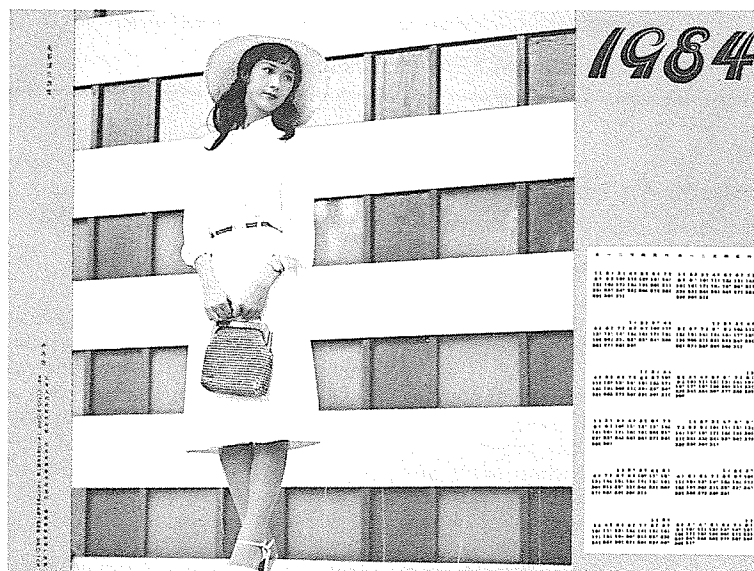
"Making a Friend: Changing Patterns of Courtship in Urban China" by Gail Hershtatter, in *Pacific Affairs* (Summer 1984), The University of British Columbia, 2021 West Mall, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1W5, Canada.

Many constraints were loosened as Communist China's traumatic Cultural Revolution faded a decade ago, including those on courtship. Today, reports Hershtatter, a Williams College historian, the Chinese are struggling to rewrite the book of love.

China's lovelorn and lonelyhearts have no Dear Abby to hear them out, but many write to the *China Youth News* ("Dear Comrade Editor . . ."), and their problems are revealing. Before the Communist takeover in 1949, writes Hershtatter, "marriage was unambiguously an alliance between families," often arranged by professional matchmakers. Later, marriage was viewed "as a simple union of revolutionary comrades." Now, things are a bit less clear-cut.

The post-Mao liberalization has not meant the dawn of a new era of

OTHER NATIONS



Western ways may be making some inroads into communist China, but if this Chinese "pinup girl" is any indication, only very slowly.

license (though lovers grapple "behind every bush in Beijing's Purple Bamboo Park"). The role of the matchmaker (now often a zealous worker in the Communist Youth League) is still crucial. "From grammar school on," explains Hershatter, "powerful cultural factors inhibit male-female interaction." Youngsters, especially girls, who prematurely (i.e., in their teens) express romantic interest in members of the opposite sex risk being branded "hoodlums." So when the time for courtship finally comes, the first steps can be rather awkward.

Public concern over such adolescent angst has become serious enough to draw city governments into the matchmaking business. In 1980, local *hunying jie-shausuo*, or "marriage-introduction institutes," were opened in several major cities. Some 12,000 singles promptly signed up in Beijing alone.

The complaints that show up most frequently in the *China Youth News* concern conflicts between romantic and material considerations. The opportunities for upward mobility in the Chinese job world are scant, so "marrying up" is for many the only way of moving up. In the summer of 1982, Li Jianxin wrote to the *News* about another familiar difficulty: His career and education were opening new doors to him, but as a result of his advancement the "common language" of Li and his poorly educated wife was diminishing. What should he do? The *News* threw open the question to the readers. "Comrade Editor" had no pat answer.